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My sister, Richelle, was born with cerebral palsy. She had severe disabilities and she was a wheelchair user. Richelle and I were very close — she was the most compassionate, sweet person in the world. She passed away when she was 13 and I was 19, and losing her was unimaginable. The loss has had a big impact on my life. Now I'm 39 and I have two sons: Gavin, who's seven; and 11-year-old Michael, who has Down syndrome. Having had a sister with disabilities, I understood a lot about caring for Michael. My kids are the best things that ever happened to me. But I've also had a lot of stress.

At work, I was promoted to market manager.

I love my job but I cover ten stores and I spend a lot of time in the car. I was making poor choices around food — grab and go! I felt sluggish and I wasn't present at home with my fiancé Mike and our kids — my mind was always focused on work. I'd be at Gavin's soccer game talking on the phone instead of giving the game my full attention.

I went to the doctor and she said my blood pressure was a little high.

I didn't want to go on blood pressure medicine, so the goal was for me to lose weight and make lifestyle changes. The Hornell Store Manager, Paul Slaver, inspired me to download the Thrive app.

Mike and I began meal-prepping and shopping together.

We bought a magnetic calendar for the fridge so we know what protein and sides we're having every day. For work, I make "travel meals" — chicken and raw veggies, bananas and blackberries — anything that's easy to put in a container.

My goal was to get home for dinner.

I'm a huge fan of my airfryer and my instant pot. Chicken is my go-to, or I'll make roast beef with potatoes and green beans — it's amazing. I relax by doing breathing exercises and looking at the resets on the Thrive app. I made one of my own with peaceful scenes from nature and photos of our puppy, Toby.

Once a week we'll take the boys to swim and then go out for dinner as a family.

Our favorite restaurant is the Winking Lizard. There's a real lizard in a tank and my kids love to watch it. And there's a popcorn machine. I'll get a fish dinner with a baked potato. We sit and really talk to each other, Gavin says such funny things.



The other day, out of the blue, he said, "We need to get down to West Virginia to see the leaves changing color because we're really missing out." We've never been there and didn't know why he said it, and we all laughed.

I've been working out at home.

I have a Bowflex HVT machine in the basement. I do resistance training and squats. And I'm playing basketball with the boys — I'm terrible, but we have a great time. We have a six-acre backyard with a pond so we walk around pretending we're on a bear hunt, because we all love the children's book *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen. Thank goodness we've never found a bear!

I'm more present with the boys.

We went to Michael's Curriculum Night. His teacher told us, "I want to let you know that Michael calls me boss and throws me a salute." We were both laughing. He got that from a movie he loves called *Dog* — he's gotten really into saluting!

My fiancé, Mike, and I went on our first vacation in five years.

My mom looked after the kids so we could have a break. We went to Las Vegas and saw some shows. Then we went to the Grand Canyon. We rented a convertible, so we had the top down driving through Utah which was amazing with the huge mountains. We went to Zion National Park with the amazing orange red rocks which were like nothing I've ever seen before. We got to the Grand Canyon at sunset, and it was so beautiful.

I've lost 30 pounds, I'm sleeping better, and I'm happier.

I'm more confident and my kids are happy. My blood pressure's down and my doctor is happy. I'm more engaged at home and at work, so my mood's better. There've been a lot of tough things in my life but I'm grateful for everything I have.



THRIVE