

# Harmless inking excursion leaves lasting impression as undetectable, permanent art



*New needles, free touch-ups dub Ray as favorite tattooist*

**9 September 1992  
11:34 p.m.**

I'm not sure how it happened. It was an innocuous-sounding question, almost rhetorical. But I should have known he was serious before I raised my hand and said I would do it.

By "it," I mean get a tattoo — permanent body art.

Permanent. That means forever, right? And now as my chosen fate approaches, am I having second thoughts? Well, no, not really. I'm just taking the time to allow the impact to wash over me.

Everyone I've talked to has given me advice on who to have do my tattoo. The majority have said I should go to Ray's Tattooing.

He does good work and does free touch-ups, they said.

I was talking to Danny earlier tonight. He has a tattoo of a heart and dagger with the word "Mom" inscribed on his right bicep.

He was giving me all kinds of advice. Until then, I hadn't considered one thing that should have been obvious: It's going to hurt.

"The outline is the worst part," Danny said.

"And if you start to feel like you're going to pass out, tell him to stop. Don't think it won't happen to you. I've seen 90-pound girls and 200-pound men pass out. So if you start to feel dizzy, stop for a few minutes and take a drink of water."

Great. I'm not a wimp. I think I have a high-pain threshold. But just how bad is it going to be?

His other advice included keeping the tattoo moist with bacitracin or Neosporin for a couple of weeks after the deed and not

becoming alarmed when the tattoo peels. "And make sure he puts the transfer exactly where you want it," Danny said. "It's going to be there forever."

Forever. That's one heck of a long time. Luckily for me, I already knew what and where I wanted my tattoo when Mark offered me money to get one (in exchange for writing this and allowing him to use photos of the event).

The artwork I chose is a (Egyptian, I think) symbol that stands for brotherhood. Well, that sounds noble, doesn't it?

But my other reason for choosing the symbol is because my favorite band, Dan Reed Network, has used it on their last two albums. I love DRN's music (it really rocks), and I love the messages in their music. What better way to pay tribute than to have something so obviously special to them emblazoned upon my hip?

I chose the piece of skin directly below the protrusion of my right pelvic bone because my parents aren't going to see it there. And neither will anyone else unless I want them to. Sure, I may be 22 years old, but I still refuse to face the disapproval of my conservative parents.

**10 September 1992  
8:12 p.m.**

Michelle and I have just arrived at the home and studio of Ray Soto, tattoo artist extraordinaire. He's just finishing up a segment of a huge piece of unfinished artwork on the back of Kurt, a multi-tattooed man.

While they are finishing up, I look around at the menagerie of birds, reptiles and plants that ring the basement room. I look at a book of photos of Ray's work. I talk to Michelle and Randee, Ray's wife.



Clockwise from far left: Ray Soto fills in the outline on Shannon's tattoo. Shannon grimaces as Ray draws the outline. Ray works on Shannon's tattoo by the light of a desk lamp. Shannon examines the final results in a mirror.

Photos by Michelle Paulman