

## Mother gets year in prison for helping cop awaiting trial flee to Brazil

By Megan O'Matz



BSO Handout / Broward Sheriff's Office

Janiber Vieira, 51, of Coral Springs, mother of fugitive Boynton Beach police Officer David Britto

A 51-year-old Coral Springs woman was sentenced Monday to a year and a day in prison for helping her son, a police officer, avoid prison.

Janiber Vieira was so protective of David Britto, then a 28-year-old Boynton Beach cop, that she helped him jump bond and flee the country rather than face 10 years to life on drug charges.

"I just want to say I'm very, very sorry for everything," Vieira tearfully told U.S. District Judge William P. Dimitrouleas in Fort Lauderdale shortly before he sentenced her on one count of conspiracy under a plea deal struck last month.

Vieira has already spent three months in jail. With time off for good behavior, she is likely to be released in seven months. She must also serve three years of probation.

It could have been far worse: She had faced a maximum of five years in prison.

Prosecutors were satisfied with the year's time.

"Be hopeful and grateful," Vieira's attorney, David Oscar Markus, told about two dozen of Vieira's friends and family members after the sentencing. They had taken up two rows in the courtroom in a show of support.

Though the stay-at-home mom had never before been in trouble with the law, Markus told the group that she will be able to endure seven more months behind bars.

"She's going to be all right," he said.

The defense team had pleaded for only time served, but Dimitrouleas rejected that option, saying the short time Vieira has been incarcerated is not enough to deter other mothers from helping their children violate court orders and escape justice.

Though the judge said he did not doubt that Vieira “loves her son very, very much,” he found that she “played an important part in the crime.”

Vieira bought a plane ticket for her son on Aug. 23. He cut off an ankle monitor the next day and fled to Brazil, which does not extradite its own nationals. Britto was born in Brazil but became a naturalized U.S. citizen.

Vieira also lied to U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents several times, denying that she knew where her son was or that she aided his getaway. She was arrested in September at Kennedy International Airport in New York as she was about to board a flight to Sao Paulo.

Defense attorneys argued that Vieira acted out of desperation because her son appeared suicidal while out on bond awaiting trial.

“She was terrified that he would kill himself,” psychologist Merry Sue Haber testified on behalf of the defense.

Britto, the eldest of Vieira’s three sons, was a former Marine and Boynton Beach’s 2010 Officer of the Year. He was arrested in July on charges of conspiring with another man to possess and traffic 500 grams of methamphetamine.

He pleaded not guilty and was released on bond in early July. Boynton Beach fired him in September.

The government has not revealed any of the evidence against him.

In court on Monday, however, Assistant U.S. Attorney Adam Fels said the former officer did not take “a single payment” in the drug scheme, but sold guns to traffickers at fair market value.

He also said Britto refused money from a drug dealer for driving him around during a deal.

Fels did not disclose any other details of the case.

During the sentencing hearing, Vieira’s defense team tried to convince the judge that Vieira should be released because she is an extremely good, even “angelic,” church-going woman who made a big mistake out of a desperate desire to save her son’s life.

“I think she’s ruled by her emotion,” Haber, the psychologist, testified.

She said Vieira has no idea where Britto is, has not heard from him, and “doesn’t know if he’s dead or alive.”

Defense attorney Margot Moss likened the escape to a crime of passion.

Before sentencing Vieira, Dimitrouleas noted that she was willing to do whatever was necessary to rescue her son, at her own risk, yet that same son wasn’t walking through the courtroom doors to “face the music” and help his mother.

Later, in an interview, Markus said he doubted that the sentence would do any good.

“I don’t think putting her in jail for a million years would deter any mother in her shoes,” he said.

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