

TATTOO

Tattoos & piercings – for some they are self-expression, for others distracting and potentially dangerous

"Mom, I'm home!"

The door swings open and there he is. Eighteen, handsome, and wearing that same silly grin. Nothing has changed. He's still the same boy you toted to college six months ago, just a bit sleep deprived. He plops his luggage to the floor and tosses his laundry bag in the utility room. "Well?" he says.

"Well! How was the drive? How were final exams? How is Meredith?" You can't seem to control all the questions until –

"You like it?" He interrupts with his finger pointing to his ear.

Your jaw drops. Someone found the reigns to your mouth because now you can't utter a word.

"Well?"

Maybe this is a dream. Maybe you need to get your eyes checked. Maybe this isn't your son!

"And that's not all. Check this out!"

He pulls up his sleeve and his arm reveals a black dragon staring at you threatening to spit fire. Your son's newfound independence has resulted in a pierced ear and a tattoo.

When they're newborns, surprises are cute, even forgivable. When they're in elementary school, surprises are learning lessons, sometimes forgivable. But when they're 18, surprises become permanent, lifelong decisions. Forgivable? Depends on who you ask.

Some parents condone tattoos and piercings; others accept them. No doubt, body art is becoming more popular in a society that promotes "self."

"Self-expression may be the main reason people get tattoos and piercings," said Billy Jack Gunter, owner of Artistic Encounters Tattoo (AE Tattoo). "Or they may be going through a midlife crisis – some people buy Corvettes; some people buy bleached hair; some people buy ink!" he laughed.

AE Tattoo employee, Mikie Hansen, 23, gives his list of reasons people get tattoos and piercings: "Special moments. Memories. Fun. Pain."

"Loss of a loved one," added Gunter.

Gunter is a 6-foot-2, 28-year-old who fashions a lebrex in his chin, two eyebrow piercings, and stretched out ears (overly large piercings.) Gunter's stretched out ears are about a half-inch wide, which he said took about three and a half years to stretch.

Plano Profile photos



Billy Jack Gunter, owner of Artistic Encounters, received his first tattoo when he was a 14-year-old "punk skater."

"You can take anything and transform it into a tattoo from a painting or a portrait."

The tattooist was a "skater punk" who wanted to follow the crowd when he received his first tattoo at 14 years old. Now, as a professional artist, he has earned 13 trophies from tattoo conventions and has been quoted in seven magazines, eight counting the *Profile*.

Gunter opened AE Tattoo off President George Bush Turnpike and Rosemeade Parkway four months ago, but this is his fifth year in the business as he has three studios in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Gunter's staff includes Hansen, as well as Tony Byrne, Wes Middleton, and Mike Smith. All are custom tattooists and painters. In fact, Smith's artwork adorns AE Tattoo's walls and are for sale ranging from \$50 - \$300.

"This studio is for the serious crowd, not your springbreak crowd," said Gunter. "You can tell by walking in. I opened a studio in North Dallas to reach an upscale crowd. There is no smoking inside, no drinking or food. We have a clean and healthy environment," he said.

The environment reflects AE Tattoo's work. "Everything we have here is brand new and we use autoclaves, what they use in hospitals, to sterilize everything. We also use barrier film on all of our equipment," said Gunter.

The minimum price for a tattoo is \$50 at AE Tattoo, but a sleeve or back piece can range from \$1,000 - \$3,000. A sitting can take anywhere from 15 - 30 minutes for the smallest tattoo or 6 - 10 hours for larger ones.

What is the most popular tattoo? "Stars," answered Gunter, "especially in Texas because we're the Lone Star State," he smiles. "Tattoos have come so far. You can take anything and transform it into a tattoo from a painting or a portrait. There are no limits." Unless you are under 18.

According to the Texas Department of State Health Services (Title 25 Texas Administrative Code, 229.406), "a client must be a minimum of 18 years of age and shall present at the time of tattooing or body piercing a valid, government issued, positive identification card including, but not limited to, a driver's license, passport, or military identification."

For body piercings, a person must also be at least 18 unless he or she has parental consent. "The consent can be satisfied by: 1) completion of client and parental approval records that include a written and notarized consent by the individual's parent, managing conservator, or guardian or 2) the individual's parent, managing conservator, or guardian being physically present at the time the body piercing is being performed," according to the state law.

Tattoo studios and body piercing salons are also required to inform their clients of risks such as HIV, hepatitis B and C, as well as possible allergic reactions to dyes or metals, and the possibility of pain, scarring, bleeding, swelling, and nerve damage.

What about the risk of unemployment? Some companies may not hire a person who has a tattoo or body piercing.

"We have a professional dress code," said an EDS spokesperson. "The spirit and intent of EDS' policy is to present a professional image to our clients."

What does "professional" mean?

"We rely on the good judgment and professionalism of our employees," the spokesperson said. "EDS does business in 60 countries. Our appearance policy de-

pends on the culture and customs of the countries where we do business."

Daphne Avila, a spokesperson for JCPenney, said, "JCPenney does not have a concrete policy in place that limits the appearance of tattoos and piercings. JCPenney encourages every associate to maintain their individuality while adhering to the professional requirements of the position."

Some people may hide their tattoos or remove their body piercings while on the job. This might be easy for males who usually get tattoos on the arm, or sleeve.

But for females, the lower back seems to be the most popular place, according to Gunter ... which brings up another issue. What if a woman is pregnant or plans on getting pregnant and has a tattoo on her lower back?

"If a woman gets a tattoo on her lower back, she can not get an epidural," said Gunter. "I tell everybody that. If any ink gets into the spine, that could cause an infection."

Dr. Charles Wallace of A New Reflection Cosmetic Surgery Centre agrees. "It's a potential concern because of the infections that might be introduced. A severe infection during the course of an epidural is a catastrophic complication that you don't want," he said.

Texas law further states that a person *under* the age of 18 may be tattooed "with the consent of a minor's parent or guardian, who determines it to be in the best interest of the minor *to cover an existing tattoo*," that is, a tattoo that is obscene, drug- or gang-related.

Wallace performs tattoo removals and said it is painful to get one removed, but that "it varies with its location." Plus, it may not be a one-time procedure. The number of treatments depends on whether the tattoo is removed surgically or by laser. Of course, the more treatments, the more expensive the ordeal.



"It's typically 10 or 20 times more expensive to get a tattoo removed than to get one put on."

Did you know?

"Tattoos are applied using a small electric device which operates similar to a sewing machine. One to fourteen needles are grouped together and attached to the end of a rod called a needle bar. The other end of the needle bar is attached to the tattoo machine. The needle bar moves up and down through a tube or barrel which serves two purposes – to keep the needle bar from moving side to side and as a handle for the tattooist to grip the machine. The needles stick out only a few millimeters from the end of the tube, so they don't go very deep into the skin. As the machine is guided over the skin, the needle bar moves up and down allowing the needles to puncture the skin, depositing the ink. A tattoo machine can puncture the skin 50 to 3,000 times per minute."

Taken from www.everytattoo.com

"[Tattoo removal] may take eight or 10 treatments and cost a minimum of \$1,000," said Wallace. "It's typically 10 or 20 times more expensive to get a tattoo removed than to get one put on."

Wallace also explained that after a tattoo is removed, some discoloration of the skin, inflammation and itching may occur. "It might be treated with antibiotics or cortisone ointments," he said,

warning that there will "still be a scar or some sort of coloration" on the skin. "The best way to manage it is to not have a tattoo to begin with."

For more information on Dr. Wallace and A New Reflection Cosmetic Surgery Centre, visit www.drwallace.com. Artistic Encounters Tattoo's Web site is www.aetattoo.com.



Tattoo artist Mikie Hansen says his customers have different reasons for getting a tattoo.

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