

# Maria Richardson

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**\$5,000 WINNER**  
**Walmart Supercenter #831**  
**Albuquerque, NM**

I was born and raised in Nicaragua and lived in Costa Rica before moving to America in 2005. When I arrived here, something happened that is hard for me to talk about. I was taken to a party, and I asked for a soda, but someone put a drug in my drink. I lost consciousness and ended up in a weird place. I was the victim of human trafficking and I was held hostage for two weeks. I pleaded with one of the women in charge to help me escape and she let me go. I didn't have any family in the United States, and I was depressed and lonely. I was too scared to report it until years later. It took me many years to trust people.

**I met my husband, Rick, in 2009, and we have a 10-year-old son, Joshua.**

Rick also worked at Walmart but he retired. He was diagnosed with lung cancer five years ago and still has breathing problems, but he's recovering. I was feeling okay, but last year, my mother passed away in Nicaragua and I felt depressed again. I was eating lots of cake and junk food, and I gained weight. I was crying every day. Joshua would say, "Mom, can you take me to my basketball game?" And I'd say, "I'm exhausted, maybe next week." Rick knew about the Thrive Challenge and advised me to start.

**I stopped drinking sodas and started drinking water and carrot juice.**

I make natural protein shakes with avocados and bananas. My husband does the cooking, he'll make chicken with salsa and potatoes, and rice and beans. And on the weekend we'll have lasagna with veggies. I've lost 32 pounds and have more energy.

**We used to eat in different rooms; now we have family dinners.**

I'm finding out so much about my son because we talk to each other. I didn't even know that he's doing salsa dancing at school and he's learning to speak French. I'm trying to teach him Spanish and I know he understands when I talk to him in Spanish — but he replies in English!

**I'm enjoying being with my family.**

We take Joshua to the game on Saturday, then we'll go to the park or to a restaurant. In the evening, we all go for walks with our boxer, Billy. And sometimes we drive out of the city to Cochiti Lake — it's beautiful, listening to the sounds of the water. Rick and I are talking more. My husband is the funniest guy, and he is always joking, which is good for stress relief. We're also doing yoga together.



**At work, I'm always helping people and I talk with everybody.**

If you come to the store and ask for me, everyone will tell you who I am. A lady came in the other day looking for a baby wagon — she'd been looking for it in three different stores. Someone had told her we didn't have it, but she asked me to check. So I checked on my app and found the item. She was pretty happy.

**To relax after work, I'll enjoy a cup of tea watching Spanish soap operas.**

My favorite is *Hasta que el dinero nos separe*. And I love listening to music. When I hear Lady Gaga sing, her voice is so strong and it makes me feel strong.

**My son and I meditate for 30 minutes every day.**

We sit down and close our eyes and talk about what we are grateful for. We do deep breathing: we inhale, hold our breath, then breath out. I tell my son, "no matter what problems you have, everything passes." I am saying it for him and for me too.

**I miss my mom, but I think about the happy times we had.**

My mother used to tell me: "You are beautiful, you are a queen, and everything is always going to be okay." So now, I say to myself in the mirror, "Maria, you are a pretty lady and everything is okay." I pinch my cheeks and I laugh. Last week I was in my bedroom combing my hair and I thought somebody touched me, but there was nobody at home, and I knew it was my mother. I said, "Thank you mom, I'm strong because you made me that way."

**I'm healing from the past.**

I know I did nothing wrong. I'm peaceful, happy, and content. I feel part of the family again.



THRIVE