



**Jolly Joanna. (2019). Red River Girl; The Life and Death of Tina Fontaine.  
Toronto: Viking Press.**

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“Red River Girl; The Life and Death of Tina Fontaine” written by Joanna Jolly unveils a true crime and heartbreaking story of a missing and murdered Indigenous girl. Tina Fontaine was fifteen years old when she went missing and murdered. The book entails her entire life and sadly, the moments leading up to her death. Jolly includes some of Tina’s family members, the trials, testimonies and police interviews which reveals key insights on Tina’s life and her surroundings leading up to her murder. Throughout the book, Jolly intensively speaks on the years long history of the oppression of Indigenous peoples and what they go through. Not only does Jolly detail the life and death of Tina Fontaine but also other Indigenous women and girls who have been murdered and missing in Canada. This unveils the systematic racism and discrimination they have experienced over the many years. It also reveals the Indigenous violence that occurs in Canada that is barely spoken about. Jolly describes the big issues and sufferings they face within the Indigenous community and the lack of support they receive. Jolly primarily focuses on the efforts that were placed on fighting for justice for Tina Fontaine and the many other Indigenous peoples that have gone missing and murdered.

The book documents Tina’s troubling life as she raised by her great aunt Thelma Favel, following the death of her father. She grew up on the Sagkeeng First Nations Reserve, as Jolly shares, “it was impossible to grow up on the reserve untouched by domestic violence, abuse,

addiction, mental illness or suicide” (p. 61). Her aunt Thelma was one of the only family members that could give her a proper stable life despite all of the inconsistencies she has experienced growing up. Joanna describes how Tina’s life was surrounded by crime and drugs at such a young age. Tina ran away on multiple occasions including when she was placed in Child and Family Services. When Tina was in Winnipeg visiting her mother, she had placed herself in many dangerous situations that exposed her to sexual exploitation, theft and drugs. Jolly states that the “reality was that in Winnipeg young Indigenous women often disappeared into the underbelly of the city” (p.19). Being such a young girl in a city, she was placed in a vulnerable state that older men can take advantage of. Meeting her mother at Winnipeg reveals the lack of guardianship. Tina was doing drugs not only with strangers she had met, but also with her mother. Of one of the many strangers she had met, Raymond Cormier was the primary suspect that supposedly had wrapped Tina in a blanket and threw her in the river, ending up in the murder of the young girl. Cormier had multiple interactions with Tina including taking drugs with him. Cormier was one of the last ones to talk to Tina before she was murdered.

One of the main themes that is seen throughout Jolly’s book is betrayal. She was betrayed from her own family, the Child and Family Services, the police and most importantly Canada itself. This unveils the failure of protection from the ones Tina should be seeking safety and guidance from. Tina’s family had betrayed her as she was roaming the streets alone in Winnipeg. Tina was exposed to sexual exploitation at such a young age. She had been in and out of the Child and Family Services. Her biological mother allowing her own daughter to take drugs reveals the vulnerable position she was in. Thelma was essentially the only one who truly tried to protect Tina

from the dangerous surroundings she was in. The Child and Family services had also betrayed and failed to protect her when she had escaped from them. There were no updates on her when she had escaped, as they hadn't noticed she was missing. There was no effort in trying to search for her. The police had also failed to protect Tina. Jolly describes an instance when the police had pulled a man over with Tina inside. Officers Hanson and Houle failed to notice that Tina was reported as a missing person alert. The officers believed she was not in any danger and let the both of them go. If the officers had checked the missing person alert, the situation would have been clearly different. Jolly also describes the mistreatment that occurs when it comes to Indigenous peoples and the police. “..Police culture defined by racism, sexism, and indifference, operating in a community where callous treatment of indigenous people was the norm” (p. 41). This shows the lack of safety and security the Indigenous peoples face from the very ones who are supposed to protect them from such harm and danger.

The justice for Tina Fontaine was the most important theme in Jolly's book. Despite the lack of protection from the police, detective John O'Donovan made extensive efforts to make sure Tina herself and her family would get the justice they deserve. Jolly explains O'Donovan's long investigation in great detail, publicizing all of his efforts to make sure the perpetrator is behind bars. With the extensive interviews O'Donovan and other officers had with Cormier, O'Donovan decided to use an undercover strategy to break Cormier of speaking the truth of what had actually happened with Tina. Jolly describes the technique which is called the Mr. Big technique. The strategy was used when a suspect is identified but there is not sufficient evidence to convict the suspect. Undercover officers would play a role in an organized crime gang with Cormier in the

hopes that Cormier would reveal anything about Tina's death. Anything Cormier would reveal, would be then testified against him in trial. This investigation took months with a lot of deliberate planning and with many detectives involved. This shows the amount of effort that O'Donovan had put out for Project Styx for the justice of Tina. Jolly expresses O'Donovan's mission of wanting to find out the truth and the amount of care he had for this particular case. "But here a police officer was speaking about Tina with compassion and empathy, as if she were a true victim- as if she mattered. For once, somebody seemed to care" (p. 39). O'Donovan clearly wanted justice to be served for the Indigenous community. Tina's case had sparked a national outrage in Canada. The entire Indigenous community was affected by Tina's tragic loss, "Every single family deserves that same sense of justice and responsibility" (p. 421). Tina's case had made many headlines and protests in Canada. Her friends and family have also fought for her justice.

Jolly's primary intention was to bring awareness to the missing and murdered Indigenous peoples in Canada. With the personal interviews and reports recovered, Jolly revealed the oppression that has been going on for years in Canada. Despite Cormier's trial ended up with him being acquitted, it has brought the community closer for change and for healing. Justin Trudeau had released a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Thus being said, it has brought light at the end of tunnel as some justice is being served for those Indigenous women and girls who have been murdered. Jolly explains how there are many "initiatives to protect Indigenous youth in the North End, including the community- based patrol, the Bear clan" (p. 482). The volunteers help women and children walk the streets every evening to make sure they are not in danger. This helps to bring safety and security in their community.

Jolly depicts an insight on how the Indigenous people live in Winnipeg, and their daily struggles. Jolly also expresses the disproportionately high number of women and girls missing in Canada. Jolly also informs the audience of many other Indigenous people who have been murdered, which brings awareness to the situation, and how it affects the entire community.

The limitations on Jolly's book, would be if she could have gotten interviews with Tina's biological mother and other close friends and family. This would have made her book feel more personal and would help to gain more insight in Tina's life and her surroundings including her families. It would have helped to understand Tina's situation even more with the personal interviews. Overall, Jolly has done a phenomenal job in addressing this large issue that is occurring in Canada.

The intended academic audience for *Red River Girl: The Life and Death of Tina Fontaine* would be primarily for the citizens of Canada, including the Indigenous community, the field of sociology and criminology, law enforcements and gender studies. It aims at almost every direction for anyone to read, as it needs to be largely addressed more in Canada. The Indigenous victims and families deserve their equality and justice in Canada.