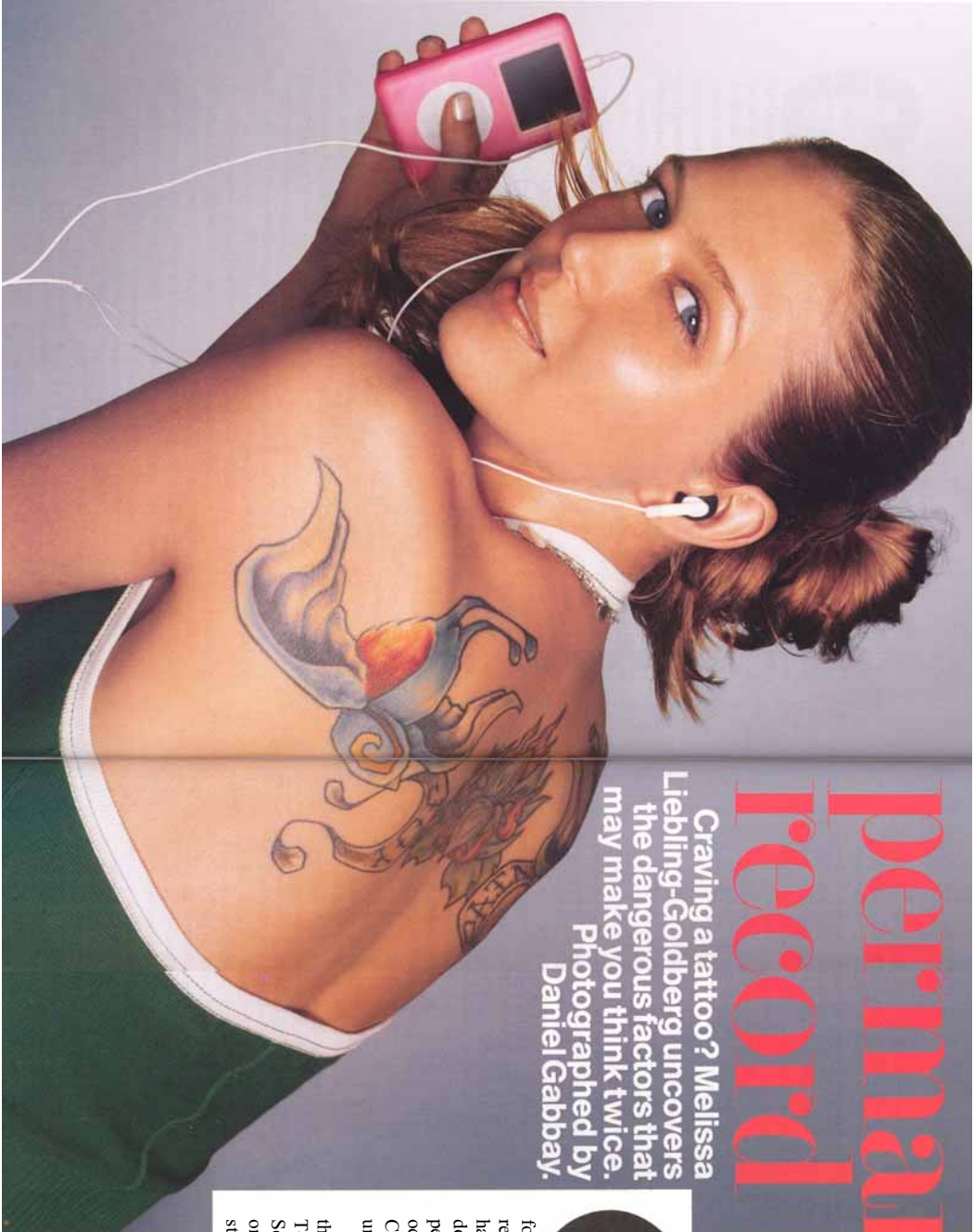


# Permanent Record

Craving a tattoo? Melissa Liebling-Goldberg uncovers the dangerous factors that may make you think twice. Photographed by Daniel Gabbay.

**O**nce reserved for the tough (biker boys) or rebellious (celebrities), tattoos have a new fan base—the girl next door. “You wouldn’t believe the people who get tattoos,” says odia, seventeen, from New York City. “It used to be a taboo, underground thing.”

Now the preppiest girls have them,” according to a study from Texas Tech University Health Sciences School of Nursing, one in five Texan college students has a tattoo, compared to less than one in ten in a 1990 study. “If you ask a Jen today, they’ll say tattoos are normal,” adds Myrna Armstrong, the lead researcher in the Texas Tech study. In fact, they’re regarded as so run-of-the-mill, explains ▶



India, that her friends get them (illegally) as young as fifteen. In most states, the legal age requirement for getting a tattoo is eighteen (a handful of states allow under-eighteens to get tattoos if accompanied by parents), but the impatient (or those that lack permission) often go to questionable tattoo parlors that don't require identification. "No one waits until it's legal," says India. "What's the fun in that?"

**B**ut there's more at stake than picking the right design. Pamela Anderson (who, according to rumors, has four tattoos) contracted hepatitis C—an incurable and potentially fatal disease that attacks the liver —

from sharing a tattoo needle with her infected ex-husband, Tommy Lee.

According to the scientific journal *Medicine*, people who receive tattoos at a commercial tattoo parlor are more than six times as likely to have hepatitis C than people who don't have tattoos. Armstrong blames the transmission of the disease on unsterilized needles that have leftover blood on them and the multiple punctures made during the inking process.

The more intricate the tattoo, the more needles are needed to drill ink below

the surface of the skin. While black tattoos need only one or two needles, colorful tattoos can require up to fourteen needles piercing the skin at once. And each puncture exponentially increases your risk. Symptoms of hepatitis C range from mild, like nausea, to monstrous, including chronic liver infection and the eventual need for a transplant. Michelle Myles, co-owner of Daredevil Tattoo in New York City, has inked

everyone from rock 'n' roll legend Joan Jett to indie starlet Christina Ricci: "Even though underage teens shouldn't, if you do decide to get one, research your artist," she says. "All needles should come directly from an autoclave [a heat- and pressure-based sterilizer], and ink should always be poured out just for you and thrown away immediately after use."

Aside from the dipping-and-diving tattoo needles, the ink itself has hazards. A recent study analyzing the contents of tattoo ink indicates the presence of potentially toxic chemicals, such as copper, lead, chromium, and lithium—not exactly stuff you want in your body. Unsurprisingly, some people are allergic to tattoo pigments (which aren't FDA-regulated) and develop itching, redness, or swelling. Fresh tattoos, which are basically hundreds of tiny punctures on the skin's surface, form scabs as they heal, and infections or scarring often

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result from scratching them. Damage can even occur from using the wrong lotion on the wounds. Myles wants to "stay away from antibiotic creams, heavy, oily ointments, and aloe vera or vitamin treatments," all of which can distort or infect the tattoo. If you're lucky enough to escape infection or allergies after being inked, you'll be the proud bearer of a tattoo for life.

Or will you? "I love my tattoo and I always will. It isn't something that I will ever get sick of," says Los Angeles resident Lily, seventeen, of the seagull on her foot. Tell that to Nick Carter, who had his "Paris" tattoo hastily covered post-breakup with the heiress. "If I had it to do over, I would think twice about the tattoos I got," says Yelena, 22, who acquired her first tattoo illegally at the age of fourteen. "The things you like change as you get older. I definitely wouldn't get more. Sometimes I think

# ink spotting

## Tattoos come into the open as celebs show off their designs.

of what my life would be like if I didn't have any." Aspiring models or actresses often shy away from tattoos before their big break because the marks can influence their ability to get work. "It could really make a difference for someone who isn't known," says backstage regular Luc Bouchard, the senior artist for M.A.C. cosmetics.

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ew York City-based dermatologist Robert Guida, M.D., advises teens to think twice about tattoos. He sees between eight and fifteen people a week

requesting tattoo removal. "People get rid of tattoos to take off the name of a jilted lover or because the tattoo is a turnoff socially or professionally," Guida says. "People change and mature ... but the tattoo remains forever."

Removal is often more painful, more expensive, and considerably more time-consuming than getting the tattoo itself. "Some can take 20 laser treatments of up to 30 minutes each. And it can cost thousands of dollars for a tattoo you only spent one hundred dollars on originally," says Rhoda Narins, M.D., president of the American Society of Dermatologic Surgery. "You can get scarred by the laser or uncover scarring that already existed from obtaining the tattoo that you didn't even know was there." The laser treatment, which isn't always 100 percent successful, works by heating the pigment until it dissolves and is reabsorbed by the body. It's most effective on black ink, but other colors (especially the bright ones like those favored these days) are harder to remove. Guida estimates that, typically, only 80 to 90 percent of the tattoo can be fully removed, leaving a faint blemish on the skin. Other (even more painful) options for removal include excision—literally cutting the tattoo out of the skin—or dermabrasion (sanding the tattoo off the skin). Both are almost guaranteed to leave permanent scars. But as painful as getting or removing a tattoo may be, living with a hasty or immature decision may be the hardest thing of all. □



nicole richie

**MARKING TIME** NICOLE BOASTS NINE TATTOOS (INCLUDING ANGEL WINGS ON HER BACK), IN ADDITION TO THE HEART ON HER ANKLE. SARAH MICHELLE HAS A CHINESE SYMBOL FOR INTEGRITY, AND TWIN DRAGONFLIES. GISELE HAS A SMALL STAR INKED ON THE INSIDE OF HER LEFT WRIST. AND JAMES KING'S LAST NAME (AS WELL AS A STAR) IS INSCRIBED AT THE BASE OF HER NECK.



sarah michelle gellar



gisele Bündchen



james king

Visit Dr. Robert Guida's website at:

[www.drguida.com](http://www.drguida.com)