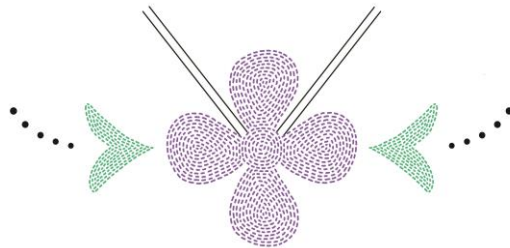


National Inquiry into  
Missing and Murdered  
Indigenous Women and Girls



Enquête nationale  
sur les femmes et les filles  
autochtones disparues et assassinées

**National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered  
Indigenous Women and Girls  
Truth-Gathering Process  
Part I Statement Gathering  
Sheraton Cavalier Hotel  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan**



**PUBLIC**

**Wednesday November 22, 2017**

**Statement -Volume 117  
Virginia Crombie,  
In relation to Madeline Gignac**

**Statement gathered by Debbie Bodkin**

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## II

**NOTE 1:** Where not required by other statute, redactions to this public transcript have been made pursuant to Rule 55 of the Commission's *Legal Path: Rules of Respectful Practice*, which provides for "the discretion to redact private information of a sensitive nature where it is not material to the evidence to be given before distributing the information to the Parties. The National Inquiry will consider the public interest in releasing this type of information against the potential harmful impact on the individual whose personal information is at issue."

**NOTE 2:** The use of square brackets [ ] in this transcript indicates that amendments have been made to the certified transcript in order to replace information deemed inaudible or indecipherable by the original transcriptionist. Amendments were completed by listening to the source audio recording of the proceeding and were made by Bryana Bouchir, Public Inquiry Clerk with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQ, April 26th 2018 at Vancouver, BC.

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**List of documents provided by witness:**

- Item 1:** Photograph identifying missing loved one with five children
- Item 2:** Written statement (four pages)

1 Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

2 --- Upon commencing on Wednesday, November 22, 2017 at 17:21

3 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** So, the audio recorder  
4 is on, and it's 5:21, and the video recorder is now on as  
5 well, and it's 5:21. So, just a few more things for me to  
6 say, it's Wednesday November 22<sup>nd</sup> and it's 5:21 p.m. in the  
7 afternoon. We're at the Sheraton Hotel in Saskatoon. As I  
8 already mentioned to you, my name is Debbie Bodkin and I'm  
9 a statement gatherer with the National Inquiry, and if you  
10 don't mind introducing yourself, your name, where you're  
11 from, your cultural background.

12 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Okay. Do I look  
13 right there or do I look at you?

14 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** You can talk to me if  
15 you want.

16 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Okay. I'm Virginia  
17 Crombie, and I'm the eldest daughter of Madeline Gignac,  
18 Madeline Margaret Gignac, and mom's maiden name was  
19 Lavallee.

20 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Oh, okay. And where are  
21 you from, Virginia?

22 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** I'm from Nipawin,  
23 Saskatchewan ---

24 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Okay.

25 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** --- where I live with

1 my husband in a little village close to Nipawin called  
2 Pontrilas. I say Nipawin because that's where we get our  
3 mail.

4 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Oh, okay, yes.

5 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Actually, I'm about  
6 10 minutes in a little village called Pontrilas.

7 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Okay. And, you're  
8 cultural background?

9 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** My cultural  
10 background, I would say more Métis ---

11 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Okay.

12 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** --- than anything,  
13 but I've been raised as a foster child in -- I'm part of a  
14 scoop, probably the Sixties Scoop.

15 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Yeah.

16 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** My mother never went  
17 to residential school, but she was a disenfranchised woman  
18 from Big River Indian Reserve.

19 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Okay.

20 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** And, my mother  
21 married a Métis and she was disenfranchised. So, the three  
22 older children, I believe, were also disenfranchised.

23 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Okay.

24 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Yes, four older.

25 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** And, I'll just -- sorry,

1 I'll interrupt you one more time ---

2 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** That's fine, no  
3 problem.

4 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** --- last time, just to  
5 say that we didn't have the audio and video recorder on,  
6 and I have your permission ---

7 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Yes.

8 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** --- to record this and  
9 you came voluntarily to ---

10 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** I came voluntarily.

11 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** --- come forward to tell  
12 your truth.

13 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Yes, and I thank you  
14 for -- I did phone yesterday and talked to one of the  
15 organizers, Denise.

16 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Okay.

17 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** And, she's -- I  
18 wanted to speak publicly, but the spots were all taken so  
19 she invited me to speak to a gatherer.

20 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Wonderful. Yes, a  
21 statement gatherer.

22 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** A statement gatherer,  
23 so I agreed to that. I thought this was the least I could  
24 do for my mother. My uncle, Ed Lavallee, read some -- a  
25 report that I typed up for him because he didn't have the

1 background information when my mother went missing, so I  
2 prepared him what I remembered and he read this whole  
3 statement in public in Edmonton, November 7<sup>th</sup> or so.

4 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Okay.

5 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Just recently.

6 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Yeah.

7 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** And so, he invited --  
8 he told me that the Commission was coming here and so he  
9 thought it would help me to just speak. And so, I agreed  
10 to come.

11 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** And, you start wherever  
12 you're comfortable.

13 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Okay, I'm going to  
14 start with -- after my uncle called yesterday, I quickly  
15 wrote a little letter. I never thought I would be in front  
16 of a camera, but I'm thankful because I believe this is  
17 what -- probably the highest thing I could ask for ---

18 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Right.

19 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** --- in response to my  
20 concerns. Here's a letter I wrote this morning to the  
21 representatives of the National Inquiry on Missing and  
22 Murdered Aboriginal Women of Saskatchewan, the Commission,  
23 and I heard that they were Denise and Michele, so that's  
24 who I wrote the letter to. I didn't know their last names.

25 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Okay.

1                   **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** And, as a follow-up  
2                   conversation with Denise at the Sheraton Cavalier Hotel,  
3                   Saskatoon, yesterday morning, I'm preparing this letter as  
4                   a statement to be submitted to the statement gatherer. My  
5                   mother, Madeline Gignac, born August 6, 1932, went missing  
6                   from outside the old Broadway Hotel in Prince Albert,  
7                   Saskatchewan around midnight, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1981. Her  
8                   remains were found three-and-a-half years later in a  
9                   farmer's field 8 miles east, 1 mile south and a quarter  
10                  mile west of Prince Albert on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1985.

11                  I and my stepfather, Arthur Gignac,  
12                  identified her clothing, shoes and a family ring. Her  
13                  death was considered the result of foul play, and although  
14                  there was an investigation, her case has not been resolved.

15                  Around August 2016, my sisters Lorianne (ph)  
16                  Gignac and Darlene Madison (ph), and myself, Virginia  
17                  Crombie, were notified that mom's case had been designated  
18                  a historical case and assigned to the Historical Case Unit  
19                  of the RCMP in Saskatoon. We went to an interview in  
20                  Saskatoon on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

21                  Thereafter, in July of 2017 my sister,  
22                  Lorianne Gignac, was again contacted by the RCMP Historical  
23                  Case Unit and informed that the number one suspect in mom's  
24                  murder had passed away in the Victoria Hotel -- Victoria --  
25                  sorry, Victoria Union Hospital in Prince Albert.



1                   Nonetheless, mom's case remains open as  
2                   there is not a 100 percent conclusive evidence this number  
3                   one suspect was responsible for mom's death. There remains  
4                   the 5 percent or so chance that this man might not have  
5                   been mom's murderer. There's always the chance someone may  
6                   come forward with more information at any point.

7                   My main concern in contacting the Commission  
8                   is that after searching as many internet websites as  
9                   possible concerning Murdered and Missing Aboriginal women  
10                  of Saskatchewan, we were unable to find any public record  
11                  of our mother. My younger sister, Lorianne, and I did the  
12                  search on the websites. Madeline Gignac's disappearance or  
13                  murder was not on any of these websites. At this point, we  
14                  got to feeling like our mother disappeared right out of  
15                  history, like she never existed.

16                  We found out that once a missing persons  
17                  remains are found, their name is taken off the missing  
18                  persons list. I still think our mother, Madeline Gignac's  
19                  name should remain on a public list as one who was  
20                  originally missing but now whose death is acknowledged as  
21                  involving foul play resulting in murder. At the very least  
22                  that her name should appear on the public list of the RCMP  
23                  unsolved historical case list of Missing and Murdered  
24                  Aboriginal Women of Saskatchewan. I know there's a  
25                  historical case list, I did see that.

1                   **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Mm-hmm.

2                   **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** And, I think it's on  
3 the RCMP website. I would like to see my mother's name  
4 also on CBC listings because we also looked through those  
5 and couldn't see our mom's name anywhere. And, it's  
6 probably because her name was removed when her remains were  
7 found. So, I just didn't want my mother's name to be lost  
8 or missing.

9                   **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Take your time. No  
10 rush. Breathe. Take a nice deep breath.

11                   **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Okay. Mom was lost,  
12 she was missing, so I didn't want her to be lost or missing  
13 from among the fallen sparrows, sparrows of Saskatchewan.  
14 I think of her as a sparrow because I'm a Christian and  
15 from Matthew 10:29 there's a biblical reference to, "God  
16 sees every sparrow that falls," and that's what I put on my  
17 mom's memorial card was that God sees every sparrow that  
18 falls, and he noted where my mother was. And, in answer to  
19 a prayer, within two days, you know, we couldn't take it.  
20 After three-and-a-half years, we just had to know where --  
21 what had happened to mom. I said a prayer, I said -- I  
22 reasoned with the Lord, I said -- it's been three-and-a-  
23 half years, I think our little sister, Lorianne, is old  
24 enough that she could probably handle knowing that mom had  
25 died. You know, was murdered.

1                   **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Mm-hmm.

2                   **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** And -- because she  
3 was only 12 when mom went missing, and by this time she was  
4 about 15-and-a-half, getting close to 16. I guess our  
5 Creator thought she was ready too because within two days a  
6 farmer found my mother's remains just outside of Prince  
7 Albert.

8                   So, that gave us some closure, at least then  
9 we could bury my mother next to her mother on Sturgeon Lake  
10 Reserve. My mother's remains were buried, we had a  
11 traditional funeral which was very, very releasing of our  
12 emotions and our sorrow. And, my mother's mother sadly had  
13 the same thing similar happen to her in 1957 or so. She  
14 also was found outside of Prince Albert in the winter,  
15 frozen, and had died. So, my mom had dealt with that and I  
16 had watched her dealing with that, and then the same thing  
17 happened to my own mom, same city.

18                   This city I know has quite -- probably if  
19 you look through every record that there is of women going  
20 missing, First Nations women, not only women but men too,  
21 from Prince Albert, you'd find quite a list through the  
22 years. Like, I'm talking about my grandma at 1957 and it  
23 goes on.

24                   Just in April this year, there was another  
25 woman named, actually I won't say her name, but she went

1 missing in Prince Albert in April this year. I could give  
2 you her name, but I don't know if I should because it's not  
3 my right to, I don't think believe, and now it's in the  
4 news and it makes me think, it goes on, and on, and on, and  
5 so many cases are -- they just are not being resolved.

6 I understand how difficult it is, you know,  
7 for investigators sometimes. I do not know what the causes  
8 are that so many cases are not resolved. I'm -- in my  
9 mother's case, I'm wondering, in 1981, were there  
10 videotapes. It was a hotel downtown. The Venice House was  
11 right next door. I don't know if the fire station was  
12 there at the time. There was a fire station right next  
13 door to where that building was, it's no longer -- the  
14 building's no longer there. It's gone now. But, there was  
15 a [CNN rail or CP rail] ~~CNN video or CTVO~~ station right  
16 across the road. Were there any cameras anywhere that, if  
17 the police had gotten a hold of, if there were any, if they  
18 had gotten a hold of them within, say, a 24-hour period and  
19 reviewed them, they wouldn't have been taped over, because  
20 sometimes they're taped over and you don't get there fast  
21 enough, you don't get -- you wonder was that question  
22 asked. Were -- was it asked, are their surveillance tapes?  
23 Are there -- what do they call them? Monitoring tapes?

24 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Yes.

25 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Security tapes? So,

1 maybe, in 1981 there might have been some, I don't know.

2 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Did you have any  
3 information about the investigation?

4 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Yes, we've received  
5 some information. Okay. So -- okay. So, some suggestions  
6 I do have -- I'm going to read you some -- the statement  
7 that I made for my uncle to read. I want this to be shown,  
8 a picture of my mother ---

9 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Mm-hmm. And, who's who  
10 in the picture? Nice and close to the camera.

11 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** This is my mother in  
12 the centre, Madeline. This is my sister, Darlene, she's  
13 next in age to me. I'm the oldest, Virginia. This is our  
14 younger sister, Lorianne, who was 12 when mom went missing.  
15 This is our -- next to Darlene in age, younger, Linda,  
16 she's passed away now. She was deceased at age 36.  
17 There's our brother, David, he was adopted by an aunt,  
18 Georgina Webb (ph), so his last name is Webb and he's in  
19 B.C. coast somewhere, [Powell River] (~~indiscernible~~) I  
20 believe. So, that's who the people are. And, we have one  
21 missing, her name was Belinda. She died as an infant at  
22 age 2 weeks of pneumonia, but there we go.

23 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Okay. And, how old  
24 were you when your mom went missing?

25 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** I was 29, and in this

1 picture I'm probably 26, 27, I'm thinking. Maybe a little  
2 younger.

3 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Yes.

4 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** There wasn't very  
5 many years before mom went missing. But, I did do up a  
6 report for my uncle, Edward, to read at his presentation.  
7 It's four pages long. It gives much more detail, but I  
8 don't know if you want me to read it or just submit it ---

9 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** You do whichever you're  
10 comfortable.

11 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Okay.

12 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** I'll take it from you or  
13 you can read it, or both.

14 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Okay. So, I just  
15 want to finish up -- because we couldn't find anything on  
16 mom when we were searching, I would suggest a memorial  
17 website. The -- it would be helpful and comforting,  
18 assurance, to those of us who do not want our murdered  
19 loved ones to be forgotten. If they're missing and their  
20 remains are found, and their names are taken off the list,  
21 we didn't even see the missing -- her as missing on any  
22 list because we never went to search the website until this  
23 year. We started searching because it just brought back,  
24 you know, the desire to learn as much as we could.

25 So, yeah, and I also think more immediate

1 follow-up of missing persons reports regarding adult  
2 persons would help, because when a child goes missing  
3 sometimes as an Amber Alert, but when an adult goes  
4 missing, especially a person who's addicted to alcohol and  
5 maybe was drinking in a hotel, like my mom was, she was  
6 waiting for a taxi and, you know, was never seen after  
7 that.

8 Sometimes it's thought, well, they don't  
9 want to be found, maybe they just went on their own, give  
10 them a few days, you know, and there's not that immediate  
11 -- maybe there's not that immediate follow-up. I don't  
12 know what it was in my mom's case, but I will read all of  
13 this now.

14 At the age of 49 our mother, Madeline  
15 Margaret Gignac nee Lavallee, I think ne means ---

16 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Surname.

17 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Surname, okay. Well,  
18 she was -- her maiden name. Born the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1932,  
19 went missing from outside the old Broadway Hotel in Prince  
20 Albert, Saskatchewan around midnight of October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1981.  
21 This hotel doesn't exist anymore, it's been torn down.  
22 After my mom went missing I don't know what the name of it  
23 was when she was in that hotel that night, but later I know  
24 it was renamed, maybe a couple of times, but it was  
25 eventually called Alley Cats, and I hated to use that word

1           that's why I call it the old Broadway Hotel. This is a  
2           hotel my mom had been going to since I was a child. I used  
3           to go to the restaurant with her right beside that hotel.  
4           So, to her it was a safe place in her mind to go and meet  
5           with relatives and friends.

6                           And so, that was -- from the northern people  
7           that live in the north of Saskatchewan that, when they came  
8           to town, we'd go to the Chinese restaurant next to the  
9           Broadway Hotel and our parents, that's where they drank.  
10          So, it was a social place, a gathering place. So, it  
11          became a very dangerous place for women, I think, later on.

12                          She had asked her niece, Geraldine  
13          Moosehunter (ph) who worked at the hotel bar at the time to  
14          call her a taxi, another reason she probably felt safe  
15          going there. Geraldine was working there. Then, mom had  
16          gone outside to wait for her cab. So, this was right after  
17          midnight some time.

18                          Mom had gone shopping earlier that afternoon  
19          at the Salvation Army for quilting materials and had  
20          stopped at the hotel for a few drinks after shopping, but  
21          because she was addicted, the afternoon wore on into the  
22          late evening. Mom had agreed to babysit Geraldine's  
23          children the next day, so left her shopping bag for  
24          Geraldine to bring in the morning. It had begun to snow in  
25          Prince Albert that night.



1                   Now, I just want to add a little bit here.  
2           Mom used to call me. When she went drinking, she'd call me  
3           to come and pick her up in the night time, and I chanced it  
4           once or twice, but I had children at home, and I finally  
5           had to tell mom I cannot do this. My children have to be  
6           first, and I couldn't sneak away to quickly pick her up,  
7           take her home, and get back home because it was putting my  
8           own children in danger.

9                   So, I don't think she called me that night  
10          though. I think she called that cab like I told her to.  
11          So, mom lived with her husband, Art, or Arthur Gignac, and  
12          their daughter, Lorianne, in a basement apartment on East  
13          Hill, 10 or 12 -- 11 blocks from the hotel. When Geraldine  
14          arrived at our mother, Madeline's, the following morning to  
15          drop off her children, she was met with mom's worried  
16          husband, Art, who had come home the previous afternoon from  
17          his job cutting posts in the bush.

18                   See, before mom went up town that afternoon  
19          she had gotten Lorianne off to school, sent a lunch with  
20          her, and when she came home after school her dad, I think,  
21          I was there or just shortly after.

22                   Art told Geraldine that Madeline had not  
23          come home the previous night. Geraldine left with her  
24          children to make other childcare arrangements. Art got  
25          Lorianne off to school then contacted me, Virginia

1 Marianne, also known as Marlene Crombie, that's a nickname,  
2 Marlene. So, you'll see I have a little USB PowerPoint  
3 that I've prepared for my uncle to use in his presentation,  
4 and in there I interchange Marlene and Virginia.

5 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Okay.

6 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** So, Art contacted me  
7 to see if I knew where mom was. My husband, Kenneth, and I  
8 and our three children also lived in Prince Albert at the  
9 time. I had not heard from mom, and to allow Art to look  
10 for mom I gladly agreed to have Lorianne come to our house  
11 on the bus after school, so she could stay with our family  
12 while Art conducted the search.

13 While Art began his search, I also began to  
14 conduct inquiries to see if any of the Grey Cab taxi drivers  
15 had picked mom up at the hotel the night before. The cab  
16 dispatcher was not able to provide any definitive  
17 information, nor did follow-up visits to the taxi stand to  
18 speak with drivers who had worked the night of mom's  
19 disappearance yield any forthcoming results. We  
20 subsequently learned that mom and her brother, Joe  
21 Lavallee, a woman friend and Doug Claire (ph), uncle to  
22 Madeline's former common law spouse, had apparently had a  
23 few drinks together at one of the hotels the previous  
24 afternoon, but that was the only contact they had.

25 Again, Doug Claire had heard a report that

1 mom had gone to drink at a particular house in the city.  
2 With Doug Claire and Art's help, we also checked out that  
3 house, but the people there could not remember or confirm  
4 anything. I also went to mom's cousin, Grace Burg's (ph)  
5 house, just a couple of blocks from my mom's place, but mom  
6 was not there. Phone calls were made to relatives on our  
7 nearby Sturgeon Lake Reserve and no one had any knowledge  
8 of mom's whereabouts.

9 My sister, Darlene, who lived in [Community  
10 1], Alberta, telephoned me the day after mom disappeared  
11 [two sentences redacted - Rule 55]. I had to tell her mom  
12 had not come home the night before but that we were still  
13 hoping she would show up or call.

14 I did not want to confirm that I too sensed  
15 something tragic had happened to mom. The years have  
16 somewhat dimmed my memory, but these are my best  
17 recollections of what transpired the days after our  
18 mother's disappearance. Are you okay with me reading more?

19 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Absolutely.

20 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** After exhausting all  
21 immediate leads, Art and I gave up and went to the police.  
22 At that time, there was at least a 24-hour wait. It was  
23 required before a missing persons report could be filed.  
24 Also, we were reminded of the possibility mom may have left  
25 voluntarily and may not wish to be contacted.

1                   Again, that's adults; right? Adults? Maybe  
2                   wait a little bit. I do not know how quickly mom's case  
3                   was looked into, but the RCMP did follow-up with a  
4                   methodical and persistent investigation. During the first  
5                   year-and-a-half, I met with the RCMP a number of times for  
6                   interviews concerning our mother's disappearance to try to  
7                   provide as much information as I could remember. The  
8                   police, of course, interviewed many other people. The  
9                   police would come even to my workplace, you know, to find  
10                  me, talk with me a little bit, you know?

11                  I went out a couple of times with two women,  
12                  which I believe both were police officers, but it may be  
13                  only one of them was and the other was her sister. We had  
14                  a relative that was a police officer, and this was who  
15                  came, and we searched areas in the geographical outskirts  
16                  of the city. I did not believe in psychics, but one of my  
17                  aunties went to a psychic, I think, and was told that my  
18                  mom was somewhere around the city, and so that's why it  
19                  basically started. One of them was First Nations.

20                  **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Mm-hmm.

21                  **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** So, on our own, Art  
22                  and I searched various streets and walking paths on the  
23                  riverbanks of Prince Albert, and I went periodically to  
24                  search on my own the perimeters of Little Red River Park  
25                  and along Highway 55. It became very discouraging walking

1 through the forest, in the bush, and I finally realized it  
2 was useless. There is too vast a forest.

3 I did not tell Lorianne about the search we  
4 were doing. I was working full-time. We could not give  
5 her any definitive information where mom may have gone  
6 because we didn't know. We all -- all we could do was  
7 pray, and if I remember correctly, a time or two, I prayed  
8 together with the children, because I had three of my own,  
9 eh? It must have been confusing for Lorianne, but we did  
10 not want to say what we feared. We tried to keep it  
11 positive and hopeful that mom would call and come back home  
12 soon.

13 Time passed, and Art, Lorianne's dad, was  
14 difficult to keep track of. Eventually, we heard he had  
15 been drinking heavily, but had finally sought help through  
16 the Salvation Army Church and entered rehab and was living  
17 at the Bridge, a hostile for men, and was attending church.  
18 Art has now passed away. It is only now that I realized  
19 Art must have gone through a lot of stress at that time and  
20 was probably questioned at various times. The RCMP  
21 recently confirmed to me that Art was not among those  
22 considered a suspect, and that two other suspects had been  
23 eliminated.

24 By the end of the year, Darlene and her  
25 husband, Tolus (ph), came from [Community 1], Alberta, to

1 take Lorianne into their care. They have raised her as  
2 their own daughter.

3 Sometime within the first few months of the  
4 investigation a lead came in that mom was living out of the  
5 city on a farm and did not want to be contacted. We  
6 received a phone call from an officer confirming that  
7 report but then later received an apology from another  
8 officer as the report had not been verified.

9 Eventually, a Crime Stoppers video was  
10 produced and aired on local CKBI television featuring a  
11 brief synopsis of the evening mom disappeared. Actors on  
12 the video portrayed mom talking to a man in a red half dump  
13 truck that had white strips painted on each side prior to  
14 her entering the hotel. A description of her case was  
15 given and a request was made for anyone with information to  
16 contact the local RCMP Crime Stoppers. A number was given  
17 to which anyone could call anonymously.

18 I do not know if there were any calls  
19 received by the RCMP as a result of this video. Throughout  
20 the years, mom's case has been handled by a variety of  
21 investigators as from time to time officers handling her  
22 case would move to other detachments. It is possible mom  
23 was mistaken for a hooker because sometimes the police  
24 asked me about that, didn't -- do you know if your mom  
25 might have done some of that? Maybe they were preparing

1           that thought, you know?

2                           **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:**   Mm-hmm.

3                           **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:**   And, I had said, no.

4           I had heard my mom and my aunt talking a few times, and she  
5           would never do anything like that.  But, I did remember one  
6           occasion mom did say, "Unless a child was starving,  
7           possibly."  So, it is possible mom was mistaken for a  
8           hooker as she stood outside the hotel that night waiting  
9           for her cab.  She was addicted to alcohol and would have  
10          been very inebriated.  She likely thought her cab had  
11          arrived and thus became victim to a predator, because I had  
12          -- I used to ask my mom to come outside.  I didn't want to  
13          go outside into the hotel to look for her.  She would have  
14          to wait for me outside.

15                         On May 5<sup>th</sup>, three-and-a-half years after mom  
16          disappeared, human remains were found by a farmer on  
17          farmland he had just purchased, approximately 8 miles east  
18          of Prince Albert.  I, Virginia, was living in Nipawin when  
19          I received a call from my old neighbour in Prince Albert  
20          alerting me to the news on the radio.  When I listened and  
21          heard the news for myself, I had the strong intuition these  
22          were the remains of my mother, Madeline, as I had just been  
23          praying for some resolution to our family's silent  
24          suffering.

25                         I immediately contacted the RCMP and they

1 asked if I remembered what mom had on. I knew what her  
2 jacket looked like, the type of pants and other clothing  
3 she would have normally worn and her shoe size. My  
4 stepfather, Art, was also living in the Nipawin area,  
5 provided me with a description of mom's shoes and reminded  
6 me that she had a family ring on with one stone missing.

7 I gave all this information to the RCMP. At  
8 the time they had not found the ring, but they said they  
9 would go back with a metal detector to see if they could  
10 locate the ring. The RCMP thought we should go into view  
11 the clothing but that we would have to wait for a few days  
12 as mom's clothing was being steam cleaned, and it would be  
13 a few days before the items were returned.

14 By the time Art and I arrived in Prince  
15 Albert, the RCMP had found the ring. Art and I went to the  
16 RCMP together to view the clothing [and footwear] and  
17 verified all items of mom's, Madeline Gignac's. We also  
18 confirmed mom sometimes used dark red nail polish. There  
19 was actually a little bag with a red -- mom's nail, a  
20 fingernail, and (indiscernible) and a joint, one of her  
21 finger joints, and I forgot to ask the Historical Case  
22 Unit, our worker is Donna (ph), I gave her 16 questions  
23 that I had. I have a few more, but I forgot to ask her,  
24 was that fingernail ever sent for any analysis for DNA?

25 I do know that mom's ring has just recently



1           been sent for a flushing by proper professionals. That was  
2           a long time, 36 years later that it's being flushed for  
3           evidence. Isn't that something? So, I don't know how much  
4           evidence might have been slogged off of it at the time  
5           mom's clothing was found, but that ring is going to go back  
6           to my little sister, Lorianne, because we requested that.  
7           We're thankful for that.

8                           **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Mm-hmm.

9                           **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** So, we have -- okay,  
10          the discovery of mom's -- okay, here we go. Did I say we  
11          also confirmed mom sometimes used dark red nail polish and  
12          that's where -- something to remind you, to tell you about  
13          that.

14                         The discovery of mom's remains definitely  
15          provided partial closure as our suspicions of what had  
16          happened to her had been confirmed. We had suspected she  
17          had been murdered on the very night she disappeared. We  
18          were at least able to have a traditional funeral for her  
19          and lay her remains to rest next to her ancestors at the  
20          Sturgeon Lake Indian Reserve burial grounds.

21                         Listening to the drums feeding at her  
22          funeral moved me intensely and allowed my tears to flow  
23          freely at last. I do not practice traditional  
24          spirituality, but that was very healing for me. It seemed  
25          like we were saying goodbye to an old culture, an old way,

1           and -- but I was glad that mom -- she was back with her own  
2           people, her own family now in that way.

3                         At last, mom was with her people where she  
4           would have been -- where she should have been all these  
5           years. She had asked me to take her to the reserve and I  
6           feel badly, because I had said no, because I said, "Stay  
7           with Lorianne and your husband," because mom had lost three  
8           of us children earlier in years, earlier to social  
9           services, and I just didn't want to see the new family  
10          broken up, you know? Although she had good reason to leave  
11          her first husband, her first common law husband. But --  
12          when she was drinking and lost us children, but there's so  
13          much more to mom's story that I can -- I try to do the best  
14          in four pages here.

15                        Okay, so now my tears flowed freely at last.  
16          At last, mom was with her people where she should have been  
17          all these years. For me, it was just the beginning of my  
18          true healing, my true healing time, but I wonder, does one  
19          ever dream in this lifetime? I feel I will only be made  
20          whole when I am reunited with mom in the time of eternity.  
21          That's when I'll be made complete.

22                        Our mother, Madeline's missing persons case  
23          was initially handled by the Prince Albert RCMP, but in  
24          August of 2016, Madeline's youngest daughter, Lorianne  
25          Gignac, of Grand Prairie, Alberta, received a phone call

1 from the Saskatoon RCMP Historical Case Unit and was  
2 informed that our mother, Madeline Gignac's case had been  
3 designated a historical case and was now reassigned to the  
4 Saskatoon RCMP Historical Case Unit.

5 The RCMP wanted to meet with and interview  
6 Lorianne. When Lorianne received the call from the RCMP  
7 Historical Case Unit she contacted me, the eldest of  
8 Madeline's remaining three daughters, and asked if I would  
9 accompany her and our sister, Darlene, to the interview.  
10 I, of course, wanted to join them.

11 On September 9, 2016, 35 years after mom  
12 went missing, we three sisters went to the interview with  
13 renewed hope that mom's case might eventually get solved.  
14 We were given the opportunity to ask whatever questions we  
15 wished to and to provide any new information we might  
16 remember.

17 This past August 2017, the Historical Case  
18 Unit of the RCMP in Saskatoon once again contacted Lorianne  
19 to tell her the number one suspect concerning mom's murder  
20 had passed away in the Victoria Hospital in Prince Albert.  
21 This brought back all kinds of conflicting emotions for all  
22 of us. At the age of 65, I am the eldest of my sisters. I  
23 felt a renewed sense of stress at the thought of revisiting  
24 the questions surrounding mom's disappearance.

25 The second eldest, Darlene, who will turn 63

1           this month has always hoped for a death bed confession on  
2           the part of our mother's murderer. Our youngest sister,  
3           Lorianne, now age 49, had buried her pain as best she  
4           could, and this latest development brought back the  
5           feelings of vulnerability and confusion she experienced as  
6           a 12-year-old when mom disappeared.

7                           At the time of this call, a special female  
8           officer, Donna, was assigned to us who was very easy to  
9           talk to and who let us know that we could call her at any  
10          time with any questions we had. I made up a list of 16  
11          questions, then contacted this officer who patiently and  
12          gently answered all of my questions.

13                          One question I asked was, why Lorianne and I  
14          could not find any information on our mother, Madeline  
15          Gignac, on any of the internet sites dealing with missing  
16          and murdered Aboriginal women of Saskatchewan. We had both  
17          begun to feel like our mother had never existed. I'm so  
18          glad I asked, because I learned that once a missing person  
19          -- missing persons remains are found, that person's name is  
20          taken off all missing persons lists. This removed the  
21          mystery and alleviated the growing sense of injustice and  
22          frustration we were feeling.

23                          There is so much more of mom's story that  
24          could be told. Mom should not have had to endure this  
25          tragic end to her beautiful person. She had suffered so

1 much already, extreme incidents of domestic violence over a  
2 span of 12 years in her first common law marriage, extreme  
3 poverty, living in an isolated northern Saskatchewan Métis  
4 community, living mainly off the land and receiving only  
5 occasional subsistence vouchers from the DNR. Mom was  
6 completely absent from drinking alcohol until she turned 26  
7 years of age around which time she lost her own mother to a  
8 fate similar to her own also outside the same city of  
9 Prince Albert and also in the wintertime.

10 Mom's grief and tears over her mother's  
11 freezing death around 1957 drove her former common law  
12 husband to extreme bouts of rage and violence against her  
13 when he was drinking. I remember one incident where a  
14 bottle of alcohol was put to mom's mouth and she had no  
15 choice but to drink. After this, she agreed to drink with  
16 my first stepfather whenever he asked. Mom soon learned  
17 alcohol could douse some of her sorrow and misery, and she  
18 no longer resisted drinking. She eventually became an  
19 alcoholic.

20 Due to her alcoholism she lost her first  
21 three children, which is Virginia, myself, Darlene and  
22 Linda, the one that's deceased now, to social services. In  
23 later years, mom told me she had a breakdown after she lost  
24 us children and she'd go outside calling for us. We  
25 children kept in touch with mom while we were in foster

1 homes and visited during holidays. We children kept --  
2 okay. Mom subsequently had a son, David, and then  
3 Lorianne. Eventually our family relationships were  
4 restored.

5 We lost so much time with our beloved mother  
6 in our early years, and our adult years were cut short.  
7 Mom left us a very great legacy of love, despite suffering  
8 so much violence and poverty, mom had an ability to endure  
9 and make the best of her circumstances. She was very kind,  
10 merciful, gentle, generous, hospitable, industrious and  
11 resourceful. She was a meticulous housekeeper, provided  
12 food and clean clothing, and she was an entrepreneur  
13 selling lovely beadwork over many years, but above all she  
14 was the best of mothers.

15 So, this is prepared by myself, Virginia  
16 Marianne Crombie, AKA Marlene, that was my mom's name for  
17 me, but I never got baptized as that, and I never got  
18 registered as that. They had a very late registration for  
19 me, age 13, and I should have took the opportunity then to  
20 say, "My name is Marlene," but I missed it. So, this was  
21 prepared November 6, 2017, at Pontrilas, Saskatchewan, and  
22 I know there's more coming. I'm hoping to write something  
23 about mom's life. Our life, our story.

24 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Right. Yes.

25 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** But, that's just --

1 we're just one of so many, so many Aboriginal families,  
2 Métis families and not only us. There's Caucasian  
3 families, there's all nations who have the same story, but  
4 ours seems to be -- I don't know, there's so many in such a  
5 small vicinity that maybe there's been -- I don't know if  
6 there's more -- there's probably a lot more ---

7 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Mm-hmm.

8 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** --- but it's  
9 happening. It happens to other people, we know that. Yes.  
10 Thank you for hearing my story. Thank you for giving me a  
11 chance.

12 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Thank you so much for  
13 sharing.

14 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Now, for sure, it's  
15 on the record.

16 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Beautiful, eloquently  
17 written history and memento to your mom. Very ---

18 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** That's the best I can  
19 do for mom.

20 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** And, I know you want to  
21 take a little break quickly. You said how your mom had had  
22 a difficult life in her marriage and so on, was residential  
23 schools or anything like that involved in her history or...

24 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** No, mom was not in  
25 residential school. I don't believe her brothers and

1 sisters were either. Nieces and nephews were. Mom was one  
2 of probably -- we would say the Métis that were -- they  
3 kept getting moved from location to location, so we --  
4 there was no permanent land base for the Métis, and I know  
5 both villages that I lived in as a child, Molanosa, in the  
6 geographical centre of Saskatchewan, no longer exists. The  
7 people [were moved from] ~~who lived in~~ that community to  
8 across the lake, Weyakwin, because I don't know if there  
9 was mineral resources in that area or what.

10 Fish Lake, the lake where I was born,  
11 [Tweedsmuir] (~~indiscernible~~), actually what says on my birth  
12 certificate, but that Native community is a historical site  
13 now called Fish Lake. The people from there were moved  
14 from there to Molanosa, I believe, and then from Molanosa  
15 to [Weyakwin] (~~indiscernible~~). So, we just got scattered.

16 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Mm-hmm.

17 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** And, these Métis  
18 communities were not permanent, but thank goodness some are  
19 being kept that historical site. And, of course, my mom's  
20 first place -- birth place was Big River India Nation --  
21 Indian Reserve where she was disenfranchised from, so,  
22 yeah.

23 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Well, again, thank you  
24 so much. You're very strong and courageous to come forward  
25 and share that with us. Do you feel like you've shared



1 everything that you've wanted and...

2 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** I do for the purposes  
3 of this Inquiry. I do feel that -- I don't know how our  
4 case becomes a historical case. I do -- like the  
5 suggestions I wanted was a memorial website. I wanted to  
6 make sure my mom's name was listed among those that are  
7 being collected in this Aboriginal Inquiry and a part of a  
8 list of missing and murdered Aboriginal women of  
9 Saskatchewan. I just want to make sure her name's there  
10 too, that it's not missing. And, more immediate follow-up  
11 to a missing persons report.

12 It doesn't matter, I think, if it's an  
13 adult, or a person that's an alcoholic, or whether they're  
14 a hooker, I just feel like any time a family is concerned  
15 enough to go to the police and report a person missing,  
16 there's probably cause for alarm. This -- the family knows  
17 best, that person, so I would suggest follow up within 24  
18 hours. At least go make inquiry where they were last seen,  
19 their last known whereabouts and the people that last saw  
20 them. Get some immediate information. It might help solve  
21 more cases.

22 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Mm-hmm.

23 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Yeah, because we wait  
24 too often for them to call us and to phone back home or  
25 come back home, and I think the feelings -- the gut

1 feelings of family probably are correct. So -- but I am  
2 thankful in our case that mom's case was -- is a historical  
3 case, and that, who knows, maybe something will get  
4 resolved -- you know, a result will come out.

5 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Mm-hmm.

6 **MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** So, thank you very  
7 much.

8 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Okay, well thank you  
9 very much. I'm just going to shut off the recorder here.  
10 It is 6:00 p.m.

11 --- Upon adjourning at 18:00

12 **LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE**

13 I, Shirley Chang, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I  
14 have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and  
15 accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this  
16 matter.

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Shirley Chang

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March 13, 2018