



Danica Jucutan (top second from left) And Family

In September of 2020, Danica Acebedo Jucutan posted this happy message on the “FAMMilies in Action” Facebook page: “I just wanted to share that after the many nights and days of researching, crying, complaining, giving up ... things got better. So don’t give up! Have faith. No matter how many people put you down, there are more people who will help you and stay by your side.”

A frequent poster to the group, Danica always told it like it was, sharing how her husband Jordan’s case manager yelled at him when he inquired about the First Step Act, how skeptical she was of potential home confinement, and much more. So when she celebrated his release, everyone in the group celebrated with her.

Now they live with their four kids in Washington State, and life is chaotic – the kids range in age from 12 to 2 – but joyful, Danica says. “We’re enjoying life. The kids are so happy that Dad is home. We get to go to lakes, hiking—it’s so different. When he was in prison, we didn’t feel like doing anything.”

The two met in the Mariana Islands, where they were both born. “We met in Tinian,” says Danica. “He’s from Saipan, and he went to Tinian for a festival. Then that we became friends for a while, and then lo and behold we’re together and married with four kids now!” Raising their young family, they both worked as teachers.

But then in 2016, Jordan was sentenced to 28 months in prison for wire fraud and identity theft for his part in a recruitment scheme to the Army Reserve, in which he was a soldier at the time. At sentencing, the prosecutor told the court that Jordan “...is a good person, who made a bad mistake ... I don’t think he is an individual that needs to be rehabilitated.” The court agreed and granted the government’s motion for a downward departure, as the court noted, “the very minimum.”

Jordan remained out of custody pending an appeal, and eventually reported to the Bureau of Prisons in July of 2019. He was housed at the minimum security satellite camp FCI Sheridan, where he worked in the food service warehouse. When the pandemic began, his responsibilities – which included delivering food and potentially coming in contact with many COVID cases – didn’t let up. Precautions against contracting the disease were impossible.

For Jordan, the situation was especially worrisome because he is obese and asthmatic, conditions that worsened with his time behind bars. He had to use two inhalers, and the treating physician described him as “acutely ill.” His release date was July 11, 2021, and he would be eligible for home detention April of 2021. But as he grew sicker and the spread of COVID grew faster and farther, he and Danica became very worried.

“In prison, everyone was talking about how FAMM was connecting people with lawyers to apply for compassionate release. So the next time I talked to Danica, she told me she already filled out a questionnaire,” Jordan says now. Turns out Danica had been doing research herself.

“When he went away to Sheridan, I was just like, ‘I don’t know what to do, I have four kids.’ I was depressed. But every night I would research how was I going to bring home my husband. I was one of those wives that could not accept the fact that my husband was inside. I had that mindset that I’m going to keep fighting for this guy even though he’s already inside.

“I found FAMM, and I joined. I started getting text messages and then emails, and I started learning. I joined the families group in Facebook, and I connected with other people just like me, and asking questions and even answering them for some people. And soon I heard about the Compassionate Release Clearinghouse, matching eligible people in prison with pro bono lawyers. So in March I filled out the paperwork to get Jordan applied.”

Jordan was connected to a lawyer through the Clearinghouse. As the months passed, whenever Danica would get discouraged, Jordan will tell her to keep her chin up. The process is tedious and involves a lot of waiting – and faith.

“Then one day, the phone rang,” says Danica. “And my daughter picked it up and was like, ‘Mommy, Mommy, the attorney, the attorney,’ so I ran and grabbed my phone. And she said, ‘I’ve got good news, congratulations!’”

In September of 2020, Jordan was granted compassionate release. The court cited his vulnerability to COVID and many other factors in their decision, including “it appears that Jucutan has maintained in prison the same positive character that the prosecutor described at his sentencing ... There are many individuals the Court would not consider releasing into the community – pandemic notwithstanding – but Jucutan is not one of them.”

Danica is now 31 and Jordan 33. They are rebuilding their lives, trying to stay healthy, and deeply grateful for Jordan's second chance. Jordan landed a job at Target shortly after his release, and they both are hoping to teach again someday.

The focus now, though, is almost entirely on the family – as it always has been. “Back home in the Islands, we were known to always be together,” says Danica. “When people would see Jordan alone in a store or some place they would ask, ‘Hey, where’s the family?’ Because they know we’re always together.”