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I've been through a lot of loss and depression in the past few years. I buried my grandmother, my grandfather and my mother. We also buried my granddaughter in 2020, who only lived for a week. My husband, Robert, is disabled with a serious bone condition. And as a team lead at work, there's a lot of responsibility. I've been very stressed. I'm 45 and I wasn't eating well. It was all fast food — grab and go! I didn't have any me-time. My kids, Nikita and Jesse, his wife, Miranda and my four-year-old grandson, Rhythm, all live with us. We've had to move several times and it's been a struggle to maintain a stable home life, pay the bills, and stay ahead. We managed to buy our first home but I still felt very stressed.

My co-worker, Rhonda Collins, encouraged me to try the Thrive Challenge.

I said, "I'm going to jump on board." First, I changed the way I was eating. Mama — that's me — cooks for everyone and I've been getting creative with great, low-carb recipes that work with our budget, like bell peppers stuffed with hamburger and tomato sauce. And I'll make whole wheat noodles with chicken. I've lost 10 pounds and I'm saving money by not eating out.

We're having family dinners and no phones are allowed at the table.

We talk to each other now. Everyone shares one positive thing from their day. I've talked about how I completed everything at work, even though we were short-staffed. Nikita has just started working at Walmart and told us she was Associate of the Month because she worked so hard. I'm so proud of her. Rhythm tells us how he played with his trucks, or how he made a little building out of his blocks.

I'm walking three miles a day around the neighborhood.

On the weekend, we go down to the lake to swim and hike. There are beautiful trails and our grandson loves being in the water splashing around. He is a little daredevil and jumps in. It's a big, fun, family time.



At work, I'll take a minute and do breathing exercises when I feel stressed.

I'll just take deep breaths in and out, which helps me calm down and refocus. I remind myself to do one task at a time so I don't get overwhelmed. I'm always there for my team. When someone's mom is sick or someone's brother passed away, I'm that ear who always listens.

I love being outdoors gardening and coming up with ideas to spruce up the yard.

I love growing flowers, but even weeding is satisfying for me. We bought a pine tree, a maple tree, and an oak tree from a nonprofit organization that sells trees for \$5 to help children in need, and we planted them in our front yard.

I have more energy to play with Rhythm.

We're working on colors, letters, numbers, and shapes. I sit with him and we do his flashcard exercises. And we have fun going outside to do "yard work" together. He has a little toy lawn mower and he'll pretend he's mowing the lawn.

I've started writing how I'm feeling in a journal.

One day I got home from work and started stressing, thinking: "Did I forget this? Did I forget that?" I wrote it all down and made a note of what I needed to do the next day. Writing in my journal helps me sleep at night without worrying.

Robert and I are spending more time together.

We'll walk by the lake and sometimes we'll have a breakfast morning, when we sit and eat, and talk about anything. We've been together for 28 years. It's been a journey, and now we see that the small things we used to make a big deal about didn't matter at all. We're enjoying life again and appreciating each other. My life has done a 180. This is a fresh new start and I'm on a better, happier journey.



THRIVE