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## Tattoo Regret

By Dana Herra - Daily Chronicle



Chronicle illustration SUSAN SPRINGER

A lot of the customers who walk into Cortland tattoo parlor Proton Studio want a tattoo of their significant other's name. But many come back to have the tattoo covered up after the relationship sours.

“They're probably neck and neck,” tattoo artist and co-owner Chris May said of the two types of requests. “Oddly enough, sometimes it seems like there are more who want them covered up.”

In a 2004 survey conducted by the American Academy of Dermatology, 17 percent of respondents with a tattoo had considered having it removed, and 5 percent had already had one covered. Among the most common reasons for covering or removing a tattoo is erasing the name of an ex-flame.

“I had someone last week who had his ex-wife's name and was marrying someone else,” Dr. Amy Derick of Derick Dermatology in Barrington, a member of the AAD, said Friday. “It was time for that to go.”

Dermatologists and plastic surgeons use a specialized laser to erase tattoos, Derick said. The laser blasts the tattoo in short bursts, causing the pigment under the skin to explode. The tiny bits of ink that remain are absorbed by the body's immune system.

Depending on the size and color of the tattoo, it could take about 10 treatments, at an average of \$200 to \$500 a pop, to remove.

Other methods of removal practiced outside doctor's offices include glycolic acid injections and treatments with light, but both carry a much greater risk of the skin scarring than a doctor's laser does, Derick said.

“There's nothing worse than having a cougar originally, then a scar of a cougar after it's been removed,” she said.

Derick also removes a lot of tattoos people got in their teens that don't define them as adults, she said.

"I think people, when they're younger, want to identify with something. But ultimately, when you get older, you don't want to be defined by that content," she said.

Young couples trying to prove their devotion are the most difficult to dissuade from getting each other's names inked on their skin, May said. When customers come in requesting a sweetheart's name tattoo, May tries to talk them out of it but rarely succeeds, he said.

"A lot of the time, the people who get them, you can tell they're in troubled relationships. They're trying to prove something or atone for something," he said. "I tell them, 'I see this all the time,' but they don't listen. You'll get ones who come in just three or four days (after getting the name tattoo) wanting it changed."

If he can't talk the customer out of the tattoo, May said, he sometimes suggests having it done in light blue ink - a color that's easy to cover up or remove.

"I would tell them it looked really nice," May said. "But I was also setting them up for when they came back in to get it covered up."

Just as some colors are easier to cover up than others, some respond better to laser treatment, according to the AAD. Blue, red and green inks can usually be removed, but the best candidates for tattoo removal involve black ink tattooed on light skin.

"The dark pigment in African-American skin, for example, competes with the tattoo color," Derick said. "There's a risk the color of the skin won't be the same brown color as before."

If you and your valentine are set on getting tattoos to show your devotion, it might be best to go with symbols, just to be on the safe side, May suggested. Popular choices for couples are matching tattoos, two halves of a heart or tattoos of a lock and a key, he said.

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