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Love Lettering: Ink Your Love?

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Love Tats

True love can be expressed in many fantastic, romantic ways: with sweet red roses, glimmering diamonds, a warm candlelight dinner or a rockin' tattoo of your darling's name scratched across your bicep.

Problem is true love, or what seems like true love, might end after just a few months. That scrolled name on your arm will be there long after you've given back his t-shirts and deleted his number from your cell phone.

In a 2004 study published last year by Dr. Anne E. Laumann of Northwestern University and Dr. Amy J Derick, a telephone survey was administered to 500 people between the ages of 18 and 50.

Of those surveyed, 22 percent of women had tattoos, as did 26 percent of men. The study did not detail what the tattoo depicted. Of the tattooed participants, 17 percent were considering having the tattoo removed.

The study also showed that people with a military affiliation were more likely to have a tattoo, with 37 percent of the military community inked compared to 23 percent of the general population.

Tattoo artists located just outside the gate of Fort Bragg, N. C., say hooah, military tattoos are big, but names of loves are just as popular on men and women.

"In a sense it's romantic," says Samantha Claydon, tattoo artist at Extreme Addiction, located near Fort Bragg. "If I was dating someone I would think it was kind of romantic if they tattooed my name. But then, I wouldn't want them to either. It's a big step."

You want his name where?

Usually, Claydon says she tries to talk her clients out of tattooing their lovers' names.

"Especially if they want it on the neck or something, we try to talk them out of it more, but not many people listen to you," Claydon says. "We get them back in here most of the time to cover it up.

"We had a girl in here not too long ago who had a name written big across her chest and came back three weeks later to have it covered up," she said.

Claydon says part of the drive to have names tattooed may be the fact that names are one of the cheapest designs on the board, starting at \$30.

"I'm not saying they're getting it just because it's cheaper. I guess people think it's going to last forever," Claydon says.

A few clients, she says, have named children after their lost loves to avoid having to cover up or remove the old tattoo. Other clients have been in time and time again to cover up one name and ink a new one.

"It's amazing," Claydon says.

Her advice for love birds?

"Really think about it," she says. "About 90 percent of the time, if you have to get it covered up, it's got to be bigger and we're limited on what we can cover it up with. Most people are not happy about having to do it.

"The other option is tattoo removal, which can be expensive," Claydon says. "I think people should really put a little more thought into it before they do it."

Break ups

Breaking up is hard to do, and expensive if you have a tattoo.

One of the most common reasons clients have tattoos removed, says dermatologist Derick, is because of the tattoo's content.

People tattoo singers' autographs, cartoons they once liked or lover's names, she says. Eventually, many people regret their choices. Years afterwards, or even months or days later, they realize the tattoo is just inappropriate, she says.

"It's one of those things that should cause pause in them to say, 'Do you want this forever?' It's costly to remove."

How costly? So much more than the \$30 it took to put the name there.

The ink that is pounded into the skin with needles during the tattoo process is removed by laser. The energy from the laser basically explodes the pigment under the surface of the skin. Once the pigment is broken into small enough pieces, the body's immune cells will carry the pieces away and dispose of them through the body's natural processes.

Professional tattoo artists who are good at their jobs use beautiful, diverse colors and place the tattoo deep in the skin, techniques that make removal very difficult.

On average, depending on the size, age and number of colors of that tattoo, it takes five to 15 treatments to remove the ink. Removal of small tattoos on average, run \$150 to \$200 a treatment. Large tattoos average \$500 to \$600 a treatment.

And don't kid yourself. Love hurts, but tattoo removal is downright miserable.

"If you aren't numbed, it can be pretty painful," Derick says.

After enough treatments, the ink will usually be gone, though 15 percent of people have a permanent discoloration.

"If they do choose to get it removed, they need to go to someone who is a dermatologist. If they go to someone who isn't, and they use the wrong laser, they will be permanently scarred," Derick says.

So next time you're feeling amorous, Claydon suggests heading to the florist. And if you really want a name tattooed on your body, pick your kids' names or your grandmother or even spell out M-O-M.

"Those really do last forever," she says.

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