

Meet the Beards: Jacob, Danielle, Anthony (17), Zander (14) and Elijah (12)

A Military Family United to Overcome Adversity

Jacob and Danielle didn't realize they had been childhood neighbors until they reconnected in their teens in Simi Valley, California. Danielle had moved several times with her mother and Jacob had become homeless when his father lost his job in the 90s. It's been an incredibly wild ride ever since, for which their dedication to each other and staying together has given them the strength and tenacity to overcome adversity.



Jacob joined the Navy in 2001, and then 9/11 happened. As a combat veteran, his service included Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, the front lines in search of underwater mines, battling pirates off the coast of Saudi Arabia, rescuing refugees off the coast of Florida,

providing tsunami relief in Pakistan, transporting Navy Seals and Explosive Ordnance Disposal personnel, and so much more. Highly skilled in naval technology, weapons and tactics, he has trained fellow soldiers and sailors in joint exercises with Egyptian, Greek, Israeli, British and Iranian militaries, and served as a liaison to the Argentinian Navy. He also served as a leadership development trainer while serving at the U.S. Naval Academy.

In November of 2006, shortly after Eli was born, Danielle awoke to a severely swollen face, a splitting headache and the inability to see. Doctors discovered a tennis ball-size brain tumor was intertwined with her optic nerves, also pushing her brain up hitting the top of her skull causing her debilitating headaches. Jacob's commanding officer pulled him from his mission in the Persian Gulf and sent him on a 36-hour trip home to be with Danielle for the first of two major brain surgeries with only a 50% success rate that she would live through the surgery, which had to be done twice within one month of each other. Today, Danielle lives with the inability to taste or smell, a handicapped right eye, and an inoperable brain cyst at the top of her brain stem.

Jacob retired from the military in 2009. He was doing great working for the oil and gas industry in Houston where he completed two years of college and gained even more skills in cryogenics. The Beards were all set to buy a house and root down when Jacob lost his job during mass layoffs by the industry in 2016. Despite his extensive resume, Jacob had a hard time finding comparable work. Desperate, depleting resources and mounting debt, they took Danielle's high school friend up on an offer to move in with them until they could get back on their feet. They left their belongings in a storage unit in Houston, since flooded during Hurricane Harvey, and moved their three boys into a double-wide in Simpsonville with their friends and their five children.

Danielle's job in auto collections at a bank earns \$14 per hour, disqualifying the family for most public assistance. Jacob has suffered over 27 injuries in total, including head injuries and breaking both of his feet in 50+ places. Currently suffering from a skin disease resulting from his military service, he turned to the Wounded Warrior Project for help. They put him in touch with Upstate Warrior Solution who referred him to Habitat's program for veterans. Jacob and Danielle have been on a mission to get their debt paid off ever since and will soon have paid off the over \$17,000 they accumulated keeping their family fed.

When they move into their Habitat home, it will be the Beard's 17th move together in 18 years. Anthony, Zander and Eli are looking forward to having rooms of their own and having friends over. Wherever life takes them from here, we know their dedication to being together will continue to serve them well.

"We may bend; but we don't break and when we encounter adversity we commit to overcoming whatever is thrown in our way. Together we are stronger than we are apart."