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6 Women Share Their Most Regrettable Tattoo—and How Much They Paid to Remove It

Alix Tunell (<https://www.realself.com/news/author/alix>) • Aug 12, 2020



In Reddit's most popular tattoo removal community—[r/TattooRemoval](https://www.reddit.com/r/TattooRemoval/) (<https://www.reddit.com/r/TattooRemoval/>)—thousands of users share their stories of regrettable decisions and offer support to one another through the long, painful, and expensive removal process. It's sobering to read through all the accounts of debilitating depression and social anxiety caused by bad tattoos, and it should be required reading for everyone considering getting inked for the first time. Two of

the most important takeaways? Make sure you are 100% satisfied with every single detail of the final sketch, and *never* get a partner's name.

Below, six women share the story behind their worst tattoo, why they ultimately decided to get rid of it, and what they'll never do again.

A misshapen horse



"I have seven tattoos now, but this was my first, at 18. I just walked into a tattoo shop with my college roommate and asked for a silhouette of a running horse across the back of my neck. The artist showed me some stock image options from Google, and I quickly picked the one that looked best. The horse idea wasn't totally random—I grew up riding and always wanted a tattoo of my own horse, Curly, but I didn't know at the time how to find an artist whose aesthetic I liked and work with them on a personal piece.

"I don't even remember looking at the outline on my neck before he started tattooing—I think I just trusted my roommate to make sure it was positioned okay. When I saw it after it was finished, I immediately hated it. It was much more solid than I imagined it being, and the horse was really fat, with a weird, udder-like stomach. But I wasn't upset. I thought it was kind of funny how bad it

was, and it became a joke with friends... they'd draw a unicorn horn on it or a little stick figure riding it. For the most part, it was easy to forget about.

“About six years later, I was working as a beauty editor and got an offer to test out the new PicoSure (<https://www.realself.com/picosure>) laser with [Dr. Roy Geronemus](https://www.realself.com/dr/roy-g-geronemus-new-york-ny) (<https://www.realself.com/dr/roy-g-geronemus-new-york-ny>), so I decided to remove the tattoo. The sessions were virtually painless, because he injected lidocaine all around the area before lasering, but my neck was sore and burning for a few days after. It was a really time-consuming process—I think I did 10 sessions over the course of 14 months. It's still not completely gone, but I'm now considering getting the custom horse tattoo I should have gotten the first time around, over it.” —Alix, 30, New York City

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My ex's band logo



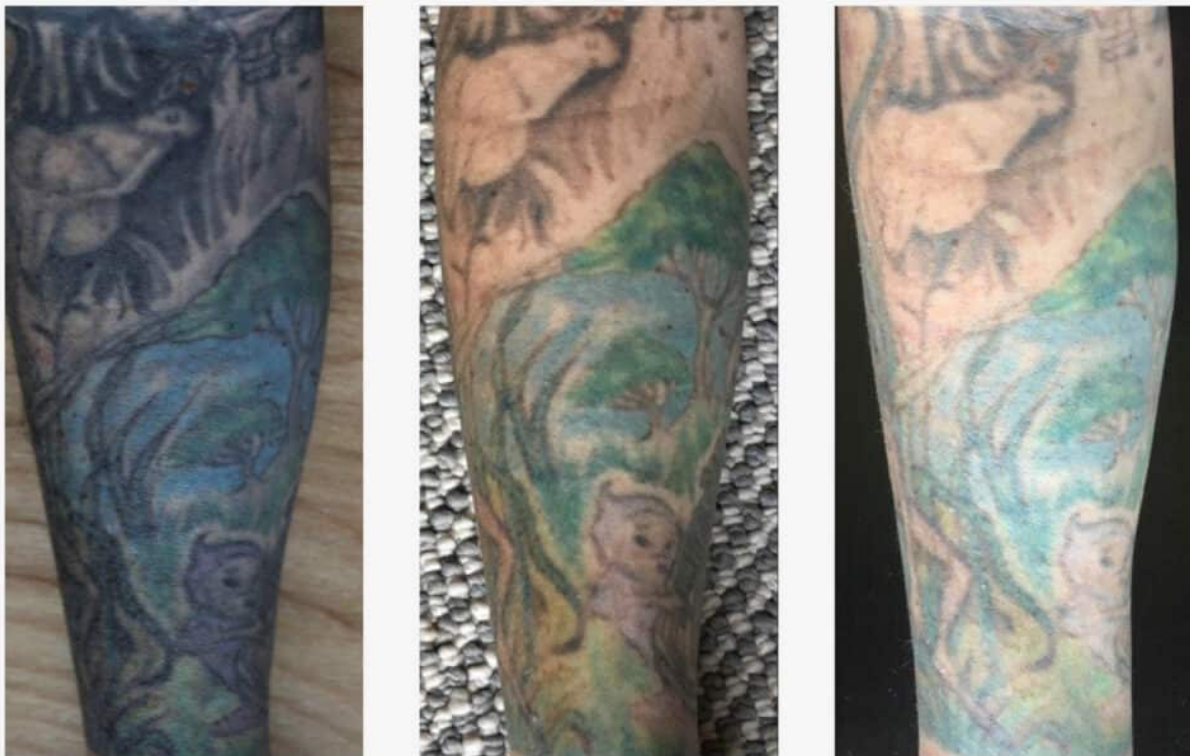
“My biggest tattoo regret is a complete cliché—my ex made music, and the worm was his logo. I was 23, and we had been together for roughly four years. We had a huge fight about a week before I got the tattoo—I got it as a sort of peace offering. I think I was trying to convince him that I did really like him, but maybe I was also trying to convince myself. I purposely didn’t get [his] name, just in case...

“The experience was pretty funny, because I brought our baby into the tattoo shop—I thought he would sleep. The staff was appalled and, in hindsight, it is a crazy place to take a baby, but I didn’t know what was socially acceptable. In the end, the receptionist sat with the stroller and my son slept, so it was a nonissue.

“After my ex and I broke up, the tattoo was a constant reminder of him, so it had to go. I’ve only had two sessions with the Spectra Q-Switch, and I can’t believe how much it has faded. I was told I may need up to nine sessions, but I anticipate [way fewer,] given how effective it is so far.”

—Alexandria, 30, Perth, Australia

A sleeve of mythical creatures



“I started building a sleeve on my right arm in 2002. All the images came from the book *Faeries*

by Brian Froud. Brian Froud's work was in many of the shows and movies I grew up with. He was the conceptual designer [who] worked with Jim Henson on *The Dark Crystal* and *The Labyrinth*. I wanted my artwork to connect me to those magical and creative memories of my childhood, so I did a sort of family portrait with mythical creatures.

"I think I loved the idea of my tattoos, but I never really loved the way it was coming together. I wish I would have taken more time with a single artist, to pull the vision together before we got started. After 10 years of mulling it over, I decided to have it removed.

"I was quoted 16 sessions for total removal, at \$400 per session—anything over 14 sessions would be free—but my body is responding incredibly well to the process. This is, in large part, due to the age of my tattoo. I'm currently at four sessions, with another scheduled in September. My sessions last roughly two hours with a Q-Switch laser, Evo Q Plus-C. It's excruciating and expensive, but for me, it's worth it, to achieve the end result." —Shelley, 38, Troy, Ohio

A floral crescent moon



"I got this tattoo to cover up another tattoo. The original was an itty bitty crescent moon—but it was so small, the corners ended up completely blowing out and it looked like more of a jagged

toenail clipping than a moon. I decided to get it covered because I figured, if I was going to have something on my body forever, I wanted to make sure I loved it (spoiler alert: OOPS).

“I’ve always liked what the moon symbolizes. It provides us with a reflection of the sun while the sun is on the other side of the Earth. It’s a reminder that even when it gets really dark and things are bad, there is still light coming, even if we can’t see it. So I got it reworked into a cluster of black and gray flowers that was loosely designed to look like a crescent moon as well. To be honest, I was never 100% sold on it, which should have been a warning sign.

“I started regretting my tattoo before the artist was even done with it. When the outline was done, I asked to take a quick bathroom break. I peeked at it in the mirror and thought, *Man, removing this is gonna suck*. I don’t even know what exactly is/was wrong with it. The artist did a great job, it’s a really pretty design, and it’s exactly what I asked for. I guess it’s just a bad case of cold feet.

“I went back to the chair and told the artist how I felt, and she asked if I wanted her to shade any part of it, to make it more wearable while I decided what to do next. There was a sunflower in the middle that the original tattoo was hidden in, so to leave without shading would mean leaving with a sunflower with a weird crooked moon inside it. So yeah, I asked her to shade it to make it wearable, but nothing crazy. She was actually very understanding and didn’t seem offended at all. She even said, ‘If you really don’t want to wear it, you have options. These things are not as permanent as they used to be.’

“For the next month or so, I went through waves, [from] hating it to loving it to hating myself for getting it, and being overall really upset with my choice. I just dislike the size of it and how black it is against my extremely pale skin. I wouldn’t even let myself look up removal for a while, because I was so scared the [doctor would] say I was stuck with it forever. But I eventually did and had my first PicoSure session in March. I will probably need at least eight to nine more. Each session costs \$200, so this will likely cost me \$2,000–\$2,500 total.” —Rose, 25, Philadelphia

My ex-husband’s initials



“I was 40 at the time I got my tattoo. For our 10th wedding anniversary, I decided to get my husband’s initials, in hot pink, on my ring finger. It was a surprise and he loved it, but we’ve been divorced for about a year now. All I can tell people is, *Don’t put your husband’s name on your body*. After four laser sessions, it wasn’t coming off, since it was hot pink. My doctor decided to cut the skin (<https://www.realself.com/question/tattoo-excision12>) where the tattoo was and stitch it up. It cost \$600 and took three weeks to heal. It was definitely worth it.” —Kimberly, 48, Sterling, Virginia

A bundle of violets

Tattoo removal with the PicoWay laser

“I already had two other tattoos prior to this one—I got the first when I was 17 and the second when I was 18. To avoid temptation, I have sworn to get just one tattoo per year, or else I would be covered in ink before I turn 20. My other tattoos are quite small, maybe a centimeter or two in size, and on regions of the body that can be easily covered for future career reasons.

“Given the average tattoo shop minimum [in Montreal] of \$120, it was worth it to actually get the next two done at once, to save some money. I researched tattoo artists in my area for about two months and found one that I really liked. But once everything was almost finalized, they just stopped responding. I was feeling dejected and impatient, so I chose an artist [who] was available and whose style was close to what I wanted. I sent reference photos for both tattoos: one was a year written in a Times New Roman–reminiscent font, to go on the back of my upper arm, [and] the other was a bundle of lavender and violets, to go on my ribcage. They were for my dad and mom, respectively.

“I arrived at the studio, and the artist showed me the sketches they had made. I was completely satisfied with the year tattoo, but the flowers were just not it. I mean, they were beautiful but nothing like the sketches I sent. I wanted something more dainty and a lot smaller. As someone who suffers from social anxiety, which makes me unable to assert myself, I just nodded my head

and said, ‘Let’s do it!’ Even while they were tattooing me, I was already pondering the cost of removal. I felt numb. I just couldn’t find the courage to say ‘Stop.’

“I left with a crushing feeling in my chest, with *What have I done?* echoing in my head. I showed my mother the tattoo dedicated to her, and she said, ‘Are those really violets?’ She told me that I should’ve gotten the year she was born as well, to match the one for my father. This just elevated the regret and guilt I felt. But I took care of it properly and waited for it to heal. I only ever saw it when I showered, otherwise it was hidden beneath my clothing. I just couldn’t look at it in the mirror. After months of thinking it over, I decided to research tattoo removal.

“I finished my first [PicoWay \(https://www.realself.com/picoway\)](https://www.realself.com/picoway) laser session about a week and a half ago. My God, did it hurt. I even applied numbing cream before the appointment, but it didn’t prevent me from feeling the laser. The technician told me that numbing cream cannot numb deep enough to where the laser penetrates. The technician predicts I will need upwards of 10 sessions, for complete removal. I might get it partially removed and cover it up. I managed to get a decent half-off deal at the clinic I chose, about CAD \$850 + tax for six sessions. Still, the price is about five times greater than it was to get the tattoo done.” —Nora, 19, Montreal

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