



Janis Puracal

Janis Puracal, an attorney in Portland, Oregon, spent nearly two years fighting for her older brother, Jason, as he was being slowly starved to death in a Nicaraguan prison. Jason was finally released and sent home to the US in September of 2012. Jason had been wrongfully convicted of crimes that he did not commit and sentenced to 22 years in La Modelo, the maximum security prison in Nicaragua, infamous for rampant human rights violations in addition to murder, rape, and assault of prisoners. Janis led an international fight to save his life, and the "Free Jason P" team, which included thousands of supporters from around the world, finally won the battle on September 13, 2012.

Jason moved from Seattle to Nicaragua in 2002 to serve in the Peace Corps. After his service, he stayed in the country and eventually bought a local RE/MAX franchise where he had been working as a sales agent. He later married Scarleth, a Nicaraguan woman, with whom he has a five-year-old son.

On November 11, 2010, the Nicaraguan police raided Jason's home and office. Masked officers carrying AK rifles searched his real estate office and seized company computers, files, and bank accounts. They forced their way into Jason's home where his 65-year-old mother—a medical doctor who was visiting from the U.S.—and his young son were sleeping. The warrantless searches of Jason's office, home, and vehicle yielded no evidence of a crime, yet Jason was arrested, charged, and imprisoned anyway.

Jason was beaten while in transit to the prison and denied food, water, and proper medical care. Jason (along with ten other defendants, none of whom he knew) was charged with international drug trafficking, money laundering, and organized crime. After being held without evidence for nearly nine months, Jason was wrongfully convicted and sentenced to 22 years in a Nicaraguan prison.

As a third-year lawyer with no background in criminal defense and very little ability to speak or understand Spanish, Janis hit a steep learning curve as part of Jason's defense team. Through the 22-month crash course in international wrongful convictions, Janis was forced to navigate prison visits, negotiations with Nicaraguan authorities, and threats to her family. She tackled briefing in Nicaraguan and international courts, diplomatic relations in the U.S. and Nicaragua, lobbying on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C., and media appearances on a national and international level, including CNN, Reuters, and The Today Show. Janis petitioned the United Nations and ultimately succeeded when the UN urged Jason's immediate release. Her door-to-door campaign on Capitol Hill secured the support of 43 Congressmen, and her day-and-night fight led to experts joining the fight from around the world.

The "Free Jason P" team fought for 22 months against all odds before Jason was finally freed on September 13, 2012. Janis continues to work with her brother to give back to the community that brought Jason home. In addition to her private practice, she works to engage law students and other community leaders in the fight for freedom and the advancement of human rights. With her experience and focus on justice, Janis was recently elected to the board of directors of the National Crime Victim Law Institute, which protects, enforces, and advances victims' rights.