

CASEFILE PRESENTS

MISSING  
NIAMH

When 18-year-old Niamh Maye went missing in 2002, her family did everything they could to help the police find her. But, like so many missing persons cases, there comes a time when the leads dry up and there's nowhere left to look. Researching what was to be a single episode, the Casefile host found so many intriguing elements, he took four years to make this incredible series.

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## Q&amp;A with Anonymous Host

*Host of Missing Niamh*

What was it about Niamh's case that initially sparked your interest and made you feel so personally connected to it?

It might have been because we were the same age, finished high school the same year, and both wanted to take a gap year after school. We even shared similar tastes in music. Ultimately, Niamh was an 18-year-old exploring life, just like I was—but something pulled her under. I realised that what happened to Niamh could have happened to anyone, the rest of us just got lucky.



It really hit me that Niamh never got the chance to realize her potential. Even as I worked on other *Casefile* projects, I carried Niamh's story with me at all times. And as I learned more about what happened to her and the way things unfolded, I became even more driven to tell her story.

You mentioned taking four years to create this series. Can you talk about the process of turning what was originally intended as a single episode into a 12-part series? What led you to that decision?

I was first introduced to Niamh's sister, Fionnuala, in January 2020 through Loren O'Keeffe, with whom I'd collaborated on several *Casefile Presents* series like *What's Missing* and *Matty*. Loren's work with *The Missed Foundation* (Previously known as *Missing Persons Advocacy Network*) has been exceptional in raising awareness for missing persons and supporting their families.

Fionnuala had been listening to true crime podcasts and recognized their potential to create awareness. She wondered if telling Niamh's story in podcast form could help generate attention. She reached out to Loren who connected the two of us. I still remember

exactly where I was during my first conversation with Fionnuala. By the end of it, I agreed that we could do a *Casefile* episode on Niamh's case.

At first, there wasn't much information available online about Niamh's case beyond the bare basics. My initial step was to meet with Fionnuala for an in-depth interview. We spoke for about three hours, and I recorded and transcribed the conversation. It's much easier to work with text than hours of audio, and parts of that very first interview are featured in the series.



From there, I knew I needed to speak with Niamh's brother, Kieron, her friends who were in Batlow with her—Brodie, Jess, and Lisa—and her parents, Brian and Anne. I took the same approach, transcribing all of those interviews, and gradually, the bigger picture began to emerge.

Over the years, I made six trips to Batlow and surrounding areas like Tumut, Tumbarumba, and Jingellic. At some point, the decision to turn this into a series rather than a single episode became clear. The more people I spoke to, the more information surfaced. After each interview, I'd come away with new names and leads to follow up.

The people of Batlow were incredible. Even those who hadn't lived there at the time knew exactly what I was talking about when I mentioned Niamh's case. They were so welcoming and eager to help, offering cups of tea, sharing contacts, and even passing on phone numbers. That small-town hospitality made the process smoother than I could have imagined.

The real turning point came when I gained access to the full coronial brief that the police had compiled for the coroner. It was over 2,200 pages of statements, police correspondence, notes and documents - a huge amount of information. I spent a lot of time combing through every page, mapping out timelines, and connecting dots. I also visited the Tumut library to sift through old archives of the Tumut and Adelong Times to compare media reporting with the brief. It was an intense but rewarding process.

About two years ago, we made an unusually early announcement about the series, hoping to appeal for more witnesses or anyone with further information to come forward. That decision paid off. Two key individuals, who I had been struggling to contact, turned out to be *Casefile* listeners. They heard the announcement, reached out, and kindly agreed to talk to me, which was a huge breakthrough.

So, what began as a single episode evolved into a 12-part series, thanks to the depth of information and the willingness of family, friends, former investigators and witnesses to help and speak on the record. The more I uncovered, the more the story demanded to be told in full.

**What was the most difficult part of investigating Niamh's story, either emotionally or logistically?**

There were definitely logistical challenges. As I mentioned earlier, finding two key individuals required a public announcement on *Casefile*. Tracking people down was difficult at times. While most were incredibly helpful, there were a few instances where people were resistant or hesitant to talk.

There was an emotional toll too. You can't spend years immersed in a case like this without it affecting you in some way, but what I felt is insignificant compared to what Niamh's family and friends have endured. The moment that hit hardest for me was after the unsuccessful search, which is detailed in episode 11 of the series. That left me with an overwhelming sense of emptiness that's hard to put into words.





Were there any unexpected discoveries or new information that emerged while creating the series that shifted your understanding of the case?

One of the most unexpected revelations for me was understanding how the Gocup Road hitchhiking theory became such a dominant narrative in the media. At the time, there were newspaper headlines and television reports stating that Niamh was 'confirmed' to have last been seen hitchhiking on Gocup Road. But as I dug deeper into the witness statements that led to this so-called confirmation, I found it hard to comprehend how such a definitive conclusion was reached.

The truth is, we still don't know what happened, as Niamh has yet to be found. We need to remain open to all possibilities, and I'm willing to listen to any theory. However, the early stance that Niamh was 'confirmed' to be hitchhiking was, in my opinion, unfortunate. Throughout the series, I explore in detail how this theory gained so much weight and why I believe too much emphasis was placed on one particular sighting.

How did you balance the emotional weight of Niamh's story with the need for objective, fact-based reporting in creating *Missing Niamh*?

It's incredibly challenging to maintain objectivity when you're so deeply invested in a story, but the key is to stay focused and let the facts lead the way. From the beginning, my approach with *Casefile* has always been to "let the facts tell the story," and I followed that principle with *Missing Niamh*. While I inevitably brought some of my own perspective to the process, I did my best to remain as objective as possible.

I approached the case with an open mind, willing to consider all possibilities. But as the investigation unfolded, the weight of evidence pointing to one particular individual became undeniable. It's important to note that while this doesn't definitively prove anything, it did narrow the focus of the series. Any alternative theories that arose ultimately held no weight compared to what was detailed in the series.



How did your perspective on missing persons cases evolve throughout the four years of working on this series?

Having worked with Loren O'Keeffe on the *Casefile Presents* series *Matty* and *What's Missing*, I had already heard many first-hand accounts of the unique pain that comes with ambiguous loss—the grief experienced by families of missing persons. Unlike other forms of bereavement, where death provides some form of closure, the uncertainty surrounding a missing person keeps families in a painful state of limbo, constantly fluctuating between hope and despair. It's an especially cruel form of loss because there's no definitive answer—families don't know whether to grieve or continue holding onto hope. Years can be spent clinging to fragments of information, only for new discoveries to shatter any tentative acceptance they've built.

As Fionnuala says in *Missing Niamh*:

*"When people talk about the grieving process for a missing person being so different from other types of bereavement, they're not kidding. It's an absolute roller coaster. You just don't know. Then you think you know, you start moving forward, and suddenly something new comes up, and it throws everything off. You're constantly having to rethink, and it brings all the emotions back up again."*

Working on *Missing Niamh* only reinforced how profound and ongoing these difficulties are. While I could never understand what it's like to experience this kind of loss, the emotional challenges that families face were evident every step of the way.

**What do you hope listeners take away from Missing Niamh, both in terms of her case and the larger issue of missing persons cases?**

I hope listeners understand that a missing person is so much more than a set of vital statistics, like their height, age, and what they were wearing the day they went missing. Niamh was a beloved daughter, sister, cousin, aunt, and friend. She had a profound impact on the lives of those who knew her. It's important to remember that behind every missing person's case is a network of people left to grapple with the torment of ambiguous loss. These cases are lived experiences for countless families who face a roller coaster of emotions as they search for answers.



Ultimately, the hope is to find that missing piece of information that could lead to some form of resolution. I hope the series reignites conversations, particularly in areas between Jingellic, Tumberumba, and the surrounding region. I've heard that it's already sparking local discussion again. Even people who spend time in the bush or forests for leisure or work, who weren't there at the time or may not have even been born then, might gain renewed interest in the case. Perhaps the podcast will reach someone who was in the area back in 2002, someone who holds that crucial piece of information we've been missing. There were many international backpackers and fruit pickers in Batlow during that time, and you never know what someone might know.

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