

Susanne O'Dell

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\$5,000 WINNER
Walmart Customer
Hamburg, NY

There's been a lot of loss in my life. My mom passed away and it took a toll on me. I started eating my feelings and gave up on myself. I was tipping the scales at 350 pounds. I had no hope. And I was in constant pain in my feet, my back, and my hips.

Earlier in my life I had three miscarriages with the guy I'd been with for ten years.

I found out I couldn't have children and I struggled to deal with that. The relationship ended, and years later I met someone else. We were engaged, and I thought we were going to be together forever. But he left me a year ago. It made me question everything — why couldn't I be happy? I knew I needed to take my life back.

My best friend, Kirsten Ohara, encouraged me to download the Thrive app.

Watching her journey has been amazing, how everything changed for her. I trust her and she's always there to listen.

I started my Thrive Challenge with movement and stress management.

I began walking during my lunch break with my water bottle in hand. I walk the stress away. On days off, I go to state parks, like Letchworth, and walk the trails, listening to old-school country music like Kenny Rogers and Reba McEntire. I love getting out in nature. It's tranquil and nobody's around — just trees and flowers and deer. It settles my mind.

Breathing exercises help me stay calm.

I have a demanding job as the manager of a hardware store. I'm always being pulled in 50 different directions and now I say to myself: "Okay, just stop, breathe in and out." I was always trying to take care of everyone else and I've learned it's okay to take care of myself.

I love doing diamond art — it's creative and relaxing.

It's like painting by numbers, but you stick little beads onto a canvas. Focusing on my art takes my mind off any worries. I mostly do pictures of classic red trucks in barns. They remind me of a different time, when things were simpler. I actually have collectable red trucks all over my house — one is a plant pot! They make me happy.



My camera is in my hand more than my phone.

Photography helps me stay positive, my Nikon goes everywhere with me. I like to capture the beauty in nature that other people might not see. So instead of just taking a picture of a tree, I'll take a photo of a spot on the bark that's been damaged, that really shows its history. Trees have scars just as we do. I took a picture of an 8-point buck standing in a field, which was special because normally, as soon as you get anywhere near them, they take off. On my Facebook photography site it was recognized as "Photo Of The Day."

I'm cooking instead of eating fast food.

I'll make grilled chicken with green beans with potatoes. And for a treat, I absolutely love macaroni and cheese. Also, I bought smaller plates which help with portion control. I've lost 100 pounds over the last year. I have much more energy, my back doesn't hurt, and my doctor is astounded at my weight loss. He said I don't need to go on any medications.

As a leader at work, I'm connecting with my team.

There are 15 people under me and I've made a commitment to spend time with each person, every day. People seek me out and say, "Guess what happened?" They've been telling me not to ever leave because they love me as their manager!

I feel like a different person.

The Thrive Challenge has been a game changer. I have a little talk with myself every day and say, "You're a good person, you're strong, and you can accomplish anything. Coping with all the loss is easier, too. I know it's not going to destroy me, and at 43, I feel much happier. I'm planning to take a few days off and drive to the Adirondacks. I'll take my camera and just enjoy the time on my own. It's time to focus on me.



THRIVE