



NATIVE WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA



Storytelling: Georgina's Story



For years, communities have pointed to the high numbers of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has been honoured to work with families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls to share the story of their loved one. As part of the storytelling process, families' are also invited to share their experiences with the justice system, media, victim services and other institutional and community supports.

Storytelling is a way of teaching and learning. The stories shared by family members are intended to raise awareness, educate, and promote change. They have been told to honour the daughters, sisters, mothers and grandmothers that have been lost to violence and remember those still missing. This is what their stories tell us.

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The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is honoured to work with families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls to share the story of their loved one. To view all of the stories shared, or for more information this work, please visit NWAC's website at www.nwac.ca.



Georgina Faith Papin's Story

Georgina Faith Papin is remembered by her friends and family as a caring mother, sister and friend. A talented artist and writer, Georgina was the mother of seven beautiful children. She is described as a warm and funny woman who could talk to anyone, the sort of person who made friends wherever she went. Georgina took deep pride in her identity as a Cree woman. Traditional dancing, songs, art and teachings had an important place in her life. Georgina will be forever missed and remembered by the many people who loved her.

Georgina was born on March 11, 1964 in Edmonton, Alberta. A member of the Enoch Cree Nation, Georgina's father was from Enoch and her mother was from the Ermineskin Cree Nation. Georgina came from a large family. She was the fourth of nine children. Her mother, Alice, was a residential school Survivor and she suffered from addictions as well as several illnesses, including cancer. Georgina's father, George, was in and out of jail so her grandparents played an important role in her early life and the lives of her siblings. Georgina's grandfather was well-known baseball player, James Rattlesnake. Her paternal grandmother was a tiny woman and the two just "fit" together. Georgina's older sisters had a special relationship with their maternal grandmother. Both girls stayed with her until she died suddenly in a car accident shortly after Georgina was born. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s all of the children, Debbie, Cynthia, Richard, Georgina, George, Tammy, Randall, Elana and Bonnie, were taken from their parents and placed in the child welfare system.

Georgina was only a year old when she and her older siblings were removed from their home. Georgina was placed in a foster home with her older brother but her sisters, Debbie and Cynthia, were sent to residential school in Hobbema. It was the very same residential school their mother had attended. For the next eleven years Georgina and her brother were shuffled between foster and group homes. Although Georgina did not like to talk about her childhood, the family firmly believes she suffered abuse and neglect. When she was 12, Georgina ran away and found herself on the streets of Calgary. Like so many isolated and vulnerable youth she became involved in a gang. At age 14 she moved to Las Vegas, Nevada. She began working in the sex trade to support herself.

Georgina moved frequently, living in Las Vegas, Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Mission, and finally, Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. She also spent time in prison. In prison, Georgina was very involved in the Native Sisterhood and actively encouraged other Native women to get involved as well. She participated in sweats, learned traditional teachings, songs and beadwork. After leaving the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women in 1996, Georgina became involved with the BC Friendship Centre, reclaiming more of her culture as a Cree woman. Georgina and

her siblings have all lost their language but Georgina knew some songs and knew how to dance. She loved to make traditional outfits, as well as dreamcatchers and moccasins.

Georgina was the mother of seven beautiful children. Her first daughter, Kristina, was born in Las Vegas. Her second daughter, Leslie Ann, was born in Edmonton. Stuart, Dylan Sky and Autumn Wind were born in BC, as were her twins, Winter Star and Little Storm. Georgina loved her children deeply but she struggled to find her place in the world. More than anything she wanted her children to have the opportunities and chances she did not. Having escaped to the streets at 12 years old she had only a grade six education and most of her teenage years were spent on the fast-paced streets of Las Vegas. Georgina carried the trauma of being removed from her home as an infant, of growing up in foster care, group homes and the streets, of missing her family and community. She carried the pain of addiction, prostitution and violence and of losing her eldest sister Debbie, who passed away suddenly in 1988. But it was losing her children that hurt Georgina the most. When she lost her children, she lost a piece of herself. “But she never gave up on them,” say her sisters. “She would have picked herself up again and got her children back.” Unfortunately, she never got the chance. In March 1999, Georgina disappeared from the Downtown Eastside and her younger sister Bonnie reported her missing to the Vancouver Police Department later that year.

Three years later, in July 2002, Georgina’s remains were found on Robert Pickton’s Port Coquitlam farm. Georgina was 34 years old at the time of her disappearance. She was the mother of seven children, a cherished sister and friend. Georgina was a joyful woman who could play guitar and sing. She was a woman who carried herself with humour, pride and tremendous inner strength. Her favourite colour was red and she loved to make bannock. She was a ball of fire with a heart of gold. She made people feel safe. These are the things friends and family members remember about Georgina.

Robert Pickton would eventually be convicted of six counts of second-degree murder, including the murder of Georgina Papin (see Update on page 49). Three of Georgina’s sisters, Cynthia, Elana and Bonnie, were present for much of the trial and prayed together before entering the courtroom. They thought about their surviving brothers and sisters who were not able to be there, but who were with them in spirit. They tried as best they could to prepare themselves but how, they ask, can you truly prepare yourself for something as horrifying as the Pickton trial? The horror of the trial, of learning how their sister suffered, was compounded by a lack of emotional and financial supports. As Georgina’s siblings they felt they had the right to observe the entire trial, but without financial support they simply could not afford to stay. The trial lasted for more than ten months, and safe and affordable accommodation was virtually impossible to find. They spent over \$300 in taxi fare trying to find somewhere to stay in Vancouver. Georgina’s sisters say they have received little substantive support from their extended families or communities and none from their respective bands. Cynthia says she was told outright that because she was “Bill C-31” she was not entitled to band assistance. They believe there needs to be more support for the families of missing and murdered women, particularly financial resources and access to counselling. However, after everything they have gone through they say it can be hard to know who to trust.

Georgina's sisters were interviewed by the media before and during the trial. They were treated with respect by journalists during interviews, but were disgusted by the way Georgina and the other missing and murdered women from the Downtown Eastside were portrayed in the media. When they approached the media about their concerns, they were told "this is how we sell newspapers and make the news." After that, some of Georgina's siblings stopped talking to the media all together. In addition to hurtful and sensationalized reporting, the families of the missing and murdered women have had to endure cruel "jokes" in the media like, "I'll have eggs with a side of dead hooker." Also devastating was the 2002 PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) anti-meat campaign that appeared to exploit the murders of the women from the Downtown Eastside. Georgina's family had to learn not to take the stories personally, but the comments still hurt. They simply cannot comprehend how anyone could be so cold-hearted, so malicious. "I wouldn't want to be remembered like that," they say.

Some of Georgina's siblings have experienced nightmares; others say they simply do not know how to begin to deal with what happened to their sister, let alone move past it. Their anger is palpable, not only towards Robert Pickton but towards those who should have known, and perhaps did know, what was going on at Pickton's farm. They do not believe justice has occurred. Georgina's sisters believe that other people were involved in the murders, or at the very least knew what was happening on the Pickton farm and these people have not been punished. The first trial is over, but Georgina's siblings do not feel as though there has been justice for their sister or for any of the murdered and missing women. Georgina's family is also angry at the Vancouver Police Department. They have so many questions, *but mainly*: why did police not respond sooner to the reports of missing women?

In October 2002, Georgina's siblings held a memorial and feast for their sister on the Enoch First Nation. It was an emotional occasion, but also a reunion. Georgina's eldest daughter traveled from Las Vegas to attend the memorial and one of her younger brothers came from New York State. Georgina's sisters say that after decades of separation, the siblings are more connected than they have ever been. It has been a long and difficult journey. Separated by distance and circumstance, Georgina's brothers and sisters do their best to care for each another. They point out, however, that it is hard to support one another when they are all going through the same trauma. Still they are fiercely loyal and after being separated as children are grateful to have found each other. Bonnie remembers vividly the day Georgina contacted her. She was 12 years old, living in British Columbia. "Georgina let me know that she was my sister and told me that we had other brothers and sisters in Edmonton. I remember Georgina's voice like she was here and it was so warm and friendly," says Bonnie. "She made me feel loved and that I belonged somewhere. It was the best feeling ever."

Georgina's siblings say they feel robbed. They did not get to spend enough time with their sister. There were so many things left to share. They miss their sister. They miss her smile and her energy. And more than anything, they want us to know Georgina for who she truly was: mother to seven children, a beloved sister, an aunt, a niece and a dear friend to many. They will always love you, Georgina.

This story is based on interviews with some of Georgina's siblings. They encourage other family members to share their stories as well.

Update:

In January 2008, the Crown filed an appeal arguing that the trial judge erred in splitting Pickton's 26 first-degree murder charges into two trials. The defense also filed an appeal, alleging errors by the trial judge. The appeal began in March 2009. BC's Attorney General has said that if the defense loses its appeal and the convictions stand, the Crown will not proceed with the remaining 20 first-degree murder charges Pickton currently faces.