

Box Turtle Tattoo Studio  
Kansas City, MO  
Amy Bug Wilson- Tattoo Artist

This too shall pass, is a phrase that has a new meaning to me. It is kind of 'tattooed' in my memory, surrounded with the image of an Enzo circle.

As I pondered over ideas for this project, I carefully considered a tattoo artist. Not just any tattoo artist I pull from a google search, but my daughter-in-law, Amy. I proposed this idea to her, and she graciously agreed. Amy and our son have been together 3 years, and will have their first wedding anniversary this summer. I haven't had an opportunity to see her at work due to the nature of her job.

Amy and another tattoo artist share a studio in the West Bottoms area in Kansas City, MO. Amy is a sought after artist, and has her appointment book full through the year. Word of mouth and repeat happy customers keep her busy. On this morning, her clients were repeat customers. A family of three that had an appointment, and they were willing to allow me to be present. The father and daughter arrived first, and I had time to introduce myself and visit. I asked permission to use this interview session for this project. Patrick was a repeat customer. He had known Amy for years. Bailey was getting her first tattoo for her 18th birthday. Patrick said he gave his daughter 3 rules. Number one, the tattoo artist had to be reputable and really good. Number two, she had to be 18. And lastly, the image had to be meaningful to her. And this is where I thought I may have crossed the line. I asked, "What is the meaning of this image the 3 of you are all getting?" Patrick began to share the family had dealt with depression. Bailey and her mother, Lindsey, had both used 'self harm' to deal with it. Bailey proceeded to show me where she was getting her tattoo, just above her wrist, which had pink scar marks. I took a deep breath. We continued to talk about her future plans. She wants to study to be a clinical therapy worker, to help people like herself. She spoke with innocence and wisdom in her beautiful eyes.

I have never been in a tattoo studio, and I had no idea what to expect. Patrick went first, to show Bailey everything was going to be ok. I studied his face closely to see how he reacted to this tattoo gun that was creating permanent marks on his arm. I only noticed his throat pulsing, and an occasional smile at his daughter, who was by his side. I figured if anyone fainted, it would be me! But I managed to get in the 'note taking and sketching zone', and totally ignore the buzz of the rotary tattoo gun, the ink and conversation from Amy and Patrick. The process went very quickly. Within 30 minutes Amy was finished. While Patrick and Bailey inspected his arm, I had a chance to ask Amy a few questions. She went about sterilizing her station and setting up for Bailey. Amy loves her job rating it a 10/10. She creates her own schedule, which is wonderful with a family. When she was 3 she saw her uncles tattoo on his arm and told her mommy 'I want to draw on people when I grow up'. Amy especially likes to create meaningful tattoos for her clients, like the family today. She also finds it fulfilling to do what she called 'cover-up work'. When someone has a bad tattoo that she inks over and creates new art, she referred to that as 'giving them back real estate they had lost'. The permanent work she creates is certainly a piece of precious art.

Bailey didn't flinch. I watched her facial expression and I noted no fear or stress. She did tell Amy she was sweaty, and Amy gave her a Kleenex she held it in her hand. She sat like a champ. Now that's not my original saying...I heard Amy say that about her husband (my son) when he got his first tattoo!

Baileys mom, Lindsey arrived and quickly settled in for her tattoo. Amy mentioned that women have a higher pain threshold than men. Lindsey did not flinch either. By the third person, I knew I wouldn't faint so we were going to make this happen without incident. And within a couple of hours everyone was all smiles with arms wrapped in plastic for a photo I requested. It was an experience I will not forget. A morning with my daughter-in-law that she may later refer to as 'take your mother-in-law to work day'. The Enzo circle and phrase 'This too shall pass' certainly has new meaning to me. As Patrick said, "Live in the moment. A family that tattoos together stays together, through thick and thin."

Peggy Wilson