



## “Your children are supposed to depend on you for support, not the other way around.”

For Nick and Melanie Pirko, homeownership means independence. “Just a place for us to live the rest of our lives with the stability we've always wanted,” Nick said. But independence was not always at the forefront of either of the Pirko's thoughts. For over a decade, since he turned 18, Nick Pirko served in the U. S. Air Force living with his wife Melanie, daughter Tiffany, and son Aaron on MacDill Air Force Base until he was honorably discharged in the early 90's.

Melanie and Nick were able to support their family for many years, but after his discharge Nick found coping with personal and civilian life difficult. He carried on a secret struggle for years and would not be properly diagnosed and treated for service-related PTSD until 2015. It was around this time that he became 100% disabled, followed by his wife.

Life completely changed for the two of them. They could no longer afford to pay their expensive rent and, like many families, moved from home to home when rent was raised beyond their fixed means. Their last move, prompted by a \$400 increase in their rent, would not have happened without the support of their daughter Tiffany.

They came to depend on Tiffany's financial support to make ends meet. Even with her support, they all live in a 700 square foot mobile home with spotty air-conditioning and no heat. Their home is also poorly insulated, leading to high electricity bills -yet another financial burden with which they have to cope.



Although they appreciate their daughters support, they do not want to hold her back. Nick searched the internet for a permanent solution to their housing problem and discovered Habitat Hillsborough's Veterans Initiative. Nick applied and they were both thrilled and relieved to learn they had been accepted into the program. Having a home means we will have a permanent place to live. No more moving just to be safe. Some place we can be proud of,” Nick said.

“We are beyond grateful for everyone who will be helping. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for us. Just saying ‘thank you’ doesn't feel like enough, so we plan on showing our gratitude by keeping our new home maintained to the best of our ability and being true neighbors in our community.”