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

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Wednesday November 22, 2017

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

Statement gathered by Debbie Bodkin

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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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**Statement Gatherer:** Debbie Bodkin

**List of documents provided by witness:**

**Item 1:** Photograph identifying missing loved one with five children

**Item 2:** Written statement (four pages)
--- Upon commencing on Wednesday, November 22, 2017 at 17:21

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

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

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

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

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

**MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** I’m from Nipawin, Saskatchewan ---

**MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Okay.

**MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** --- where I live with
my husband in a little village close to Nipawin called Pontrilas. I say Nipawin because that’s where we get our mail.

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Oh, okay, yes.

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: Actually, I’m about 10 minutes in a little village called Pontrilas.

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Okay. And, you’re cultural background?

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

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Okay.

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

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Yeah.

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

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Okay.

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

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Okay.

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: Yes, four older.

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: And, I’ll just -- sorry,
I’ll interrupt you one more time ---

**MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** That’s fine, no problem.

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

**MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Yes.

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

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

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

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

**MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Okay.

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

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

**MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** A statement gatherer, so I agreed to that. I thought this was the least I could do for my mother. My uncle, Ed Lavallee, read some -- a report that I typed up for him because he didn’t have the
background information when my mother went missing, so I prepared him what I remembered and he read this whole statement in public in Edmonton, November 7th or so.

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Okay.

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: Just recently.

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Yeah.

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

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: And, you start wherever you’re comfortable.

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

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Right.

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

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

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

Around August 2016, my sisters Lorianne (ph) Gignac and Darlene Madison (ph), and myself, Virginia Crombie, were notified that mom’s case had been designated a historical case and assigned to the Historical Case Unit of the RCMP in Saskatoon. We went to an interview in Saskatoon on September 9th, 2016.

Thereafter, in July of 2017 my sister, Lorianne Gignac, was again contacted by the RCMP Historical Case Unit and informed that the number one suspect in mom’s murder had passed away in the Victoria Hotel -- Victoria -- sorry, Victoria Union Hospital in Prince Albert.
Nonetheless, mom’s case remains open as there is not a 100 percent conclusive evidence this number one suspect was responsible for mom’s death. There remains the 5 percent or so chance that this man might not have been mom’s murderer. There’s always the chance someone may come forward with more information at any point.

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

We found out that once a missing persons remain are found, their name is taken off the missing persons list. I still think our mother, Madeline Gignac’s name should remain on a public list as one who was originally missing but now whose death is acknowledged as involving foul play resulting in murder. At the very least that her name should appear on the public list of the RCMP unsolved historical case list of Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women of Saskatchewan. I know there’s a historical case list, I did see that.
MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Mm-hmm.

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


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

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

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

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

Just in April this year, there was another woman named, actually I won’t say her name, but she went
missing in Prince Albert in April this year. I could give you her name, but I don’t know if I should because it’s not my right to, I don’t think believe, and now it’s in the news and it makes me think, it goes on, and on, and on, and so many cases are -- they just are not being resolved.

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

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Yes.

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: Security tapes? So,
maybe, in 1981 there might have been some, I don’t know.

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

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

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

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

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

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: I was 29, and in this
picture I’m probably 26, 27, I’m thinking. Maybe a little younger.

**MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Yes.

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

**MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** You do whichever you’re comfortable.

**MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Okay.

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

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

So, yeah, and I also think more immediate
follow-up of missing persons reports regarding adult persons would help, because when a child goes missing sometimes as an Amber Alert, but when an adult goes missing, especially a person who’s addicted to alcohol and maybe was drinking in a hotel, like my mom was, she was waiting for a taxi and, you know, was never seen after that.

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

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

**MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** Surname.

**MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Surname, okay. Well, she was -- her maiden name. Born the 6th of August 1932, went missing from outside the old Broadway Hotel in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan around midnight of October 20th, 1981. This hotel doesn’t exist anymore, it’s been torn down.

After my mom went missing I don’t know what the name of it was when she was in that hotel that night, but later I know it was renamed, maybe a couple of times, but it was eventually called Alley Cats, and I hated to use that word
that’s why I call it the old Broadway Hotel. This is a hotel my mom had been going to since I was a child. I used to go to the restaurant with her right beside that hotel. So, to her it was a safe place in her mind to go and meet with relatives and friends.

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

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

Mom had gone shopping earlier that afternoon at the Salvation Army for quilting materials and had stopped at the hotel for a few drinks after shopping, but because she was addicted, the afternoon wore on into the late evening. Mom had agreed to babysit Geraldine’s children the next day, so left her shopping bag for Geraldine to bring in the morning. It had begun to snow in Prince Albert that night.
Now, I just want to add a little bit here. Mom used to call me. When she went drinking, she’d call me to come and pick her up in the night time, and I chanced it once or twice, but I had children at home, and I finally had to tell mom I cannot do this. My children have to be first, and I couldn’t sneak away to quickly pick her up, take her home, and get back home because it was putting my own children in danger.

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

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

Art told Geraldine that Madeline had not come home the previous night. Geraldine left with her children to make other childcare arrangements. Art got Lorianne off to school then contacted me, Virginia
Marianne, also known as Marlene Crombie, that’s a nickname, Marlene. So, you’ll see I have a little USB PowerPoint that I’ve prepared for my uncle to use in his presentation, and in there I interchange Marlene and Virginia.

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Okay.

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

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

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

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

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

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Absolutely.

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: After exhausting all immediate leads, Art and I gave up and went to the police. At that time, there was at least a 24-hour wait. It was required before a missing persons report could be filed. Also, we were reminded of the possibility mom may have left voluntarily and may not wish to be contacted.
Again, that’s adults; right? Adults? Maybe wait a little bit. I do not know how quickly mom’s case was looked into, but the RCMP did follow-up with a methodical and persistent investigation. During the first year-and-a-half, I met with the RCMP a number of times for interviews concerning our mother’s disappearance to try to provide as much information as I could remember. The police, of course, interviewed many other people. The police would come even to my workplace, you know, to find me, talk with me a little bit, you know?

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

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Mm-hmm.

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: So, on our own, Art and I searched various streets and walking paths on the riverbanks of Prince Albert, and I went periodically to search on my own the perimeters of Little Red River Park and along Highway 55. It became very discouraging walking
through the forest, in the bush, and I finally realized it was useless. There is too vast a forest.

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

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

By the end of the year, Darlene and her husband, Tolus (ph), came from [Community 1], Alberta, to
take Lorianne into their care. They have raised her as their own daughter.

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

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

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

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Mm-hmm.

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: And, I had said, no. I had heard my mom and my aunt talking a few times, and she would never do anything like that. But, I did remember one occasion mom did say, “Unless a child was starving, possibly.” So, it is possible mom was mistaken for a hooker as she stood outside the hotel that night waiting for her cab. She was addicted to alcohol and would have been very inebriated. She likely thought her cab had arrived and thus became victim to a predator, because I had -- I used to ask my mom to come outside. I didn’t want to go outside into the hotel to look for her. She would have to wait for me outside.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Listening to the drums feeding at her funeral moved me intensely and allowed my tears to flow freely at last. I do not practice traditional spirituality, but that was very healing for me. It seemed like we were saying goodbye to an old culture, an old way,
and -- but I was glad that mom -- she was back with her own people, her own family now in that way.

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

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

Our mother, Madeline’s missing persons case was initially handled by the Prince Albert RCMP, but in August of 2016, Madeline’s youngest daughter, Lorianne Gignac, of Grand Prairie, Alberta, received a phone call
from the Saskatoon RCMP Historical Case Unit and was informed that our mother, Madeline Gignac’s case had been designated a historical case and was now reassigned to the Saskatoon RCMP Historical Case Unit.

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

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

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

The second eldest, Darlene, who will turn 63
this month has always hoped for a death bed confession on
the part of our mother’s murderer. Our youngest sister,
Lorianne, now age 49, had buried her pain as best she
could, and this latest development brought back the
feelings of vulnerability and confusion she experienced as
a 12-year-old when mom disappeared.

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

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

There is so much more of mom’s story that
could be told. Mom should not have had to endure this
tragic end to her beautiful person. She had suffered so
much already, extreme incidents of domestic violence over a span of 12 years in her first common law marriage, extreme poverty, living in an isolated northern Saskatchewan Métis community, living mainly off the land and receiving only occasional subsistence vouchers from the DNR. Mom was completely absent from drinking alcohol until she turned 26 years of age around which time she lost her own mother to a fate similar to her own also outside the same city of Prince Albert and also in the wintertime.

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

Due to her alcoholism she lost her first three children, which is Virginia, myself, Darlene and Linda, the one that’s deceased now, to social services. In later years, mom told me she had a breakdown after she lost us children and she’d go outside calling for us. We children kept in touch with mom while we were in foster
homes and visited during holidays. We children kept --
ookay. Mom subsequently had a son, David, and then
4 Lorianne. Eventually our family relationships were
5 restored.

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.

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

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Right. Yes.

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: But, that’s just --
we’re just one of so many, so many Aboriginal families, Métis families and not only us. There’s Caucasian families, there’s all nations who have the same story, but ours seems to be -- I don’t know, there’s so many in such a small vicinity that maybe there’s been -- I don’t know if there’s more -- there’s probably a lot more ---

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Mm-hmm.

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

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Thank you so much for sharing.

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: Now, for sure, it’s on the record.

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

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: That’s the best I can do for mom.

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

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: No, mom was not in residential school. I don’t believe her brothers and
sisters were either. Nieces and nephews were. Mom was one of probably -- we would say the Métis that were -- they kept getting moved from location to location, so we -- there was no permanent land base for the Métis, and I know both villages that I lived in as a child, Molanosa, in the geographical centre of Saskatchewan, no longer exists. The people [were moved from] who lived in that community to across the lake, Weyakwin, because I don’t know if there was mineral resources in that area or what.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE:** Yeah, because we wait too often for them to call us and to phone back home or come back home, and I think the feelings -- the gut
feelings of family probably are correct. So -- but I am thankful in our case that mom’s case was -- is a historical case, and that, who knows, maybe something will get resolved -- you know, a result will come out.

MS. DEBBIE BODKIN: Mm-hmm.

MS. VIRGINIA CROMBIE: So, thank you very much.

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

--- Upon adjourning at 18:00

LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

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

Shirley Chang

March 13, 2018

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