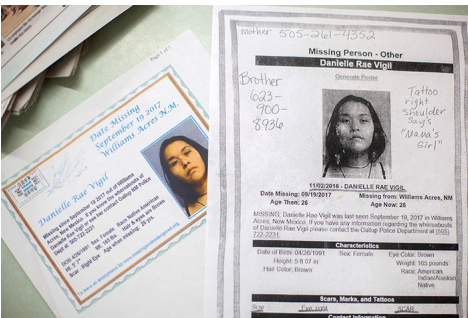


Church sex abuse victim's search for missing daughter continues

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 17 August 2018 05:36



She disappeared last year

The children of Nery Contreras face a life without both a mother and father. And this rapid change occurred in their lives within a matter of months in 2017.

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Contreras, 30, functioned as the sole parent of his two children, Roselyn, 6, and Armando, 2, after their mother disappeared last September. He currently awaits his fate in a jail cell, facing deportation, after being arrested for his second DWI in November.

And it's unclear what the future holds for their mother, Danielle Rae Vigil, 27, who has been missing for nearly a year. But, there's hope. Vigil was sighted in Las Vegas, NV, and according to her mom Prudence Jones, her fingerprints were discovered by a Las Vegas detective, and there's sightings to prove that she's in Sin City.

Information on Vigil was first relayed during a *Gallup Sun* interview with Contreras's mother, Elvira Amador, on July 10. Amador said that Vigil's disappearance, and Contreras being the only parent to the children, was one of the facts they would present in the case to allow him to remain in the United States when he goes before a judge later this month.

"[We have to] send them letters about this, [telling them to] let him stay in USA for his children," Amador said during that interview.

Jones contacted the *Gallup Sun* after she read about Amador's plight, to share more information about her daughter's case. She said her daughter was taken off the New Mexico missing persons list in June, since Vigil was spotted in the north side area of Las Vegas.

To that end, Jones has been spending the past several weekends traveling to Las Vegas, tacking up fliers around town, and asking residents if they know anything about Vigil's whereabouts.

Jones said she hopes by sharing her story, people will better understand her plight. Her grandchildren could lose both of their parents.

"My heart is with my grandkids right now – I named them," Jones said, during a phone interview Aug. 13.

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Jones's namesake may sound familiar to people in the Gallup area. In 2016, she came forward with her story about the sexual abuse she suffered in her youth at the hands of Franciscan Brother Mark Schornack, OFM.

The case against the church, the Diocese of Gallup in particular, dominated several years of Jones's life, which she said took a toll on both her and her family. But through it all, Vigil was a constant source of strength.

"She picked me up when I couldn't go on with it," Jones said in an interview Aug.14. "She always gave me hope."

The talks for mediation in the case began in early 2015, which was also when Vigil's father passed away. Jones noted that's when she started to see a change in her daughter.

Jones also said she ended up in the University of New Mexico Hospital in Albuquerque in February 2015, a result of the mounting stress from the court case and her family's personal struggles.

The first mediations began in May 2015, but those negotiations fell through. Jones said the outcome was disappointing, and it was made more difficult to accept because it happened at the time when Vigil started getting in to trouble with the law.

"It never occurred to me she was being affected," Jones said.

The second round of negotiations began in December 2015. While further progress was made, those talks also came to a halt. The emotional toll on Jones continued to grow.

"The secrets were tearing me apart, the depths of deception in the church," Jones said.

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In 2016, Jones said the stress had mounted to the extent that she had a nervous breakdown. She left to stay in Denver, Colo. while her daughter remained in Gallup with Contreras and their young children.

Jones spent the latter half of 2016 doing everything she could to try and save herself and her family from the emotional toll brought on by the case. This culminated in Jones going public with her accounts, including appearing on the Santa Fe public radio series "Dark Canyon," which investigates sexual abuse committed by clergy in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, and it explains how these accounts are kept secret.

Despite her history with the church, Jones said she considers herself a forgiving person.

"I'm not gonna blame the church, but I made them aware of the effects on the family," Jones said. "Everything I've done in that case was for my family."

Despite the settlement funds dispersed to abuse victims, including Jones, she said the fallout from the case affected her entire family.

"I felt ostracized from my community," Jones said. "Once people find out my name, they treat me differently."

Jones left Gallup in September 2017 to start a new life in Phoenix. But life took a sudden and tragic turn, when on Sept. 19, Vigil was officially marked missing out of Williams Acres, N.M.

"Danielle left Gallup on foot; when she was last seen in Gallup, all she had were the clothes on her back. Her important papers like identification were left with Nery," she said.

Meanwhile, Amador, the mother who's caring for the tragic couple's children in Gallup, feels the publicity about Vigil's disappearance could hurt, more than help because of Jones's involvement in the high-profile priest sex abuse case.

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"You need to be careful doing these things," Amador said.

But, Amador shares Jones's sentiment of continuing to do everything in their power for the sake of their families.

"We're fighting for the kids. I don't want them to be in foster care," Amador said. "No one else in Danielle's family shows up to fight for them."

Jones said she will do everything in her ability, including taking continual trips to Las Vegas, until her daughter comes home.

"Until everything is gone, I'm going to fight for my daughters and my grandchildren," Jones said. "I saved myself, it's up to me to save my children and grandchildren."

By Cody Begaye
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