

## **Reflections on the Closure of KP and RTC**

### *A Former Indigenous Prisoner Who Was Apprehended and Taken Away From Their Family by the 'Child Welfare' System*

Excerpt from "The 'Prison [Tourism] Fix': Carceral Habitus and Retasking in Kingston, Ontario" authored by Jarrod Shook, Justin Piché and Kevin Walby | published in *Canadian Prisons: Understanding the Correctional Landscape* edited by Carla Cesaroni (Oxford University Press, 2020).

In 1987, I was placed in Millhaven Maximum Institution. During the two years that I served there I went into a really dark place after being locked up all the time. I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. A mixture of depression and anger overtook me, and I decided to "string up" [die by suicide]. I tied bed sheets together and did the deed only to be cut down by a correctional officer (CO) who happened to be doing rounds. I was sent to the local hospital, where I went into a coma and suffered brain damage. After one week in the hospital, I was transferred to the Regional Treatment Centre (RTC) on the grounds of Kingston Penitentiary (KP).

Upon my arrival, I experienced zero compassion. It was like being held in a dungeon. I was at RTC for one month and underwent analysis by a psychiatrist. Much of the time I spent at RTC I was forced to wear a baby doll [a type of medical dress one would be put into for an examination or operation] and only had a mattress in my cell. The psychologist would visit me with his chair placed out front of the cell. I was careful about being too open with him for fear of the consequences of being honest. Each day I received one shower. I was led to and from the shower in handcuffs. There was no fresh air on the range and constant screaming. It wasn't a treatment setting, despite its name.

I was finally sent back to Millhaven and received a transfer to Joyceville where I ended up applying for parole, which was denied because of my suicide attempt. I'm an Indigenous man and, while at RTC, I requested to see an Elder and was refused. Treatment at RTC didn't exist. After my time at RTC, I was stigmatized and marginalized. Years later, I studied criminology at Carleton University where I came across numerous articles about assimilation and found out that the penitentiary sat on a "federal reserve." KP and RTC was simply another federal reserve where First Nations' peoples and others were displaced. While I was incarcerated I knew why I was so angry, but I didn't understand what was happening. I now know what I was experiencing was systemic racism.

The hellhole that KP and RTC represented were due for closure. KP needed to close because it maimed the incarcerated, their loved ones, the community and even those who worked there. When I think of KP and RTC, all I think about are the deaths by suicide. The tours that they offer there now only offer a one-sided narrative, involving ex-CO's giving the tour and glorifying punishment. No one ever talks about the 19-year-old kid who sat in that shit hole and took his own life. We don't hear those stories. Some people refer to Canadian prisons as the "new residential schools". There's nothing new about this. It's been going on for quite some time. Just like the early days when they cut your hair, took your name, and assigned you a number. It's all the same.

I think they ought to tear the fucking thing down. It's just like any other colonial structure, statue, or building to me. If they do anything with it, they ought to honour the prisoners who lost their lives there, not make it into a prison tourism site. How about in the spirit of reconciliation they make it a memorial site for Indigenous people and others who lost their lives?