



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

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Joanna Jolly's true-crime book, "Red River Girl: The Life and Death of Tina Fontaine," is written in a journalistic style. By incorporating "extensive face-to-face interviews, police notes, transcripts of recordings, and trial testimonies" (p. 5), Jolly informs her readers about the brief life of Tina Fontaine, the problems with the police and Child Family Services (CFS) systems that contributed to her death, and the extensive, month's long investigation to catch her murderer. Tina's death made national headlines by illuminating the undeniable racial problems experienced by Indigenous communities in Canada and ignited a movement that pressured the government to address these issues and provide better support and protection for Indigenous people.

On August 17, 2014, Dwayne Oliver and his son discovered Tina's body in the Red River; the teenager was wrapped in a blanket and weighed down by rocks, clearly indicating murder. Sargent John O'Donovan, who led the investigative team, identified Tina as a petite fifteen-year-old at the time of her death, only weighing seventy-three pounds. Her loving family described her as happy, cheerful, intelligent, and kind. Then, after her father's death, Tina left her reserve and her great-aunt and guardian, Thelma, to seek out her mother, Valentina Duck, in Winnipeg. Through transcripts of interviews, Jolly discovered that Thelma and other family members sus-

pected that Tina's mother had been supplying her with drugs, as well as physically abusing her and pushing her into sex work (pp. 81-83). O'Donovan noted that "within the space of a few weeks, Tina's initial enthusiasm for the city had diminished and she wanted to find her way back to Thelma" (p. 82). Another interviewee, Katrina, confirmed that Tina was selling sex to fund her drug addiction. Katrina connected with Tina because they both understood "the feeling of being alone both emotionally and mentally" (p. 96). Clearly, Tina had changed dramatically in the short time before her death.

Jolly explains that news stories of missing Indigenous women were not a new phenomenon in Winnipeg; the press often reported on Indigenous youth's deaths. When she learned of the efforts put forth by families of Indigenous victims and how complacent police were when investigating these cases, Jolly was astonished. According to the commissioner's investigative report, "police behaviour reflected a hierarchy established by Canada's early settlers: white men at the top, Indigenous men beneath them, and Indigenous women at the very bottom" (p. 21). Reports disclosed how officers often abused their powers and victim-blamed Indigenous women; they were prejudiced and discriminatory, and they failed to prevent unlawful acts against the Indigenous population. Jolly found that "police culture [is] defined by racism, sexism, and indifference, ...where callous treatment of Indigenous people was the norm" (p. 20). Her research revealed the high occurrence of racial violence: "Indigenous women made up only four percent of Canada's female population but were four times more likely to be murdered or go missing" (p. 23). The impact left by colonialism still dominates Canada's political and social institutions, perpetuating the social violence against Indigenous people and amplifying misogynistic ideologies that contri-

bute to the disproportionately high violence rate against Indigenous women.

Indeed, in Tina's case, the Winnipeg police had been negligent in their duties. Just days before her death, Constable Brock Jansen and his partner interacted with Tina, but they let her go after giving her name. They did not question why this fifteen-year-old girl would be driving around late at night with a criminal; they failed to notice that Tina's name had been flagged for multiple missing person reports; and they failed to recognize the predatory situation and that she was likely providing sexual services for money.

The CFS was also at fault for failing to protect Tina. When there were insufficient homes for children in their care, it was common practice to temporarily house them in hotels. Indeed, the CFS often placed Tina in hotels where drugs, sex work, and other illegal activities were abundant, even though they had specifically labelled her "as someone at high risk of sexual exploitation" (p. 93). The CFS failed to offer her counselling, failed to shield her from drugs and sex-work, and failed to inform her guardian of her whereabouts. They neglected their duty and left Tina unsupervised, uncared for, and vulnerable to the streets' dangers.

In direct contrast to the CFS and police's neglect, Jolly dedicated much of her book to presenting O'Donovan's painstaking efforts to find Tina's killer and seek justice for her and her family. O'Donovan shocked the country when he spoke of Tina with "compassion and empathy, as if she were a true victim – as if she mattered. For once, somebody seemed to care" (p. 19). The investigative team worked overtime for months conducting research and interviews. Early in the investigation, Raymond Cormier became the most prominent suspect, and they dedicated thousands of dollars to Project Styx – an undercover operation hoping to secure a confession from

Cormier for her murder. The investigators were confident that she had been sexually exploited by Cormier and other predators, exposed to drugs, and tossed into the river like trash. Although he admitted to having sex with Tina, the team could not prove that Cormier had murdered her. The amount of work and effort put into Tina's case was unprecedented. Historically, cases involving Indigenous victims were often brief and short-lived. O'Donovan broke this pattern, and through his impassioned speech about the Indigenous teen, he inspired the city to empathize.

Tina Fontaine's death was a tragedy that instigated a much-needed evaluation of Canada's public services' systemic racism. It pressured the police, government, and Canadian public to question their apathy toward the social issue of a "race-based genocide' against Indigenous women" (p. 275). The CFS changed their funding strategies to focus on "prevention and early intervention" (p. 276), and the Canadian government launched a "much-anticipated National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls" (p. 236). No longer were citizens comfortable with the headlines they had become desensitized to, and the Canadian Human Rights Commission "urged that Tina's case not disappear into the statistics. 'We have a duty to ensure she leaves a legacy . . . to bring an end to the chronic cycle of violence that rips Aboriginal women and girls from the fabric of family and community at [an] alarming rate'" (p. 123).

Jolly was motivated to write this book when she began contemplating "the pressure officers were under to find [Tina's killer], when so many other killings of Indigenous women and girls had gone unsolved" (p. 5). In her book, Jolly intended to highlight how Canadian society is struggling to address two of its major social issues: the long-standing acceptance of systemic racism against Indigenous people, and the widespread indifference to the national crisis of Missing and Murdered

Indigenous women. In Thelma's words, it is hard to "understand why it had to take Tina's death to open everybody's eyes to the fact that there's a problem out there" (p 30). "Red River Girl: The Life and Death of Tina Fontaine" is educational and well-constructed; the narrative effectively presents the gruesome details relating to Tina's death in a way that is impactful and direct. Thus, Jolly succeeds in engaging her readers' sense of empathy and encouraging them to change the systemic racism in Canada.

Jolly's research-based approach to writing about true-crime and her inclusion of statistics and data makes this book an excellent read for anyone within the anthropology, sociology, or legal fields. The book might also appeal to an academic audience interested in women's studies or serve as a reference for post-secondary students or instructors whose courses cover topics connected to Canada's Indigenous communities. Jolly's book is educational, well-organized, eye-opening, and emotional; I would recommend this book to mature readers who are looking to educate themselves on ways that systemic racism affects the Indigenous population in Canada in the hopes that they take action to improve Canadian society as a whole.