

## *from my yt mama*

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### **how my yt settler mama met my Chinese immigrant dad**

there are different versions of how. I remember my dad telling an exciting story of breaking out of Matsqui Penitentiary in BC: scaling the chain-link fence and throwing a jacket over the razor wire at the top so he wouldn't cut himself as he went over it, hiding out through the night in an itchy haystack in a farmer's field adjacent to the pen, before running to Medicine Hat, Alberta to seek sanctuary with his stepdad, the only grandpa I ever knew. grandpa Tai ran an antique store right across the street from the Canadian Pacific Railway station and lived in the basement. mom says dad and other prisoners were getting day passes to go pick strawberries in the many berry fields now occupying unceded Matsqui territory in the Fraser Valley and there was a rumour that these work permits that granted little bits of freedom would be stopped so he ran away while on one. but both stories begin with dad leaving the prison when he wasn't supposed to and end with dad running to Medicine Hat to hide out at grandpa's. Medicine Hat, where my mom lived her whole life up to that point. they met at a party

## race according to my yt mama/1

when I first heard Cher's hit song "half-breed" on the radio  
I asked my mom what that was and she said that's you  
she was a big fan of 60s/70s Cher who according to my mother  
was always glamorous and cool and never  
wore the same pair of bell-bottoms twice so  
I don't think mom understood that I would  
internalize the lyrics of the chorus when trying  
to place myself in the prairies of southern Alberta  
where the only people who look like me  
were what racist yt people called halfbreeds:  
the Métis, and the mixee children of  
destatused Indigenous mamas and yt dads

## the places we come from/0

I was born in a place now known as the City of Medicine Hat

according to Wikipedia:

*The name "Medicine Hat" is the English translation of "Saamis," the Blackfoot word for the eagle tail feather headdress worn by medicine men. According to Wikipedia, in 1883, when the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) reached Medicine Hat and crossed the South Saskatchewan River, a townsite was established. As the west developed, Medicine Hat became instrumental as a CPR divisional point, as it is the halfway point between Vancouver and Winnipeg.*

how, do you think, does a direction develop?

how, do you think, does English have such obfuscating power?

## yt prairie mamas and five generations of Ellens

my yt great-grandmother Ellen  
migrated from Sweden to the “new world” at 17

my yt grandma’s middle name is Eleonora

my yt mama’s middle name is Ellen

me, her mixee daughter’s middle name is Ellen

her mixee granddaughter’s middle name is Ellen

I wonder if the latest Ellen will have kids and if

she has a girl will she choose to carry on the tradition

## the places we come from/1

a branch of kisiskāiwani-sīpiy (the Saskatchewan River) flows through Treaty 7 Territory, the last of the Numbered Treaties to be negotiated, signed in 1877. Treaty 7 includes the cities of Medicine Hat, Calgary, Lethbridge, Red Deer, and several small towns and villages

kisiskāiwani-sīpiy flows through the centre of Medicine Hat, which was established as a town site once the CPR built a bridge across the river

part of the Cypress Hills is in Treaty 7 Territory and traverses the border between the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan into Treaty 4 Territory

traverses borders like me  
traverses borders like my yt mama did  
when she loved my not-yt dad  
and didn't give a fuck  
what anyone in our shitty prairie town thought  
about their love  
that produced me

according to Gershaw, that is, according to the yt man's Truth, the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) was formed in response to the Cypress Hills Massacre. Calls for a police force to protect yt settlers in what was then called the North-West Territories, and to protect the Canadian border from American whiskey traders because these *heartless traders robbed and debauched* the Indigenous Peoples, had already been sent to the nation state's capitol. then the massacre occurred: American traders *seeking revenge* for allegedly stolen horses *ambushed a peaceful camp of* Indigenous Peoples, slaughtering thirty of them. so a decision was made and a call was made and some 300 *brave boys began an adventure west* and became the NWMP

sun dances, *with all their savage cruelty*, were held in the Cypress Hills until outlawed by the yt man

## the places we come from/2

Drumheller is located in the Red Deer River Valley. wāwaskesiw-sīpiy (the Red Deer River) meets with both the northern and southern arms of the Saskatchewan River to empty into Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba connecting the prairie provinces through moving water

Drumheller Institution was built in 1967  
to celebrate Canada's centennial, do you think?

as a kid I have been to Drumheller countless times to visit my dad in the pen but have never been to the Royal Tyrrell Museum and even now at the mention of visiting the museum  
my inner child swims rapidly to the surface  
crying seething resentful

seeing my dad in this place this place that was the only place where I saw large groups of people of colour made ever-more fervent the desire to look like my blue-eyed fair-skinned mother

## rideshare

my mom used to give rides to women whose men were inside men who when they found out that mom was driving from Medicine Hat to one of the prisons around Southern Alberta asked my dad if my mom could help them out

one girl when we went to McDonald's for lunch only bought a large orange pop but no food for her and her 2-year old son so my mom bought them lunch

my mom was giving rides since before I can remember

if you understood how hard the prison industrial complex works to isolate prisoners from their blood and chosen fams you would understand how important this labour of my mother's was



## strip search

one time at Drumheller pen the male guards wanted to strip search the women and the children before a visit. which I'm pretty fucking sure is illegal but the yt man says what is illegal and what isn't. I don't remember any male visitors though there could have been. my mom refused to let these yt men touch her or her children and it helped the other mothers to refuse too

## she tore a strip off him

maybe she could refuse the guards because when she was a child  
a yt man hurt her  
so when the yt man said I am going to invade  
the bodies of you and your children she said  
never again, motherfucker

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