



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

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Joanna Jolly's book "Red River Girl" gives a detailed account of the police hunt for a child killer in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Jolly gives a detailed, step-by-step account of how the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) went about their investigation into fifteen-year-old Tina Fontaine's life and death. A true-crime book that gives readers insight into some of the more dangerous and desperate sides of Winnipeg. Jolly uses her outsider perspective to tie together the bureaucratic systems that are to support flailing families, the historical racism that has plagued police services across Canada, and Canadian society in general. The book's primary focus was the actual police investigation and the substantial effort and lengths that the WPS went to find Tina's killer. Although not explicitly identified throughout the book, Jolly infers several sociological concepts such as; labels, power, and conflict.

The complacency surrounding the violence against Indigenous women is in the language used to describe them. Squaw, Indian, whore, are some of the many negative labels used to describe Indigenous women, and Jolly utilizes them throughout the book to assert how deeply their negativity affects women. Although some may dispute the label 'Indian' due to it being a legal term for the Canadian federal government, it carries many negative connotations. The stigma that revolves around being Indigenous goes back to the colonizing of what we know as Canada. Jolly states that the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba "found that 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). With this concept, Indigenous women and girls' social position is extremely low, leaving many in circumstances that make them vulnerable.

Indigenous people, particularly women and girls, have been viewed in such a low position that they have appeared to be disposable to many in society. As a result, "Indigenous women were more likely to be killed outside the home by strangers or "casual acquaintances", a term often used to describe the sex worker and client relationship" (p. 24). The previous statement highlights how many women and girls ended up in a precarious position regularly, their lives full of abuse and poverty, and that the "women were suffering because of intrinsic racism" (p. 25). Further to these facts, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) had never examined the number of missing or murdered Indigenous women in Canada before 2014. Only then did the RCMP estimate "that nearly 1,200 Indigenous women had been murdered or gone missing in Canada between 1980 and 2012" (p. 23). Numerous advocacy groups and organizations believe the number of missing and murdered Indigenous women is much higher than the RCMP estimate.

Calls for the federal government to conduct an investigation into the disproportionate number of murdered and missing Indigenous women in Canada grew stronger after Tina's death. Due to a large number of women in question coming from reserves and small communities to the larger prairie cities such as Winnipeg, Jolly felt "that the city encapsulated the issue with its large but segregated Indigenous population, its high number of missing and murdered women, and the very public failure of its police to protect Tina before her death" (pp. 3-4).

Jolly focuses on Sergeant John O'Donovan, the lead investigator into Tina's death. The author spends time emphasizing that O'Donovan was not originally from Winnipeg or Canada, but immigrated from Ireland. In showcasing where O'Donovan came from, Jolly implied that he was not subject to the same systemic and institutional racism that a person born in Canada has integrated into their lives. When O'Donovan spoke to the press about Tina's murder, he altered from the traditional victim-blaming that many police services had done in the past. O'Donovan spoke "about Tina with compassion and empathy, as if she was a true victim – as if she mattered" (p. 19). Throughout the book, Jolly continues to intersperse O'Donovan's emotions of anger, frustration, sadness, and finally defeat with Tina's murder investigation.

Although with Tina's death, it appears that the WPS treated the investigation seriously, there were several bureaucratic failings prior to her murder. Jolly focuses on the investigative process and describes in detail the homicide department's attempts to trace Tina's last days and determine with whom she had contact. Jolly also gives the reader a frustrating glimpse at Winnipeg Child and Family Services (WCFS) and how they dealt with vulnerable children placed in care. The summer Tina was murdered, WCFS was overwhelmed with insufficient staff or safe placements for the children in their care. It had become protocol to place children in hotel rooms that often lacked substantial supervision allowing older children to prey on younger ones and for others to run away (p. 47).

Although it appeared that Tina's great-aunt provided a stable home environment on Sakeeng First Nation for Tina, the draw of a biological parent was too great. Families are complicated systems, and Jolly does a decent job of outlining some of Tina's family dysfunction.

Tina was already in a fragile state after her father's death and wanted to connect with her mother in Winnipeg, over 120 kilometers away. Tina would leave her aunt's house with permission but then started to repeatedly run away when not allowed, leading her to be taken into WCFS's care eventually. Unfortunately, the safety and refuge that Tina thought she would find at her mother's did not exist; instead, her mother gave her alcohol and beat Tina (p. 46). The feelings of abandonment by those who are supposed to protect you are damaging, especially when they involve abuse. Based on feminist theories, where families are divided based on power, family members are unconsciously ranked by how much power they hold.

An exact timeline of where Tina was in her final days was never fully established by the WPS. There are gaps between eyewitness encounters with Tina; however, the WPS had a missing person flag connected to her name in the system. Jolly calls attention to the fact that Winnipeg police officers pulled over a truck that Tina was a passenger in but did not react to the missing persons alert attached to Tina's name (p. 262). The officers let Tina walk away, leaving the reader to question if the officers did not care because she was just another Indigenous girl.

O'Donovan and his team appeared to narrow down who most likely was last with Tina before her murder, though it was not one hundred percent clear. The investigation focused on Raymond Cormier and Tina's repeated involvement with him, particularly her final day alive. The WPS believe Cormier or others may have sexually exploited Tina; however, it is not explicitly clear if this occurred. Unfortunately, all evidence collected was circumstantial, and much to the frustration of all involved in the investigation did not identify the murderer. Jolly detailed the trial emphasizing all the work on behalf of the WPS that lead to the culmination point; however, it did

not lead to the outcome O'Donovan and his team were hoping for, prosecution of Raymond Cormier.

Although the book places heavy emphasis on the lengths the WPS put into finding out who murdered Tina, the book only touches on the complacency surrounding violence against Indigenous women. There are also gaps in the family structure and dynamics that Jolly did not explore, which did not allow the reader to know who Tina Fontaine was truly and more about what might have been in the city's extreme draw. Many underlying social factors placed Tina in a harmful situation at such a young age. However, Jolly did a great job showing the extreme lengths the WPS put into finding Tina's murderer and just how brutal a murder can be to solve, unlike how television portrays the solution. Overall, the book is easy to read, following a logical timeline, and those who enjoy true crime will find this book interesting. In academia, I believe this book is lacking in many areas; however, those in policing or criminology may find the details of the investigation stimulating.