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kendrajaneb@safepiercing.org
Front Cover: Linda Yorba
Photo by Shanna Hutchins

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FROM THE EDITORS

WOMEN OF OUR INDUSTRY

KENDRA JANE B
MARINA PECORINO
The Point Editors

• Kendra Jane B

I could not be more proud to showcase a topic so important to me in this pivotal issue. I give you *The Point: Journal of Body Piercing*; not only a new name but a new, modern look!!

This issue and the exciting new changes we are bringing you have been in the works for months, as has my “From the Editor”. The women of our industry; an issue dedicated to the women who came before me, who made my role today possible. Wow! What an honor and a privilege for me to be able to highlight some of these groundbreaking powerhouse female figures. It has also been the most daunting task to this point in my career and by far the most difficult. I felt that I needed to provide the 100’s of female (and female identifying) piercers that would read this worldwide with something profound, especially since we just celebrated International Women’s Day.

So I have written and erased more times than I would like to admit, and I have decided that instead of attempting to be profound I will be REAL.

Lately everytime I read through my social media, I read account after account of how females in our industry are treated in their shops. They are made to feel unsafe, they are harassed by clients and co-workers, they are made to feel inadequate and sub par. Well I say enough is enough. It is time to stop walking on eggshells because of your employer and this industry. Many of you constantly worry that they will let you go over ridiculous little things. They often treat many of you as disposable and do not respect your boundaries or you as a person. I think it is time we turned the tables.

Instead of going to work everyday worried you may lose your job or be belittled or what have you, turn those tables. Make your bosses fear that everyday you may find something better and leave. Let them feel the stress of “not being good enough”. It is time for us all to know our worth.

I know many of you are terrified of not piercing or not finding a job. But in all reality our industry is greatly lacking in high quality Piercers and there are many great jobs at great studios for those that are willing to work hard. It is time we all saw our value and worth and stopped letting our bosses tell us or use their actions to show us they see no value in us!

Instead of telling you all about the accomplishments I have had over the last 8 years of my career, here is my definition of a successful female leader. They are someone who believes in who they are and what they can offer. They are able to fully utilize their skills and talents to capture the imagination and win the hearts and minds of those that choose to follow them. They are a role model. We hope the women leaders we have highlighted in this issue inspire you to start kicking ass and taking names.

“If your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, then, you are an excellent leader.” —Dolly Parton, singer-songwriter

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in the articles contained in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of The Association of Professional Piercers.

• Marina Pecorino

There have been a large number of influential and instrumental women in modern body piercing. This issue has been cultivated specifically to highlight some of these figures. As you might expect, it would be impossible to cover all the incredible females of our industry’s history within one issue, but we hope to initiate a dialogue and bring awareness to the often overlooked female pioneers.

From the early years of Gauntlet to current, women have played an integral role in the development and progress of our industry. All too often though, these piercers and body modification practitioners have not been represented in the forefront of the movement.

My personal journey within the body modification world has been greatly influenced by my female clients, coworkers, and predecessors, but probably the biggest impact on my life within the industry has come from Caitlin McDiarmid. Without her, this organization and my own personal journey would be in a very different place.

As you read through these pages, we hope you find knowledge, inspiration, and empowerment.
This issue of The Point is focused on Women in the Piercing Industry. There are countless women who have inspired me and who I could thank for my own personal voyage. That said, I’d like to put the spotlight on someone who I couldn’t imagine the Association of Professional Piercers without: Bethrah Szumski.

Bethrah served the APP as Secretary for many, many years, and it was Bethrah who called me when I was elected to the Board to give me advice. Being a Board Member involves a lot of responsibility, and the learning curve is steep. Were it not for Bethrah explaining the ins and outs of joining the Board, I would have been lost. In hindsight she may regret making that phone call to me, because I have leaned on her for advice in all aspects of my life ever since. Very rarely does more than a month go by without me reaching out to her for insight, advice, or just a shoulder to lean on.

For those not in the know, Bethrah has been with the APP since just about the beginning. She has served as President and Secretary, but also was deeply involved in our Conference for years. She also spearheaded some of our organization’s forays into international Conferences in Amsterdam in the early 2000s. These Conferences helped inspire piercers in Europe to start their own organizations. There is virtually no part of the APP that has not benefited from Bethrah’s involvement.

It is tough for us today to remember that the APP was once a very young organization that could have disappeared without spectacular leadership and tremendous sacrifice by our early volunteers. Bethrah’s commitment to the APP and its mission led her to put in countless hours of blood, sweat, and tears. As someone who has benefited tremendously from the efforts of the early APP, I have huge amounts of gratitude for all of the early Board Members and volunteers. That gratitude knows no bounds when I think of Bethrah.

As she segued out of her role as Secretary (and in the process trained our current Secretary, Aaron Pollack), Bethrah pitched the Board a new idea: “Why don’t we do something for our Members that is different than Conference. Something in nature where they can learn and bond and relax together. It can be a Member’s Retreat where we all camp together”. A lot of people would have come up with the idea and then asked other people to do the work. Not Bethrah. She immediately found appropriate locations, developed a budget, figured out all of the things that would go into a wonderful camp experience and then made it happen. To say it has been a success is a gross understatement. Camp APP has quickly become a must-attend event, and once again it is due to the vision, leadership, and hard work of Bethrah Szumski.

Along with Bethrah, I’d like to send a special thank you to all of the women who make the piercing community a better place. The APP and the piercing industry as a whole are benefactors of your leadership, intelligence, strength, wit, and talent.
AN INTERVIEW WITH BETHRAH SZUMSKI

SEAN DOWDELL
Club Tattoo

Atlanta, Georgia: Virtue and Vice
Athens, Georgia: Pain and Wonder

SD: How did you get your start in the piercing and tattoo industry?

Bethrah: I started with my husband at the time Cap Szumski. I started Virtue and Vice in 1994.

In 1999 we bought Pain and Wonder and felt the name was strong enough to keep and grow.

In 2005 we were divorced and had to do a complete business partnership split. From this I developed a business management skill set that I never anticipated. I had the business know how to run and own both businesses.

SD: Do you find it hard to promote two different brands?

Bethrah: Not at all, they are in two different cities and each have a strong presence on their own! Each has its own unique identity, although there are aspects that crossover. The studios use the same logo and the interior colors are similar rather than completely different. They don’t need to conform, but rather reach each other in a progressive approach that ties together organically and through marketing. They reflect each other while the personality of the individual studio still comes through.

SD: Where and where were you born and raised?

Bethrah: I was born in 1971 in Berkeley, California but have travelled and lived all over including Albuquerque, Atlanta, New Mexico, Australia, and Ecuador. I even lived in a school bus for a year!

SD: Can you give us a little background as to how you came to be interested in piercing?

Bethrah: Dumb Luck lol, I was 16/17 and had my daughter at 16. I was a hostess and waitress at Village Inn. That was in 1987/1988. The only tattoo shop in town was Fineline Tattoo which was Brian Everett’s Studio and I was hanging out there a lot. I was dating a few of the bikers that were at the shop. Brian eventually hired Cap, and eventually he and I started dating and we fell in love. We ended up together for 16 years and he eventually adopted my daughter.

In the early 1990’s he became burned out and had saved some money. We took this money and travelled and eventually moved to Atlanta. We opened Timeless together and I was learning to tattoo. The following year I learned how to pierce.

This is when I called and spoke to Elayne Angel for advice in starting my piercing career. She advised me to take the Gauntlet course and invited me to come down. She was a GREAT source of information as far as simple anatomy and troubleshooting and approaching each piercing.

SD: Were you scared when you started; and if so of what and why?

Bethrah: I had nightmares for quite a while about guest spotting in New Orleans, but Elayne really taught me to change and grow. She really instilled the ability to learn and evolve and keep an open mind. It was a great experience actually and to have her as a mentor was just incredible.

I also helped Elayne develop a portfolio system which had enormous value. It allowed the capability of showing clients what piercings were actually going to look like and have discussions with the specific clientele. It was something that I was actually able to give back.

SD: What is something positive that comes from our industry?

Bethrah: What we provide as a service is important. It is an opportunity to mark an occasion in someone’s life. It can add a tremendous value to someone’s personal life experience. It can also improve aesthetics, sexual function, and quality of life in some cases. It can make people feel better about themselves which is great!

SD: What would you like to see change in our industry and why?

Bethrah: I would like to see female piercers getting a little more respect and adulation from the masses. Men in our industry seem to get much more acceptance and praise in our industry.

Secondly, “the freehand gods” should realize that there are so many more ways to do things and to be efficient. There is more than one correct way to do things. (Sean: BTW, I couldn’t agree more!)
**SD:** Who was most influential to you in the early years and why?

**Bethrah:** Elayne Angel was instrumental in my career growth.

**SD:** What type of things have you contributed to our industry?

**Bethrah:** There is an enormous risk and bravery of accepting gray area. Meaning that anything that is left unproven or unexplainable can still be of benefit. It is okay to continue to do them. Otherwise you are selling yourself short in the interest of your client.

**SD:** What are your current interests, hobbies?

**Bethrah:** Most of my energy, brain power and effort goes toward improving the business or my work with the APP. Is cleaning house a hobby? I really like getting that done.

**SD:** Do you have any regrets or things you would do differently?

**Bethrah:** I wish I had stopped worrying about pleasing everyone much earlier. Most people go around worrying about their position in the status quo. Mob mentality and popular opinion are terrible things to measure by.

**SD:** What would you like others to know about you that may not know about you?

**Bethrah:** Oh my god, that’s hard! My employees say that I speak Spanish and have a “matter of fact” and shame free manner. For myself it’s that I have great respect for people who work hard for the greater good- even when I dislike them in every other way. A lot of people talk a good game about what they would do or what others should do to make things better but very few people actually jump in and do the work. True dedication trumps everything for me.

Also, maybe that I keep a go bag handy with basic survival items and a gas mask. I’ve figured out the best way out of my city on foot or bike and my dream house on my land would be essentially a box car bunker.

**SD:** When did you feel like you were going to be a success?

**Bethrah:** I’m still not sure! I feel like we are all one natural disaster away from being homeless.

**SD:** Tell me about your involvement with APP? Why did you get involved with the APP?

**Bethrah:** I believe wholeheartedly in the mission of the organization. I was taught early on that getting involved is important. I stay involved now with things I still have passion for. Teaching and Camp are the big ones. IOver the years I served as Secretary for 10 years and president for three. I’ve served on many committees and covered a lot of different duties.

**SD:** It has been an honor to interview one of the key piercers in our industry that I feel should get a lot more credit for the contributions and sacrifices she has made to the industry. Thank you so much Bethra,
Obviously, Jim Ward is widely regarded as the “father” of the modern American piercing movement, but who is considered the mother? In my personal opinion, that honorary title should go to Michaela Grey.

At a piercing clinic in New York, Michaela met Jim Ward; she was a student at Sarah Lawrence at the time. Prior to this meeting, Michaela and her then girlfriend were performing piercings out of their dorm room, but Jim made such an impression on Michaela that she decided to move to San Francisco and seek an apprenticeship. In May 1991, Michaela was hired as a summer counter person at Gauntlet, and soon advanced into an apprenticeship position under Scott Shatsky and Karen Hurt.

An excerpt from *Running the Gauntlet*:

“By 1993 the mass proliferation of body piercing studios staffed with inadequately trained piercers was causing grave concern with health departments and legislators. In some places there was talk of outlawing body piercing altogether. We at Gauntlet had tried repeatedly to get others in the industry to police and regulate themselves, but with minimal success. It became apparent that unless we banded together and became proactive, we could very well find ourselves out of business. We knew that if body piercing were made illegal, the only piercers continuing to operate would be doing so clandestinely, and piercing clients would be no better off than they already were.

Any Gauntlet Senior Piercer who wanted to get their Master Piercer certification was required to undertake a special project. Michaela was ready to make this advancement, and her special project, the magnitude of which we didn’t realize at the time, was to attempt to create a network of responsible studios willing to work together with healthcare professionals and legislators to set reasonable standards for the industry and regulate rather than outlaw it. This became so
time consuming that friction developed between Michaela and her coworkers. The store manager wanted to fire her. [...] 

Despite her rough edges, it was apparent to me that Michaela had too many things going for her to simply turn her out in the street. So rather than abandon her I made the decision to mentor her and take her on at corporate as my assistant. This gave her the time and freedom to work on a number of projects, including what eventually became the Association of Professional Piercers (APP). [...] 

In 1994 the State of California was poised to pass legislation (Assembly Bill 3787) that would regulate body piercing, tattooing, and permanent cosmetics. A handful of piercers from several studios began to network and strategize how best to assure that these forms of body modification were not outlawed. Those who met at the Gauntlet corporate office for those early meetings included Raelyn Gallina, several representatives from Body Manipulations, Nomad, and Primeval Body in L.A. Along with some of his students, including Idexa, Fakir also attended. The office was full. As the pending legislation grew closer to passing, a group got together and drove to Sacramento. Michaela spoke on behalf of the industry during one of the hearings for the bill. She also did a number of television interviews. The bill ultimately failed thanks to lobbying by the ear-piercing gun manufacturers. However, this did not end the threats to the industry, and the need for a professional organization to deal with them. 

Future meetings were held after hours
at the Market Street store. From these the APP came into being. Not surprisingly, there was much wrangling, many heated discussions, and some friction. Some of those who attended left in a huff never to return or to come back many years later.

Blake Perlingieri helped Michaela with registering the organization for nonprofit status, opening a joint bank account for the funds, and starting its newsletter The Point. With the assistance of Ghadi Elias from Mastodon in San Diego, APP moved forward and organized its first board.

Michaela served as the original Chair (later retitled “President”) of the Association of Professional Piercers, starting from its inception in 1994 until she transitioned to the International Liaison in June 1997. During this transition of the Board, in The Point: Issue 10, Kent Fazekas, incoming Chair, wrote the following about her:

“Michaela Grey. Words cannot express the amount of gratitude the APP has for you. The amount of work you have put forth toward the APP is remarkable. As chairperson of the APP your workload is enormous, and I can only imagine the amount of time per day you donate to the APP (I may be finding out real soon). You have a very pure heart Michaela and your actions show that you truly believe in the APP’s mission. We love you Michaela.”

During the fledgling years of the organization, in addition to her APP Chair responsibilities, she worked diligently to produce early issues of The Point. She also served as the co-editor for PFIQ, helping to redirect its focus from male/leather, to a more female friendly perspective. In PFIQ #45, Michaela wrote the following:

I do not discern between the experience of being pierced, the healing process, and the completed, integrated adornment; they are wholistic and inter-relative. Being pierced is a natural extension of my need to create an intentional environment for myself—a world of spiritual completeness, practicality, and uniqueness. I fiercely intend not to live an unexamined, blind life.

I started at the San Francisco Gauntlet in 1991. Prior to that, I spent two years as one of those uneducated hack piercers against whom I now crusade. My current responsibilities as an educator and media disseminator put me in the position of being able to make a real difference in the piercing experiences of others, for whom I am grateful. Piercing and other body-affirming practices are becoming ever more popular in defiance of an increasingly depersonalizing world. I am proud to be one of those spreading this message.

Michaela worked closely with Jim Ward to develop a piercer training curriculum for Gauntlet and co-author a written manual called Responsible Body Piercing in 1993; she later became the director and primary instructor for these seminars, with other Gauntlet piercers co-teaching.

In 1998, prior to the existence of the President’s Award, the Board dedicated the “Jack Yount Memorial Certificate of Recognition” to Michaela, for her efforts in promoting excellence in professional piercing.

Due to friction with others in the industry because of her so called “conservative” views, Michaela stepped away from body modification to pursue a career in graphic design and production art. Later she went back to school for costume design and graduated from the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising (FIDM) in Los Angeles.

In 2005, the APP presented Michaela with a Lifetime Achievement award, stating that “her work to secure the stability of the [APP] in the early days were critical to its survival. Piercers have had the opportunity to speak to the regulations which govern them.
worldwide as the result of her efforts.” You can read more about this special award in The Point: Issue 48.

This was originally intended to be an interview with Michaela Grey, but unfortunately, she declined the opportunity. She made it clear that she “left the industry due to gross persistent misogyny and disrespect for piercing’s history and elders” and as a result would prefer to keep her distance. Michaela is not alone in these feelings, and this underlying tone illustrates precisely why this issue of The Point is themed around the women in our industry, past and present.

From Brian Skellie:

Michaela knows that some of us commiserate with her for the rough times she had with APP, and how much I and many other people still hold her in high esteem. We should ensure our archive reflects Michaela with honor and respect as a person not just an integral past political figure. She worked tirelessly as an ally to our mission, no matter how uncomfortable or stressful it was. She took on so much in her role at 23 years old, put up with hard work and difficult debates along with the good, and much of it was thankless. Without Michaela, the APP could have just been a tiny, short lived CA endeavor. Thankfully she helped clear away some of the nonsense that gets in the way of the good work. There is much more to her personality and her work than the awards we gave her and back issues of The Point can illuminate.

We have kept in touch since her APP years. Michaela’s ever present wit shines in our interaction when I brought up the Archive and asked for her to reflect upon her involvement and share her ideas:

“Aside from the looming threat of ill-conceived legislation, I was forming the APP at the time I was running two Gauntlet piercer seminars a month. I observed a wide cross section of the piercers currently working, from folks I admired and respected to a lot of people I wouldn’t want piercing an apple juice carton with a straw. If I seemed excessively cautious it’s largely due to the truly scary folks I encountered in the seminars, and knowing that they represented a likely majority of the industry at the time (and sadly, probably still today).”

I believe her caution was sensible. She is skillfully self critical, and never needed my opinion or assistance. Some others at the time seemed to play the devil’s advocate and enjoy getting strong responses. This treatment of her efforts was lamentable. She should be remembered as a great gift to the trade. She saw video of the 20th Anniversary panel discussion and noted:

“I’m usually never thinking about that part of my life. It was very moving to see so many old cohorts gathered at that table to talk about the early days of the organization. All water under the bridge. I’m mostly pleasantly surprised. Allen’s mention of me was unexpected and got me a little misty. As he said, we butt ed heads often. It’s good to see that we both did it from love of the craft.

“It’s also interesting to see that some boundaries like ‘do we let crap jewelry manufacturers on the Expo floor’ persist to the present day.”

Some companies have learned what it takes to make standard quality jewelry, and done well. Others still are dodging any light we shine on them, but we hope they will come around.

“I’m awed and humbled to see how the APP has grown. I’m also loving the international outreach! I have a number of the new Members from Mexico and Italy on my FB feed and it’s awesome to see it grow.”

Michaela with Jim Ward at the APP banquet 2005 when she received the Lifetime Achievement Award 

photo by Drew Ward
On September 6, 2014, the body modification industry lost one of its pioneers. After a long battle with cancer, Raelyn Gallina passed away.

In the early days of modern body modification, it was definitely a man’s world. Doug Malloy, Jim Ward, and Fakir are credited as being the “fathers” of the modern piercing movement, but while they were servicing a primarily male clientele, Raelyn was blazing a trail among women, offering piercing, branding, and scarification in the lesbian BDSM community. While Doug, Jim, and Fakir get the lion’s share of the credit for what modern piercing has become since it emerged in the late 70s, Raelyn’s name has often been little more than a footnote—and that’s a shame. (It is called “his-story,” after all.)

While she made her home in California’s Bay Area (the center of the modern body modification resurgence in the U.S. through the late 70s and 80s), Raelyn also had a tremendous impact on early body modification on the East Coast thanks to her travels. In the early 90s, she would see clients and do workshops in and around the Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and Baltimore areas, offering not only piercing, but also branding and scarification. At a time when feminists were leading the movement to politicize the body, she was creating a safe space for lesbians, leatherwomen, butches, femmes, the queer-identified, and even the occasional man. She presided over a women’s space, but welcomed everyone from the local queer communities.

Raelyn battled inflammatory breast cancer over ten years ago, and last May she found herself dealing with a recurrence that affected parts of her brain, bones, mediastinum, and lungs. She finished a course of 25 radiation sessions in June of 2013, and spent the fall and winter recovering. Although that radiation did a good job on many sites, Raelyn was still undergoing radiation treatments. Sadly, she lost that long, final battle.

Raelyn was a pioneer in piercing, branding, and scarification, and even one of the early organizers of the APP, and without her influence our industry would not be where it is today. The world is poorer for her passing.
I’ve known Caitlin for many years now, and I have never stopped being astounded at the level of love and commitment she has for our industry. Many of you know only a small fraction of the tremendous amount of work that she does. But instead of giving you paragraphs full of work details, I would like to talk about something else that she has contributed to our industry...

Caitlin has a rare gift of not only being able to recognize the strengths in others, but to help others recognize and develop their own strengths.

For more than a decade, she has overseen the groups of volunteers who assist us in running Conference every year. In the matter of a week’s time, she turns a group of relative strangers into a tight-knit and functional family. In addition to overseeing the largest event in our industry, she is also helping to instill in these volunteers a deep abiding love of serving our industry. She is somehow able to channel being a friend/parent/sister/boss/teacher at exactly the moment each of these things is needed. Many of us have walked away from these experiences knowing ourselves better and with a strong desire to give back to this industry that we love. I feel like Caitlin is primarily responsible for this feeling.

Even after Conference, she makes a commitment to keep in touch with past volunteers, to offer support when needed, to pass along information about job openings, to spread the word when someone needs help, and to stay involved with this extended family. None of that is her job, that is simply dedication. To me, it shows how much her love for our industry extends beyond the confines of our profession, and into the lives of its practitioners. We are truly, truly lucky to have her.

—Sarah Wooten

Caitlin “Mama Duck” McDiarmid is a pillar of power and the foundation of many facets of Conference. She’s the glue of the volunteer family and a prime example of what a strong, caring, and passionate person can do to affect change in the lives of others. I’m endlessly thankful to have her as a mentor, a leader, and an example of how to move through the world. She dances, she laughs, and she cries with us all, and she’s never afraid to get down in the mud with us and help us dig.

—Dae Jedic

My first year at Conference was scary, but after meeting Caitlin and talking to her in person for the first time, all my anxiety went away because I could tell that no matter what she would be there to help me through the experience. And she did. I don’t know how the APP would function without her. She is the reason I come back year after year.

—Aaron Foster
Caitlin McDiarmid was the first person to really give me a shot at participating in the APP. She helped me get some of my ideas incorporated into Conference; I’m happy to see both the Mentor Program and the workshop style of classes succeed because of that chance. Caitlin is a true inspiration to a generation of piercers who want to volunteer and see the industry and our organization grow. Thanks Caitlin!
—Ryan Ouellette

Caitlin’s title might be Administrator, but her expertise is far more than office management. She very much speaks the language of the industry and knows what’s happening before the rest of us. Piercers, studio owners, environmental health agencies, educators, jewelry companies, and health care providers all reach out to the organization for help. That makes Caitlin the first contact many of them have. She has to understand their needs and speak a language they understand. A school nurse’s needs will be different than a health inspector and Caitlin is proficient in communicating with both. Sometimes she needs to refer people requesting information and help to piercers in the APP community. This means she needs to be aware of who has certain skill-sets and experiences and best suited for the job. If nothing else, she must be an expert at delegating. Caitlin is great at her job and that can only happen if she loves what she does. So it’s obvious she has a lot of love for piercing, and whether or not you’re an APP Member, you benefit from her hard work.
—John Johnson

I met Caitlin only a short time ago but in a mere few months, she has single handedly changed my life, whether she is aware of it or not. I have her to thank for who I am growing into as a person and as a professional. During my overwhelming time (for myself and those around me) at the 2017 Conference, Caitlin was at my beckoning if I needed her at all. For anything that I needed to speak about, cry about, or just to sit with. She put her needs aside for all of those who volunteered prior and present to help make the Conference happen every year. Our Mama Duck lived a turbulent year in 2017, but none of it stopped her from moving forward and keeping the APP alive and well, making sure our needs were met, that we were healthy and taken care of. She especially has impacted me to become more aware of my mental health and to take action on it. I hadn’t realized I needed to make a serious reality check on myself prior to my first Conference. She spoke to me gently and with immense professionalism, making sure that I fully understood where she was coming from as a Mama Duck. I have her to thank for the path that I am leading now. She truly is a strong warrior dancing queen. Mama Duck never quits; she works all year long for us and with us. Caitlin is a victorious manager and leader for our growing industry and I thank her for always keepin’ on. I love you, Caitlin.
—Love always, Duckling Nina Mikulin

Many of you have heard me speak about Caitlin McDiarmid, who is often simply referred to as Mama Duck. I also have the distinct pleasure of referring to her as my twin; we share the same birthday. But we also share so much more than that. I have been fortunate enough to celebrate this woman; during the 20th Annual Conference Banquet, I was able to stand in front of hundreds of you and tell everyone what I already knew - Caitlin is very special. I recited a piece of writing about pie. Pie is never the easy choice, but it is always worth the effort it takes. A perfect reminder that behind the scenes for many years there has been someone putting in the love, the long hours, the team building, the hard work, and all of if for us. I am lucky enough to have had this powerhouse of a woman as a boss, an employee, a mentor, and most importantly as a friend. She has changed my life and lives of many others. So it is only fitting in an issue where we honour some of the many women who have lost sleep, spilled tears, and shed blood for their tribe, that we get out of our chairs and give this woman a standing ovation. This organization would not be the same without her and all she has done over the last decade.
—Kendra Jane B
Casey: Who are you?

Alicia: My name is Alicia Cardenas. I am a professional body piercer, tattooer, modification artist, and business owner in Denver, Colorado.

CH: How long have you been in the industry?

AC: Since July of 1994, so 24 years.

CH: Tell me a little about your apprenticeship.

AC: It was a very non-traditional apprenticeship under a woman who was very involved in the BDSM community. Her name was PJ and she was a Fakir Intensive graduate. She ran a tattoo/piercing/dungeon shop in Denver called Bound by Design. My apprenticeship was very traumatizing! It was an unethical fast track to ritual in piercing. I don’t have any regret regarding the way I was taught, but would never do that to someone else. I consider myself to be a lifetime apprentice, forever learning especially in and around my involvement with the APP. I apprenticed for about 3 months. I went from never touching a client to full time body piercer in that three month period. Benefits of such a difficult apprenticeship are that I learned very quickly what I did and did not want to be involved in. I learned boundaries by having my boundaries pushed too far. I learned respect from not receiving any. I learned that even women can be abusive to other women. I learned that there is no amount of money that can replace trauma.

CH: Can you comment on the duality of science versus ritual, the importance of both in the piercing industry? With such a short apprenticeship, when did you experience/delineate both sides?

AC: When I started in the industry, there was very little science involved. We didn’t even package tools in disposable pouches. Tools went from autoclave into drawers and we used glutaraldehydes (cold sterilization) to disinfect. There were no regulations, no standards, and even the APP was merely beginning. There was only ritual and it was based (because of my teacher) in BDSM. Quickly I learned that this was not my way, sexually that is, but that I liked the ritual aspect of it. The intention and layers of emotion and spirituality called to me. The science and aspects of mathematics like measurements and clinical practices came much later and also intrigued me. I definitely helped bring the science to it after I became involved with different movements to get the industry regulated. The NEHA Body Art Code that all states use as their model codes, that was me in 1999.

CH: When you started, what was it like being a woman in a male run industry?

AC: DIFFICULT!!! I had to work twice as hard for half as much. I learned quickly to work with the shortcomings of my male counterparts, so we could thrive as a team. I basically learned to wipe everyone’s ass to make myself an asset. I protected myself by laying down boundaries, basically telling all the men that I would not sleep with them to make my way to the top.

CH: How long have you been a business owner?


CH: I find it interesting that all your business partners have been men? Touch on that and why you have decided to go solo.

AC: I guess that is true. I have had many different collaborators over the years and many of them are men. My experience around male counterparts has been all over the spectrum. I have grown from having known them, I have emulated aspects of them, and I have outgrown them. I no longer wish to collaborate with anyone on a business level mostly because I work circles around people. I work hard and I have a lot of raw experience (I have fucked up a lot). I am, however, extremely grateful for all my partners even the one I don’t communicate with anymore. Each person I worked with has given me gifts of which I would not have gained on my own. I consider all my partnerships to have been successful.

CH: Who helped you on your journey to being the boss?
AC: My mother is my greatest influence and taught me to run my own show. She helped me open Twisted Sol the same year she passed away. I was always a bossy girl though, so it came very naturally to me. Turns out that bossy just means you are a strong leader.

CH: Why was it important to you to own your own business?

AC: If I didn’t own my own business, I would want to work for someone like me. Until that someone comes along I will continue do this (run my business). It’s important to follow your dreams and allow your visions to be realized.

CH: What change have you seen in the industry in the last 20 years?

AC: OMG! It’s almost unrecognizable. It’s heartbreaking… there is what I see as serious lack of ethics and respect in the younger generations of piercers. I have observed that many are no longer concerned with our history or lineage. BUMMER! Social media has changed the world and has certainly changed our industry. In my opinion, you can have a huge following, do mediocre work (but you just happen to be able to take a decent photo of it), be a nightmare human who is cruel to others and to clients, and still be a sensation. Some things are going to need to change, and people are going to need to stop hiding behind their screens and learn to be good humans again.

CH: Let’s talk cultural appropriation. What is cultural appropriation?

AC: WOW. That’s a huge subject, and almost an article of its own. Let’s just say cultural appropriation is taking something, and using sacred symbolism, that is not culturally yours, for your gain. And using it without acknowledgment or education or even sensitivity of its original intention. Now having said that I would like to introduce a new phrase we should all become familiar with and that is cultural fascism. Cultural fascism is trying to control other people’s creative and free expression around cultural experience.

CH: Recently there was an ad from a jewelry company that didn’t sit well with a lot of folks due to the idea of cultural appropriation? What are your thoughts on that?

AC: It’s Cultural Fascism! Social justice warriors who are using social justice as a weapon to destroy people without knowing the entirety of the story. In my opinion, this is a huge subject and deserves a lot of attention. In this situation things went way too far. If your attempt to right a wrong (point out cultural appropriation) results in you threatening to harm someone over it, you have gone way beyond doing the work based in justice and you need to reexamine your work and vision.

CH: How does that affect you as a woman of color?

AC: Watching a bunch of people work out their de-colonization and indoctrination is no longer interesting to me, especially on the internet. What America needs to know is that we, as a culture, were raised with white supremacy at the core of our values. And it’s going to take a lot more than a black president to pull us away from that. I am sad that we get caught up with what other people are choosing to do with their bodies when we still live in a world where people don’t have clean water and healthcare. Everyone needs to check their privilege and be rooted in the abundance we have come to know and stop taking it for granted. As a woman of color I am still distraught that there are not more women or women of color in our industry. I am horrified that a huge amount of the women in our industry still are on the outskirts of the industry and are heavily undereducated. I am mystified that people of color are not encouraged to start career paths in tattooing and body piercing. An industry with balance and diversity makes for a far richer industry (society). PERIOD.

CH: What advice would you give a young woman for success in the workplace? Or how do you continue to support women in the workplace?

AC: I continue to support women in the industry by investing in them. Teaching them and empowering...
them. My shop is an example of that! It’s run by badass women.

**CH:** Who have you trained? What is your experience around training others?

**AC:** I have trained only three people with full on apprenticeships, and only one is a full time piercer. It’s not a job for the weak. It takes constant growth and attentiveness. I am lucky to have trained you and consider our apprenticeship together to be one of the most thorough trainings I have ever witnessed, which only has half to do with me!!!!

**CH:** You trained me, the interviewer, what was that like as a whole? Why did you pick me?

**AC:** I picked you because you called and emailed me like 40 times. You being gifted in customer service was huge. I trained you because you would not take no for an answer and in this industry you have to fight for what you want. You were a natural born fighter. I am grateful that you carry on my legacy, not only in the moment of clean and effective piercing, but in a warmth, compassion, and effectiveness in touching other’s hearts.

**CH:** How do you achieve your work/life balance?

**AC:** I don’t! hahaha!!! I still live, work, and screw up my personal life constantly. But I would say having a system in place for self-care is what I am currently working on.

**CH:** Has being a mother changed any facts or opinions of the industry for you?

**AC:** Being a mother changed everything. Suddenly I had two kids, the shop and my real kiddo. Everything I learned in piercing has prepared me for parenthood. Compassion and patience. My child has expanded my conscientiousness.

**CH:** Where do you see yourself in the next five years? 10 years?

**AC:** I will always do body art. ALWAYS. It’s a lifestyle, not a job. But I imagine I will focus more on artwork and parenting and let you (the interviewer) run the shop until my kid can help you run it. I’d like to disappear into the woods and make a retreat center for healing. I would also like to sing in a mariachi band someday! ;)

**CH:** Who are some of your influences? Shout outs!

**AC:** Professionally—Women in the professional piercing industry who have inspired me include Elayne Angel, Gigi Gits from Kolo Piercing, Crystal Sims from Evolution, Ericka Smiceniski from Somatic, Kristin Otter from Metamorphosis, Christiane Lofblad from Pinpoint in Oslo. And the anthropological efforts of Erika Skadsen. My favorite piercers also include Luis Garcia, Derek Lowe, Casey Hosch, Aaron Foster, Danny Yerna, Ryan Ouellette, Courtney Jane Maxwell, Chris Jennell. And on a personal level, Dave Field, Ana Paula Escalante, Caitlin McDiarmid, Beverly DeOlivera, Monica Larrea, Theresa Preston, Corey Lolley, and Casey Hosch.
President's Award

One of my favorite things about serving as APP President is that I have the "job" of bestowing an annual award. There aren't any formal or established criteria for me to follow, and in some ways that makes it even harder to reach a decision on the winner. That said, when I came up with the idea of naming this individual, I knew it was absolutely the right choice.

I wanted to make it clear during my brief speech at the banquet that it shouldn't only be the super-sparkly, outgoing, attention-getting folks (such as myself) who are noticed. I wanted to recognize someone who is hardworking and highly participatory, but in a quieter, more behind-the-scenes way than some of us.

This person studied photography at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1992-93. They have been a professional piercer since 1998 and an APP member since 1999. This piercer worked in a studio as an employee for eight years, until 2006 when that business closed. They opened their own studio in 2007. This person is incredibly devoted, dedicated, consistent, and cares deeply about doing quality work.

This recipient has served admirably on the Conference Committee since it formed in 2008; she also volunteered at our annual events before that. She handles a task that is surely one of the most daunting and difficult with grace and compassion: She wrangles all of us speakers and our handouts and PowerPoint presentations so they are ready for Conference. Her patience and diligence are beyond measure. I'm a little embarrassed to admit she's even had to goad me at times to extract my presentation materials.

Not only is this woman a wonderful piercer, a respected colleague, and a fantastic employer, she is also an amazing mother.
She has aptly been described as “The APP’s best kept secret.” This woman has earned my deepest respect and is so deserving of recognition for her efforts on behalf of the industry and this organization.

My selection for the 2013 recipient of the President’s Award is Sarah Wooten.

Thank you so much Sarah for all that you do. You earned this award so quietly and gently, yet thoroughly. Congratulations!

Preferring to make receiving the award a positive and pleasant experience, I did not require her to address the audience at the banquet. I am aware that this woman of many talents does not have public speaking high on her list of favorite things to do. So instead I suggested that she write something for The Point and here it is:

“I am feeling honored, humbled, and a little overwhelmed with having been chosen to receive the 2013 APP President’s Award. I like to joke around that I have some sort of obsession with volunteering, but the truth of the matter is that it’s one of the most rewarding aspects of having a career in this industry. I strongly believe that the APP has done an immeasurable amount of good for piercers, both for our industry and for our community. To me, the ability to give back by donating my time and energy in such a direct way is really gratifying. Being a part of the Conference Committee allows me to work closely with people I respect and admire, and to help create this wonderful educational event that benefits fellow piercers. I had no idea in advance just how much hard work goes into each year’s Conference, but the result makes the effort more than worth it.

“I’m incredibly thankful for the recognition. It makes me want to work harder and to do more. I’d also like to take this opportunity to encourage others to consider volunteering in some capacity. There are so many different ways to reach out and give something back, and I promise you’ll be glad that you did.”

Well said, Sarah!
The first time I heard the name Misty Forsberg, it was attached to a photo of a beautiful and very well done scarification, and labeled as her very first piece ever. I immediately thought she was either a liar, or an extremely talented person. I was very happy to quickly find out she was indeed very skilled and knew exactly what she was doing. As a scarification artist myself, I followed her progression through this male dominated niche with great interest. Everything I would see from her on BME kept getting better and better, and I felt a wind of change coming as one of the rare women doing scarification professionally was making a name for herself.

Rapidly, her name was everywhere. I was reading her articles on Suspension.org, documenting the various activities and advancements in the body suspension community. I would see her running around the Dallas Suscons, quietly helping Allen Falkner make these events happen flawlessly. With his very special way of mentoring, she would soon discover a passion for education, teaching and training at suspension events all over the world. Her time and involvement within the body suspension world was rewarded in 2012 with the first A. "Spliff" Rosa Award for Advancement in Body Suspension. She went on to then co-found the International Suspension Alliance and sat as a Board Member on its first term.
Scarifications by Misty Forsberg
All this being said, her biggest and most impressive achievement is probably her involvement in rewriting the body art legislation for the state of Arkansas. Teamming up with Steve Joyner and the Arkansas Body Modification Association, she embarked on a giant legal journey, fighting in the House and Senate against a state senator who used misinformation to try to ban certain body art practices such as scarification. From 2011 to 2013, they worked on stopping the ban on scarification while also passing safer legislation for the tattoo and piercing industry. From there, they worked on updating the body art rules and regulations for the state health department. The battle between their group and the senator was highly publicized, and as far as I’m aware, it was the first time the APP took a stance on a matter outside of the body piercing realm.

Although not actively piercing at this time, her interest in education and advancement of the piercing industry continues. Misty now focuses on laser tattoo removal and is sought after for her extensive knowledge and amazing results. She still travels all around the world doing scarification, teaching, and facilitating body suspensions. Whenever she gets a bit of time off, you can find her on top of a mountain swearing at a bunch of rocks.

Not all heroes wear capes. Some of them wear old grandma sweaters, have a very quiet voice, and still kick more ass than Superman. Misty Forsberg is definitely one of the latter.
Piercing: Christina Shull

Interview: Sean Dowdell

Studio Name: Integrity Piercing  |  City/State: Wenatchee, Washington
Number of Years Piercing: 16  |  Interview: Sean Dowdell

Sean Dowdell: Why did you want to learn to do body piercing?
Christina Shull: Oddly enough, I had no interest in being a piercer. I found a studio that was willing to take me as a tattoo apprentice but only on the condition that I learned how to pierce as well. That was the only opportunity I could find for a tattoo apprenticeship, so I took it. I quickly realized that I did not have the creative ability to draw custom tattoo designs and I would have been a mediocre flash artist at best. Luckily, at that time I also realized that I had an unexpected passion for piercing and decided to give up on tattooing to pursue professional piercing. While I have developed strong feelings about not using piercing as a stepping stone for tattooing, I am fortunate that in my particular situation, it worked out well for me.

Sean Dowdell: When did you start body piercing, who taught you, and where?
Christina Shull: I started piercing in October 2000 in Wenatchee, Washington. My original apprenticeship was very minimal and left me seeking appropriate training and education. That search brought me to the 2001 APP Conference, where I made connections who led me to the two Seattle piercers, J.J. Moiso and Troy Amundson, who took me under their wings and mentored me for two years. During that time, I was actively seeking a better studio than where I was at but lacked the resources that the piercing industry now has. Through obtaining the APP’s Al D. Scholarship in 2003, I was able to relocate to Evolution in Albuquerque, where I received much-needed guidance from their talented team - Crystal Sims, Shawn Taylor, and Noah Babcock.

Sean Dowdell: What piercers do you look up to and why?
Christina Shull: I could fill the whole magazine with a list of who I look up to and why! I look up to everybody who has played a role in the inception and development of the APP, as it is an organization whose mission I wholeheartedly support. I look up to everybody who has been involved in legislation and regulations, as their volunteered time has shaped the evolution of the piercing industry. I look up to the piercers who have innovated piercing procedures and the implements used, jewelry styles, and various concepts of business and customer service. I look up to every piercer who is representing the piercing industry on a professional level, as the collective effort of so many has lead to increasingly positive public perception and legitimizing the industry as a whole. In all, I have admiration and respect for the countless individuals who have contributed to the increasingly positive direction the piercing industry is taking. Since I feel that answer is very generalized, I will add that I really admire Brian Skellie. I hope to someday possess as much information, the willingness, and patience to share that information, as well as the amazing level of contributions to the industry that he possesses.

Sean Dowdell: I know you are an owner/operator of your business. What made you decide to go out on your own and open your business?
Christina Shull: After 10 years of living outside of my home state, I wanted to move home to settle down close to my family and friends. My hometown has never had a high-end piercing studio, which gave me the opportunity to come home and open a business that my community was in need of. After years of working for and guesting in some of the best studios across the country, I had a lot of ideas about what my ideal studio would look like, the experiences clients would receive, and how I wanted my business to be perceived by my community.

Sean Dowdell: What challenges have you had being a female piercer, and with being a female business owner?
Christina Shull: Honestly, I have never felt that I have had challenges as a female piercer and business owner. If anything, I feel that as a female, I have an advantage with my clients and when seeking past employment in the piercing industry. In many places where I have lived, found that there were many clients who preferred a female piercer for certain situations. In my current area, over 90% of my clients are female and I find it advantageous that they feel I might relate to them better as a female.

Sean Dowdell: What do you think are (if any) problems within the piercing industry?
Christina Shull: One of the biggest problems that I see in the piercing industry is a lack of consistent professional standards. I feel that it is hard to be thought of as a professional industry when the majority of the industry does not meet acceptable industry standards. In most states, no training or education is
required to obtain a piercing license, if the state requires a license at all, and that, unfortunately, leads to a large variance between studios in terms of quality, experience, and service. I believe that as more of the industry chooses to meet current industry standards (appropriate sterilization standards, jewelry materials and quality, studio setup, training, and education, etc.), the piercing industry will continue to be seen overall as more credible than in the past.

Sean Dowdell: Where would you like to be in 5 years (pertaining to life and business)?
Christina Shull: I have a lot of plans in the next five years! I chose to grow my business in a very slow but steady pace, but after three years of being the only piercer, I am ready to expand my staff and studio hours. I plan to add a second full-time piercer and complete a full apprenticeship for my receptionist, who has been working counter for eight years and has earned herself a quality apprenticeship. Once I have a full staff and my business is able to run without me piercing full time, I would like to pursue an education as a CPA and offer industry-specific business consulting and accounting. I feel that the piercing industry lacks industry specific help when it comes to planning and running a business, and I would love to fill that void. As far as personal goals go, I am working on finding a good work-life balance. I have struggled over the years to find a more healthy balance between the two aspects of my life, and moving back to my hometown was a big step in working towards having more balance between business and personal life. My five-year plan involves working towards having a personal life that brings me as much satisfaction and happiness as my professional life does.

Sean Dowdell: I had the pleasure of getting to hear

"I STARTED PIERCING IN OCTOBER 2000 IN WENATCHEE, WASHINGTON."
you teach at APP conference this year. I really liked
your personal approach to the community that you
serve. Can you tell me a little about your perspective
on that?
Christina Shull: Thank you, Sean! While I feel that
stereotypes about body art businesses and professionals
have been improving over time, I feel that we still have a
way to go before we are seen as a professional industry.
When I opened my studio, it was important to me to break
the local stereotypes for body art businesses and be
perceived as other local businesses are. I also have firm
beliefs about being an active part of my local community
and be able to give back to the community. My approach
has been to be as involved as possible. My business is
very active with the local Chamber of Commerce, we are
Better Business Bureau members, we donate lavishly to
any local fundraiser or event, we sponsor local events and
programs that we support, we hold fundraisers for local
causes that we feel strongly about. The Integrity Piercing
brand has become a household name that is synonymous
with local community, even with people who have never
stepped foot in our establishment.

Sean Dowdell: What do you love about teaching other
piercers both inside and outside of conference?

Christina Shull: I love being a part of the positive evolution
of the piercing industry! The better we become individually,
the better we are as an industry. I am very honored that the
APP has had me as an instructor for over ten years, and
has given me the opportunity to be a part of the profession
of the piercing industry. Also, going back to my rough start
in the industry, I will always be thankful for the piercers who
had a monumental part in shaping my career and I am
truly grateful for the opportunity to help other piercers who
are now where I once was. I love being able to give back to
the industry that I adore so much.

Sean Dowdell: What changes would you like to see in
the piercing industry?
Christina Shull: I would like to see more forward
momentum towards the adoption and implementation
of currently accepted industry standards. While we now
have more studios offering higher standards, the majority
of the industry is still not offering clients the best. I hope
that the future brings more studios wanting to offer clients
the best possible experience, education, and jewelry.
I also hope to see more piercers seeking out the best
possible training and education, as well as more studios
treating their technicians as skilled workers deserving
of better pay and benefits. I hope the future will allow for
professional piercing as a long term career that can provide a comfortable living and retirement.

Sean Dowdell: Tell me something positive that you feel comes from the piercing industry?
Christina Shull: I love that the piercing industry helps our clients live a better life. Whether we are helping someone feel more comfortable with their body, to celebrate a particular moment or achievement, or overcome a fear, we are providing an outlet for personal growth and self-improvement. Having an impact on my client's life, regardless of the extent of that impact, is something that I consider to be very sacred and wonderful.

Sean Dowdell: What would you like other piercers to know that they might not know about you?
Christina Shull: I don't think there is anything that I haven't publicly shared about myself. I try to be as honest and forthcoming with the industry as possible.

Sean Dowdell: Being a veteran piercer, what advice do you think that most new piercers should be aware of as they climb into this industry?
Christina Shull: I hope that any piercer will never get too comfortable with what they think they know. Even with 16 years of piercing, I am always open to new techniques, ideas, and ways of doing things. By always being open to new things, I have kept my job interesting, I am always improving, and I have never had to worry about experiencing burnout. Staying open minded and not becoming stagnant has enabled me to continue bettering myself as a piercer and business owner.

Sean Dowdell: Is there anything you wish to learn or get better at in the piercing industry or in business in general?
Christina Shull: I am constantly looking to improve my piercing techniques, my customer service skills, and my knowledge of business. I do not want to ever get to a point where I feel that I don't need to keep learning and growing. As a somewhat new business owner, I feel there is so much that I can learn about accounting and running a business. I am looking forward to what the future holds as far as learning more about what I can do to run a business that puts first both the needs of my clients and my staff.
Sean Dowdell: Why did you want to learn to do body piercing?
Courtney Jane Maxwell: My first professional piercing when I was 14 left a strong impression on me. The piercer’s bedside manner and ability to create the feeling of a safe, controlled space was quite inspiring. I left the studio knowing that I wanted to be that for other people. My long standing interest in body manipulation only added to that.

SD: When did you start body piercing, who taught you and where?
CJM: I started piercing right after my 20th birthday, just outside of St. Louis (where I am from originally). I am one of those oddballs that was self-taught, aside from a little guidance from a few local piercers - not the most glamorous answer, but the honest one. I have to emphasize that I do not believe this is an appropriate way to start piercing. It was unusual circumstances that allowed for it in my life, but nonetheless, I don’t ever encourage someone to follow my example, especially at this point in history.

Luckily, for the future of my career, I started going to the annual A.P.P. conference from the very beginning. Relentless pursuit of my continued education is the reason I made it through.
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SD: What piercers did you look up to while learning and why? Who do you currently admire in the industry?
CJM: Early on, I always remember looking up to the instructors/volunteers at the A.P.P. conference, as well the piercers on staff with BME. The people who were stepping up and getting involved. I always really admired that as a young piercer.

As I got to meet and learn more from other piercers, I was so impressed by Luis Garcia. He is one of those people who is such an exceptional piercer and teacher that I simply can't imagine the industry without him. I admire what he has been able to do for the profession, and the amount he gives back on top of being a full-time piercer.

I also have to name Brian Skellie. He has changed the game for us by constantly raising the bar for industry standards, and bringing in a totally different level of scientific understanding to the field.

SD: What do you feel is your biggest contribution to the industry as a whole?
CJM: Truthfully, I feel as though I'm just getting started. My first thought was, “ask me again in another 10 years!”

SD: What would you say you are most known for in the industry and in your place of business?
CJM: I had to think long and hard about this, but perhaps my patience? I deal incredibly well with people that are challenging to communicate with, be it clients or other piercers. Its something that is a great defining factor in my work as a piercer, but has been quite helpful over the years in regards to outreach work as well.
In addition, a lot of piercers and piercees contact me regarding my knowledge of genital piercings for transgender clients (pre and post op) so I gather that I’m known for that as well. I’ve always been pretty passionate about advocating for the interest of genital piercing clients in general.

SD: Being a female piercer, what advice do you think that most female piercers should be aware of as they climb into this industry?
CJM: I think being female is a different experience for many different people, so I hate to generalize. That said, I encourage people to be prepared. Think hard about what it means to you to be a woman, and what that could mean for you in the workplace. Be prepared to handle the many ways people may behave towards you because of this. Don’t be left wishing you would have said or done something differently. You need to be confident in order to handle the many situations you will find yourself in, so arm yourself mentally.

SD: Is there anything you wish to learn or get better at in the piercing industry?
CJM: Everything. Always. I’m never going to be done! If I ever say that I am finished, do me a favor and kick my butt.

www.SaintSabrinas.com
www.Facebook.com/SaintSabrinas
FEMALE GUEST ARTISTS

HIKA K.

Author’s Note: I will be writing in binary terms and use the formulation “man”/“woman”, “female”/“male” instead of “read/perceived as male/female” for a smoother read and due to a limitation of writing space. Therefore I hope that non-binary people will not feel excluded, especially since the intention is to implicate perceived genders instead of exact gender prescriptions.

Where are the travelling female piercers?

I saw this question a few weeks back in a Facebook group for piercers and started to ponder. Indeed, where are they? If I were to name those that I am aware of, only a handful of names would come to mind – but reconsidering, thinking again I know there are more. I know them personally. I just forgot that they are travelling because I don’t see constant posts about their upcoming or latest travels. But even if I take those into consideration there are still not many, which is curious. If you asked me about travelling male piercers, my reply would be “Why, dear, nearly half of the males in our industry!” or at least that’s how it feels.

In all honesty I have rarely thought about travelling female artists. But once I started thinking about the question I couldn’t stop. Why are there so few, especially in the piercing industry, while I see quite a few female tattooers and performers travelling as much and as far as their male counterparts. Is our industry really so different? Between 2014 and 2017, I travelled what the people around me considered a lot – I didn’t see it as so much, compared to other artists. During this time, I travelled for guest spots to the point where I spent three months at a time constantly sleeping on a different couch every week. For me this didn’t seem to be outside of the norm. Apart from the fact that I didn’t promote it, there were really no hardships in finding new guest spots and work to do at all. Tattooers in the places I travelled were often surprised because they didn’t know about travelling piercers. Customers and friends were often surprised that piercers would be booked to go to other places and didn’t stay at the same studio constantly. None of this had anything to do with my gender though. So how does it come that so few of my female peers are doing the same thing?

To be honest, although the mentality of our industry is far more open than more mainstream occupations, I have always considered it seemingly harder to be a female piercer. As in every workplace, we have to show far more competence than our male counterparts to be taken seriously; not always because our employers may see women as less professional, but more when it comes to clients. Outer appearance, physical height, and even the depth of our voice factors into the perception of competency, even if only on a subconscious level. Men can get away with more seemingly unprofessional or often what appears to be “cheaper” online representation with lesser quality photos than those posted by a woman. Strictness, being direct, blunt, or simple honest statements can be interpreted as rude, condescending or “bitchy” when it comes from a women, since we are expected to always be sweet and charming. On the contrary, it takes more effort to seem especially caring as a man. And even though it takes more work for a woman to be seen in the piercing
industry as much as it does in any other profession, this should actually not stop us. In fact it should make us more prepared to do everything perfect at our guest spots – or as I call it, our homes for a limited time. It prepares us to not leave any room for mistakes but even to show beforehand in conversation why we are the best possible choice to fill in when help is needed.

So where are the travelling women?

As somebody who spends a lot of time researching stereotypical gender roles and their representation in media, as well as the result of this in the upbringing of persons of said genders, I have my own theories on all of this.

First of all an example that up to now I constantly shrugged off over the years: People tend to utter a certain surprise towards me when they learn I often travel unaccompanied. I love to be independent and make my plans alone instead of dragging people along. So even if I don’t work I often travel without company. For short travels and with a certain lack of money I don’t even mind hitchhiking, at least within Europe; for everywhere else I have watched too many horror movies. When I work I often get picked up by car from the train station or airport, especially at night—but this isn’t always the case. I don’t mind riding the train at night in unknown places. Most people don’t understand that. Most people can’t understand how I feel safe doing this. How I can feel comfortable even travelling alone in daylight.

Although I actually know these things, they didn’t come to mind until a friend reminded me. As a little girl you are told that it is unsafe for you to travel alone. As a woman this is confirmed. As a woman walking home alone at night you learn to change the side of the streets when a stranger approaches. You are trained early on to listen for footsteps behind you. Your kind is depicted in movies and books to be violated if no knight in shining armor appears early enough to save you. How safe can you feel alone on streets unknown to you then?

Where boys are brought up to be explorers, girls are brought up to need protection. Even if your parents don’t raise you in this direction, toys, advertisement, and children’s tv shows do. How many of the films that you watched as a child star a female hero leaving the safety of home going on a mission, or to just explore the world? I can’t think of any that were popular for my generation. The only stories where the woman or girl leaves home by her own decision are those where they do it for love.

For example, how many female characters are in *The Fellowship of the Ring*? On a side note: men are also trained from early on that it is adventurous to travel uncomfortably, whereas people seem to expect women to need it cozy. The shock on people’s faces when I tell them I slept for months on couches with only enough clothes to wash them once a week to be fresh again! If I hear the sentence “where is the rest of your luggage?” one more time! But it makes sense, given how much effort is put in by women to be considered “presentable” by society, as opposed to the effort men have to put into this. So it also might be more stressful for a woman to travel and still look “professional”.

This leads me to my next point. We are taught that love, the home, and a lot of emotional labor is what we are made for. In every mainstream movie or story from my childhood, regardless of how adventurous the heroine was, her adventures ended in the arms of a man. Even Mulan who subverted everything the man in her story thought a woman should be declines the option for a splendid career with the words “I have been away from home long enough.” The fact that she could have had her career and seen her family, well, that is another point and wouldn’t fit the princess themed message.

There is a certain idea in society, that a woman’s duties are to the family and are far more important than the idea of a career. As much as we are educated and can break away from traditional rules in our looks, behaviours, and career choices, it still feels uncomfortable to “neglect” the people in our life. Although I would argue that most of us are brought up to communicate a lot – which are the positive aspects of classic gender roles in this case – and be able to be present and supporting even via phone and text, it seems like it is not enough to only take care from far away. It feels often like the lack of
physical presence is a cold shoulder towards our loved ones, especially our partners; I can see how this possibly stops women from leaving home and conquering the world.

Hell, even though I did regular guest spots gaining loads of experience in being away, and had different relationships (as well as friends) that all were supportive of my travels, I still feel a bit guilty when I make new plans. I feel like a bad friend for not being at birthdays. I feel like a bad girlfriend because it requires planning when to hang out and what events to go to together. I feel bad towards the customers in my hometown because they have to wait for appointments and I often can only do troubleshooting via text and refer them to other studios when I am away. But all of this has to do with an idea ingrained in our brains by society that our role is to be nurturing and to always be “there”. Whereas we are trained through social constructs that it is fully acceptable, even a sign of great success, when a man doesn’t have time to make it to private events or to come home in time after work because of a busy schedule. A father working constantly and travelling for work? That is the way it is. But beware if a mother would consider a career that limits the time with her offspring that much, if she would put this responsibility on her partner’s shoulders! For a long while I thought it may be weird when I sometimes got asked “isn’t your boyfriend feeling bad?” or hear “well, you don’t show your boyfriend enough love when you are always travelling.” I wonder if men hear those things—but I highly doubt it.

The idea of having to be there, building and keeping up a comfortable and warm home, putting the responsibility of the world on our shoulders—that is something we put on ourselves, because we may think we have to. But in the end: we are the ones pressuring ourselves. There is no higher power deciding that we should. We do so because we believe we have to take care of the happiness of other people, but we should take care of ourselves first of all. Staying calm and in a fixed workspace is fine, nothing I would argue against. But if the feet are giddy and there are too many “buts” in our head, one should think about how important those are and where they come from.

Even if you know that you should be able to pursue your career as much as your male counterparts, it is hard to let go of the pressure and responsibility and I hope that a lot more of my sisters realize that it is worth it to let go. This is exactly what makes you special and amazing piercers: your ability to care. Fighting the obstacles. Taking the hard road of standing your ground in a (longtime) male-dominated field. Second guessing yourself and overcoming it. Making double the effort to show that you are doing a good job. Not having the option of letting your ego be bigger than your skills.

The women in our industry rock and should get ready to conquer the world.

**PAIGE E. TOTH**

Guest spotting is a great way to enhance your career. Traveling within your own state, out of state, and sometimes even out of country can really put some things in perspective. You are given the ability to see how other studios work, how clients from different areas respond, and to network with your colleagues and peers. It’s not uncommon to scroll through your social media and see multiple people announce their upcoming dates and numerous studios. However, whether you’ve noticed it or not, it’s somewhat rare to see a woman, or a non-male, piercer pop up on the circuit.

The first thing that most often pops into someone’s head when it comes to the topic of traveling piercers is a numbers game. Is there really such a large gap in the number of male and non-male piercers in our industry that it in turn affects the ratio of guest piercers? It’s no secret that this industry is still extremely male dominated, regardless of the amount of male versus non-male piercers. With the help of social media groups focused on book-
ing guest spots it’s very clear to see that there are more men putting themselves out there to travel to other studios. It’s also very clear to see that a large amount of people on the guest spot circuit are individuals with a lot of notoriety and experience guest spotting. That leaves the question of are women and non-male piercers just not as interested in guest spotting, is it a question of experience, friendships, or is it something deeper?

Over the last couple of years the industry has seen a vast amount of information come forward about predatory behaviour or other types of harassment. The small amount of what has made it to the public eye of the industry is nothing when compared to the shared experiences between colleagues and peers behind the safety of closed doors. With all of this comes a real fear for many of us. We’ve all heard stories of women and other individuals instinctually placing their car keys between their knuckles while walking down the road, maybe paired with the finger on the trigger of the pepper spray in the pocket of their jacket. When it comes to guest spotting, it can be scary. Often times you’re traveling alone, not really knowing the people you’re working with, not really knowing the people who’s couch you’re sleeping on. If you flew to your guest spot you can be without a car or an escape route if things go south and you start to feel uncomfortable or in danger. For some this just isn’t a risk they are willing to take.

There’s no direct answer as to why the ratio of male and non-male guest piercers is so skewed in one direction. The only thing we can do is realize and understand the potential reasons and continue to work to make this industry as inclusive and safe as possible. There are an immeasurable amount of amazing individuals in this industry that far outweigh the bad apples. With awareness, support, and the sharing of information we can create the industry we want, and the industry we deserve.

TARYN DAHLGREN

When I made the decision to quit my studio, pack up my life into a friend’s closet, and hit the road to travel and pierce, I was terrified. Probably more terrified than I’ve ever been in my life about anything. But I was coming up on my eighth year of piercing and I figured now was the time to do what I always wanted to do, and that was to see the world. Two adventure-filled years later, here I am, a little more wise about life, piercing in general, and a whole hell of a lot happier. I’ve also found a niche with other traveling piercers who feel the same way I do about the whole thing. It’s a rad life. I was asked a good question recently though and that was “why do you think there are so few female traveling piercers?” I won’t lie. At first, my mind went blank. I felt like there were so many of us. But then I realized that really, we are few and far between and that got me to thinking. Why?

Well, I racked my brain trying to figure it out. I came up with some negatives of course. Women shouldn’t travel alone because it’s scary (heads up, it’s not). Women are matriarchs of their households and can’t be gone for long, etc. And then it hit me out of nowhere. Female piercers are too busy holding it down in this industry to be traveling piercers. Now, more than ever, there are so many amazing, talented ladies who are running the show! There are some incredible studios popping up all over the place that are owned and/or run by badass women. Women who are holding their noses to the grindstone with a vengeance, sometimes juggling a family in there too, and unfortunately, that doesn’t leave much time for traveling to do guest spots.

But is that really a bad thing? Absolutely not. Watching my female friends and peers rock this industry down to its core is inspiring on a whole other level. So, while we have a bunch of different angles to consider (ha, angles. See what I did there?), we should focus on the fact that we’ve got some fierce women piercers who are changing the face of who we are and what we do; they’re simply too busy to travel. For now.
WOMEN OF OUR INDUSTRY

WOMEN IN PIERCING
A Perspective on Role Models

CHARLIE LeBEAU
Board Member of UKAPP

The terms “women,” “woman,” and “female” in this article are used to represent all binary and non-binary women, regardless of size, shape, race, and religion.

Personally, I can count on one hand the female role models I had growing up. I don’t just mean in relation to my career, I mean in general. I had my mother, Debbie Harry of Blondie, and Princess Leia as my sole inspirations; although each are wonderful in their own right, my mother was really the only one who could provide me any reasonable advice. So when it came to choosing a career path, I knew I didn’t want to be a mother. I also couldn’t be the General of the Resistance (I’m still holding out hope for that one). So instead I chose to become a rock star. Clearly, that worked out exactly as planned.

It was during this era of my life, that I discovered more and more about body piercing. As I immersed myself into the music scene, I came to realize an abundance of crossover with the piercing industry. At this point, I already had begun to get pierced and had shown an interest in modification, but it was only by throwing myself into another interest that it became a passion. I hunted out my local studio and hassled them for months, until they agreed to take me on as an apprentice.

I bring this all up not for my own trip down memory lane, but because I became aware as I started my apprenticeship, how few female role models there were in my life. My mentor was male, my college lecturers were mostly male, I was one of three women on my music course, and almost none of the music I listened to was sung or played by women. This, I realised, was a problem.

The piercing industry owes its debts to many incredible piercers, male and female, and it would be brash to suggest that it was ever actively anti-women, but the building blocks of piercing as a business and industry were male dominated. This is not necessarily a negative observation, merely that this is still a young world for my generation and it helped me come to terms with the fact that we are still finding our feet within the industry. We are still waiting to become role models for the next generation of Debbie Harry and Elayne Angel wannabes.

I’ve been lucky in many of my personal experiences. I’ve not had many issues with harassment, negative work environments, or workplace bullying due to my gender. I know this is far from the case for the vast majority of women who continually worry between going to work or not being able to pay the bills. Or alternatively being threatened with career ending slander should
they dare tell anyone about what is really going on. If you think it’s unnecessary for women to want their own personal space, then you haven’t been paying attention.

Recent movement within western society has lead to many industries “outing” their former heroes—something a lot of women would all agree is a long time coming—and the piercing industry isn’t an exception. With this newfound recognition of the female voice comes a responsibility from all genders, to leave that space to be filled by someone who is needed there. We can actively give women freedom to have discussions in forums without feeling the need to censor and rephrase their question. We can allow women the opportunity to lead more seminars without the fear of someone threatening to end our careers because we didn’t want to speak alongside them. We can allow more women to become Generals.

The women now leading the forefront of our industry have years of knowledge and experience, not only fighting for a hard earned spot in an incredibly selective occupation, but also doing so with little inspiration from our own to spur them on. I am fortunate to have an amazing support network now, filled with women who I look up to for their business acumen, their strength, their style, and their hard work to promote a new generation looking for role models of their own.

Mateo Way with Marina Müller doing the heavy lifting. Photo by Shanna Hitchens
Australia; a land stretching over 7.6 million square kilometres, famous for its blistering summers, beautiful beaches and wildlife that will kill you in every awful way conceivable. Born from this unique environment comes a well-known character, the true blue Aussie larrikin; a cultural icon who is tough, defiant, loud and enjoys poking fun at people. Although affectionately embraced by the international community and Australians alike, this stereotype has its pitfalls when trying to establish one's identity on an international, professional scale. The need to be loud, tough, boisterous and outrageous is often expected of those from Down Under and can unfortunately take precedence over the individual identity. While this persona definitely has its place in the Australian piercing community, there is a hive of quiet activity migrating from this previously dominating attitude and branching into a more delicate, refined, sophisticated and feminine creation. To understand how this evolution started to come about, we must first reflect on our origins of how Australian piercing began.

We speak with Bella van Nes of Piercing HQ, the continent’s original female piercer, whose piercing career started over 28 years ago in Australia’s first piercing studio, then located above a small adult bookstore in Melbourne:

“In the beginning] we saw a range of colourful characters. Folks didn’t care that the jewellery was plain; all they cared about was how it was going to make their sex life better. Fast forward to the navel piercing boom in the mid ‘90s and the need for prettier decorative jewellery styles. This was the beginning of having a piercing done for “the look” instead of “the feel” and when my need for more female staff became apparent; who were happy to spend time putting jewellery combinations together for clients and pouring over wonderful jewellery catalogues with them.”

This motivation for aesthetics over sensation sparked a ferocious growth for the Australian piercing community, jewellery manufacturers and women’s place in the industry.

The Australian piercing industry has evolved and expanded greatly in those 28 years to become what we see today. As of 2018, there are only 10 studios nation-wide operating at a standard internationally recognised as high end or reputable. Outside of that minority, there are over 400 piercing-related franchise businesses and innumerable tattoo studios and beauty salons offering piercing services. Considering there are a minimum of three to five piercers in each franchise, the ratio of franchise to studio piercers becomes greatly skewed. Due to this imbalance, a severe congestion is being seen, with a saturation of lower quality jewellery and more laxed standards becoming regarded as the norm. Another more intriguing outcome of the rise of franchise piercing has been the influx of female piercers being offered full time work in these ‘retail’ positions in precedence over males piercers for similar job opportunities.

In Australia, the retail and franchise industry is the third largest employer of women, after healthcare and education; this merging of retail franchises and piercing has opened the door for more women to be offered piercing positions than ever before. Prior to this pairing, the Australian piercing scene was almost entirely male dominated and with little to no job security, while franchises played a role in legitimising this career path by paying piercers a retail wage and steady employment. Although perhaps not an ideal
introduction to the industry, joining a franchised brand soon became a way to get your foot in the door as an apprentice or employee at a reputable studio. From these humble beginnings, female piercers were now in a position to step forward and put their foot on the career ladder within these retail chains and begin to network with high end studios and manufacturers like never before.

Synonymous with this saturation of female piercers nationally came the increased desire for ornate, couture, and more exclusive lines of jewellery, directly influenced by the world’s creative stylists; gone were the plain steel captive bead ring haydays of the ‘90s! On the runways of high end fashion influencers like House of Malakai, Alexander McQueen, Dior, and most noticeably Givenchy, we were seeing luxuriously stylised adornments and faux-piercings that soon proved to be ground-breaking in establishing the market for high end body jewellery in a modern Australian setting. Social and visual media greatly contributed in globalising these international piercing and jewellery trends, also allowing clients on our shores to make reference to the work of international industry members. It also increased a demand for unique pieces sculpted from precious metals and stones that had never before been seen here on such a scale or with such diversity.

This mainstreaming of elegance in piercing began to widen the original Australian piercee demographic; the demand for opulent, more feminine jewellery options lead to a shift in what clients expected to experience within a piercing studio, and their attitude towards the practitioners providing their services. Piercers collectively started hearing fewer statements about “putting a hole in” or “just being a piercer,” and were now being trusted to provide more of an artistic and immersive approach to the client's overall aesthetic and desires. This newfound expectation of a piercer’s artistic integrity to craft an ensemble designed to accentuate and flatter became more desirable than the previously normalised pierce-and-go experience, which gave rise to an opportunity for a deeper, more personal collaboration and interaction between piercer and piercee. This noticeable atmospheric softening and an openness to more emotive experiences is moving further away from the masculine stoic stereotype. Allowing for a synergy that can be a wholly rewarding, cathartic contact for both client and piercer by creating a positive, safe space to process the potentially serious emotions and events that brings patrons into our work spaces.

Introspectively, from our own personal experiences as younger women growing up in more rural Australia, the options presented for adult life are largely centered around hairdressing, beauty therapy, or child-rearing. To be a woman not actively pursuing those ambitions is to be an outlier from the norm of femininity, and as such, implies harshness, bullishness, and almost a certain masculinity. In addition, an interest or participation in an already taboo lifestyle, such as body art, modification, or the kink scene, and this misconception about who you are and your attitude as a woman is reinforced greatly in the eyes of others.

In Australia, the retail and franchise industry is the third largest employer of women, after healthcare and education; this merging of retail franchises and piercing has opened the door for more women to be offered piercing positions than ever before.
ELOISE RIDGEWELL
of The Piercing Urge, Melbourne, VIC:

My interest in the industry as a spectator was peaked in early adolescence by an urge for rebellion and a desire to be abrasive and obtuse. I grew up in a very conservative household by most standards, and saw body piercing as an outlet, so expressed my aggression by getting—wait for it—an awfully, AWFULLY executed 16ga septum piercing—somebody call Korn; their freak got off the leash. Retrospectively, that traumatic first piercing experience in the typical rough, dingy, bikeresque tattoo studio as a naive girl served as the catalyst that opened my eyes to the prospect of stepping into the industry as a practitioner, rather than purely an enthusiast. I entered the industry young, angry, and always on the defensive, but soon realised that I didn’t want to give my clientele the same experience that I had received, which was largely regarded as the norm for the area I lived and worked in at the time.

Soon enough, the scary outfits turned into soft colours and floral skirts, and the “fuck you” attitude softened into something much more truthful and authentic to who I am. Around this time, I was lucky enough to connect with some incredibly strong female piercers on the Australasian scene, Cherry Sutherland and Kylie Garth, and was offered a position with one of the most established high end studios in the country, The Piercing Urge, which has been in operation in Melbourne since 1991. I am eternally grateful to my employer and owner of The Piercing Urge, Peter Sheringham, for providing me with the platform, support and opportunity to be able to step forward in this industry, as well as his acceptance of a more feminine touch in such a well-established kink-originated studio, in order to become inclusive and welcoming to a broader demographic.

Attending the Trauma Informed Modification and Grounding class, as well as taking part in the Women of Piercing roundtable discussion during the 2017 APP Conference really ignited a spark in terms of what kind of impact I wanted to have on my clients during my short amount of time with them. Being trusted by our clients, whether it be their faith in our professionalism, technical abilities, eye for design, or allowing us to assist in the reclamation of their body is an incredibly powerful thing, that I truly feel grateful for every single day. Becoming more in touch with my own femininity and softness has helped my work and client interactions infinitely; I’m noticing an overwhelmingly positive and fulfilling encounter for both parties in comparison to the more typical Aussie piercing attitude of “have a teaspoon of cement and harden up”. We as piercers are often therapists, healers, personal life coaches, cheerleaders, and caregivers, and I sought to create an inclusive, welcoming space, where people could feel free from the quick judgements and abrupt bedside
manner they may have been used to; where they could not only receive a traditional in-and-out piercing service, but also something more holistic and cathartic should they require that.

This newfound placidity has also opened many doors professionally, allowing me to connect with a much wider spectrum of piercing community members. Being able to attend my first APP Conference and meet the community’s strong female figures and industry’s foremothers, including Alicia Cardenas, Bethrah Szumski, and Kendra Jane (who is also the reason I am sitting here writing this article) was a profoundly humbling and inspiring experience. Brainstorming with Kylie Garth and Suzanne Hallett and birthing the concept for a now hugely successful industry group for women, gender non-conforming people, and trans folk, then forging meaningful connections with the beautiful people that are part of it has been one of the single most rewarding encounters of my life. There’s a real feeling of sisterhood, inclusivity and empowerment brewing both in our industry and societally at the moment, and I am so thankful to be a part of it.

KYLA SCRIVENER
of Sacred Art, Newcastle, NSW and APP Member:
I experienced one of the most powerful eureka moments of my life during the 2017 APP Conference. The incredibly well spoken John Johnson spoke of the “Life Piercer”. To paraphrase, he explained that we take the lessons our craft teaches which have an impact on our life forever. We see the world through a piercer’s eyes no matter where we are, inspiring the people who continue to be a piercer long after they have retired the needle. I have learnt some of my most important life lessons from this incredible art form, but none more than the ability to embrace my femininity and embrace my womanhood. The irony that I needed to learn this from men still makes me laugh quietly at the weird twists this universe throws our way.

I naturally fell into piercing at a time where to me it was still a way to ruffle society’s feathers. If it was large, impressive, shocking, or garish then I wanted it pierced and I wanted it as offensive as possible because to me that was tough and that’s all I knew. Fast forward to 2015 when I was offered a position at Sacred Art in Newcastle, New South Wales where APP Member Mick Swan ran things a little differently to what I was used to. Mick had created an atmosphere that was calm, gentle, inviting, and boutique. His prime focus was to establish an environment where his mother and sister could visit and feel safe and comfortable. The confronting mohawk, black metal band shirts, and obnoxious choice in piercing jewellery that once comforted me made no sense in my new found environment.

The demographic I was now piercing were women between the ages of 18—45, from a middle to high socio-economic demographic, who wanted delicate gold ends with precious stones.

The confronting attitude and attire had to go, because selling diamonds and presenting myself this way was an uphill battle. This small change pushed me to soften my look and find a more female friendly identity. With mostly female clients, I was finding that I was constantly surrounded by these women, who all had stories to tell and that room would become a safe confession of catharsis, adornment, and human connection that I had never experienced before. Then the emotional bomb of the incredible “Mod-
"ify Your Story" by Jaymes Lombardi hit me; his words of you being a guide to these people and that “everything you do, revolves around the stories we tell” resonate with me to this day. This is the third male in this story to make me realise that I was put on this earth to create, heal, celebrate, and mentor. These people wanted to create a moment, to heal or celebrate that memory or chapter in their life and to be guided through it in the nicest and safest way possible. To be able to be this person, I had to tap into that innate feminine side of myself because my masculine side just could not connect. These tiny changes planted seeds that now allowed me to really honour the clients I was so lucky to be surrounded by and finally allowed me the space to embrace that side of myself which never felt comfortable before.

While the metaphorical cauldron of a feminine energy is bubbling over internally, Australia is starting to see an awakening in a more soft-handed and delicate approach to piercing as a result. This newly allowed artistic freedom presents an opportunity to cultivate an immersive atmosphere of safety and beauty by utilising scent, sound, and design both personally and in the aesthetics of your studio to appeal to your client base. By doing this, two high end studios can create an entirely unique experience for their clientele, even though they may well provide the exact same services with the exact same jewellery. Clients are also becoming much more involved in the process of seeking out artists who compliment their jewellery and design choices, like they would if they were researching a particular style of tattooing. You no longer go to a piercer just to get a piercing, but rather for an overall experience, and our attitudes must reflect this.

Although the industry at large is becoming more multi-faceted, progressive, and gender-diverse than ever, the final shifts of societal norms still need to occur to be completely inclusive nationwide. The distribution of piercing positions in terms of binary gender is relatively even in Australia, however the societal norm of what is acceptable and expected from each role is not. Gloria Steinem quotes, “women are always saying, ‘we can do anything that men can do’ but men should be saying, ‘we can do anything that women can do.’” The final frontiers of Australian piercing need to see the barriers of stereotypical masculinity receding so that more male piercers are able to connect on a deep and interpersonal level also without the fear of not being a ‘bloke’. As Australian writer and comedian Patrick Marlborough quotes, “our national image of manliness is obsolete, and it’s killing us”. With this feminine piercing renaissance at its peak, hopefully we will see more men allowed to be able to shed the weight of toxic masculinity and embrace their feminine side within the industry, and encourage more women to be present in the dialogue without feeling the need to be loud or aggressive to be heard.

“Be soft for the sake of every hard heart; show them with every move of your body that gentle does not mean weak.”

—Emma Bleker
When I was asked to write about the women in the industry, I always think of the same small group of badass women that I have seen at Conference time and time again. The sometimes quiet, but fierce warriors; small business owners who paved the path for all those who came after. When I think about the world of female practitioners, there are still only a handful. And, of course, I think of Christiane from Pinpoint Piercing. Christiane has been a powerhouse of inspiration from Oslo, Norway. I got a chance to ask her a few questions and get to know her a little better. And find out more about what she is up to.

**Alicia:** Can you please tell us a little bit about yourself. Who are you and how long have you been a professional body artist?

**Christiane:** I'm Christiane Løfblad, and I'm the owner of Pinpoint Piercing in Oslo. I've been piercing professionally since '94, and been doing scarification since around '03. I'm currently piercing about three days a week, and do administrative work the rest. I was co-running Wings of Desire Suspension Team for around ten years, but have more or less retired from body suspension due to burn-out. In my spare time I try to find a balance between physical training (mainly pi-
lates and yoga) and socializing with friends, and I also make lamp shades from x-rays (SU KL lamps).

Alicia: How did you get your start in the industry? Did you have a formal apprenticeship?

Christiane: I spent my late teens traveling around Europe in squatted houses, and was already piercing myself with various instruments. My first visit to a real piercing shop was at the Reeperbahn in Hamburg around ’92 or ’93. My friend and I wanted to get our navels pierced and I actually remember asking the staff member who served us “why is it so expensive?” Ha ha! So when I have these eye-roll encounters with young people today I try to be a bit more understanding and remember where I came from myself.

I moved back to Oslo in ’94, and the first piercing-only shop had opened there, in the basement of an established tattoo shop. I quickly became a very regular customer, and after some months I was offered a position at this shop. My training was very simple; I would not call it an apprenticeship. Definitely not an ideal situation, but at the time I think this was a fairly common way to learn our trade. Around ’96 a colleague and I went to London for a week to guest spot at Cold Steel, it was quite the eye opener for me to see how a “real” shop was doing things. And in ’99 I moved to Copenhagen and worked for a while at Gorlubb, which was a bit of a turning point. It was the first “good” shop I worked at on a regular basis, and I improved a lot with my time there (thanks, Jack Rubini!).

Alicia: What was the industry like when you first started? How has it changed? Good or bad.

Christiane: When I’m asked how I think the industry has changed over the twenty-some years I’ve been in it, I can’t help but think more of how I’ve changed myself. So I’ll try to put aside my subjective perception.

Piercing in Oslo has always been a commercial thing, from the nineties when we were doing navels and tongues all day, up until today when it’s ear piercings with cute gold pieces. Back in the day, neither our customers nor ourselves were as focused on quality jewelry as we are today, but I feel in general the customer base in my area is and has been conscious about getting the good stuff. So in a way I’m not sure there’s been so much actual change, rather just a shift in trends. Vanity will never go out of fashion; it’s a fundamental characteristic in humans to decorate our bodies to express who we are.

As for the industry itself, for me I see a lot more pressure from our peers to excel. Elitism is not necessarily a bad thing - I’ve always believed in striving to improve and get more knowledge - but I don’t remember this being such an omnipresent thing before the internet became so influential for all of us. Sometimes I feel it’s getting a bit out of hand, and can be a bit excluding.

Alicia: What is your experience about being a women in the industry? Has it been easier or harder? What are some of the challenges you have faced?

Christiane: Every now and then I get asked how it is and has been to be a woman in the industry, and can’t say I have much to say in that matter. I don’t feel I’ve been discriminated or in other ways had a hard time because of my gender. Maybe I’m just fortunate to live in a country and continent where there are a lot of females in the industry, or I’m totally oblivious to any gender negativity taking place. Either way, I don’t give it much focus.

Alicia: How long have you owned your studio? How did it begin?

Christiane: Towards the end of my twenties I was again living abroad, and when I moved back in ’02 I started working at Pinpoint (the shop was originally opened in ’98 by two former colleagues of mine; Runar Jensen and Knut Kvernvold). After a few years I was offered the chance to buy the shop. Although at first I was a bit reluctant to face the responsibility, my boyfriend at the time quickly convinced me that I would be foolish to decline the offer (thank you, Håvve!) At first I was the only person working the shop, but slowly there was need for more help. We now have two full time piercers, one regular guest piercer, one apprentice, two counter staff, and one packing help.

Alicia: What would be your advice to someone starting off as a new business owner?
Christiane: To new shop owners these days I have just my subjective advise to start small and work you way up, because I don’t think I could have done it any other way. Think thoroughly through what is absolutely essential to invest in, and separate it from what would be nice to have, but can also be upgraded later. Always work to the best of your ability, but also strive to improve. I think that’s the essence of it, really.

Alicia: Who are your professional and personal influences?

Christiane: I’m a great admirer of experience and do look up to those in our industry who have been in it for decades and still have the same passion for the work and the drive to share the knowledge (hi, Alicia and Elayne! And all you others!) That said, I think I might get the most influence from those in my closer proximity. Our head piercer Sala who’s been with us for six years now is a great motivator to me to keep on improving, as are the rest of the staff who all see the shop as their own. It’s very inspiring to work with a crew who’s so passionately into their trade, and I’m very proud of all of them.

Alicia: What is your favorite part about this job?

Christiane: There are many favourite parts of my job because it depends so much on my mood. Somedays I love doing paperwork and orders and don’t have energy to deal with customers at all. And other days I can’t think of papers and just want to do the craft part. But one part of the job I get a lot from is witnessing the appreciation of some of the customers when they see their new piercing(s). I know how good I can feel sometimes when getting new work done myself, and it gives me a good feeling to be the one helping them to achieve that feeling. In moments when I feel my job is superficial in relevance to people who work with helping those in need, I remind myself that I also manage to evoke good feeling in a lot of people.

Alicia: If there was one thing you could change about our industry what would it be?

Christiane: I’m not sure I have much desire to change the industry. Of course I’d wish for a general higher level of standards, but I think in Oslo and Norway this level is fairly ok compared to a lot of other countries where price wars play a huge influence on what direction a lot of the shops take. In any line of work there will always be contributors who are more concerned with making a quick buck than having good work ethics; this is inevitable. I’d rather put the effort into educating our customers so they make the right choices for their body adornments, than letting the lack of work ethics of some of these contributors get to me.

Alicia: What are your plans for the next 5 yrs? 10 yrs? How do you create balance in your work and personal life?

Christiane: I’ve never been one for having long term plans; I tend to lay the rails while the train is running, so to speak. These last years I have been cutting back on serving customers so I have more time for all the admin work, and it’s likely that the admin duties will take an even bigger part in the future. But I have noticed that I need to pierce on a regular basis, so I need to reserve a few days a week for this. Luckily I have an amazing staff that helps also with some of the admin work, so the responsibility is not solely on me. Learning to delegate has been important for me to achieve a balance, and I’m still learning! I was recently very close to burning out, so I’ve become very conscious about not over stretching myself. Running the shop entirely on my own in the beginning was definitely a useful experience, but I also taught myself that it’s expected to work long hours and always be on duty. It’s hard to unlearn this, but I feel I’m on the right path.

Alicia: Thank you, Christiane. We appreciate you taking the time to answer my questions. You are a continued inspiration.
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JAMES WEBER, Former President, Association of Professional Piercers
One would think that a neck piercing in the 1930s would be the most surprising detail of any woman’s life, but not for our Piercing Pioneer, Georgia Perkins, a.k.a. Mrs. Jake Hamon.

Georgia was born in Kansas, where she met her husband Jacob Louis Hamon, aka Jake. After Jake obtained a law degree, the couple moved to Oklahoma. In 1909, they had two children, Jake Jr. and Olive Belle.

Jake senior was a risk-taking, young Republican, who speculated on oil and railroads, both of which paid off, substantially. He became known as “The Oil King of Oklahoma.” Jake even brokered a deal to build a railroad with the famed circus entrepreneur, John Rigley.

From historical records, Jake’s character appears shady while he was the attorney general of Oklahoma. Rumors of corruption marred his political career from the beginning. Allegedly, he extorted gamblers on his road to building wealth and power. Soon after while lobbying in Washington, D.C., he was accused of attempting to bribe a Senator. By far, the most scandalous charges against him were for buying votes for Warren G. Harding’s nomination as the Republican party presidential candidate. The estimates for payouts ranged from $250,000 to $1,000,000 (approximately $3 to 12 million in today’s dollars). The backroom dealings were rumored to provide Jake and his cronies exclusive access to the oil rich fields of Teapot Dome, Wyoming. The ensuing congressional investigation would forever tarnish the legacies of Jake Hamon and President Harding.

Hard to believe, but the Hamons’ personal lives were even more outrageous! At 40, Jake met the young Clara Belle Smith. The two fell in love. Reports remain contradictory for which or if both Hamons couldn’t stomach a ruinous divorce, so they remained married. Jake put his mistress through school and then hired her on as his personal secretary. To make hotel stays less problematic, Jake paid $10,000 to his nephew to marry Clara so that she could legally obtain the last name Hamon. Despite these great lengths for appearances, the affair was a poorly kept secret.

As fate would have it, Georgia’s cousin was the wife of then presidential hopeful, Warren Harding. As mentioned previously, Jake paid a considerable sum to buy the nomination for Harding to go on to win the presidency. Once elected and with pressure from his wife, President Harding, or most
THE HAMON CASE

THE TRAGEDY—A man was shot in the Hamon Hotel, Ardmore, Okla., Nov. 21, 1920. He died several days later. The man was a millionaire and had a wife and five children. He was found shot in his room. The man was identified as J. Hamon, a well-known banker.

THE VICTIM—The victim was a 17-year-old girl, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. Hamon. She was shot in the back of the neck and died at the scene. The girl was a student at the local high school.

THE ACCUSED—Clara Smith, the maid of the hotel, was arrested and charged with murder. She admitted to being in the room at the time of the shooting but denied any involvement in the killing.

THE MANY FAMILY—The many who were present at the scene included the victims' family, the hotel staff, and several other guests.

DROPS OF TEARS OF EXHILITATION

Mr. and Mrs. J. Hamon were overcome with grief when they saw their daughter lying on the floor. They had just received word that their son was alive after being missing for several days.

THE ESTATE OF A MILLION

The estate of the murdered man was left to his wife and children. The total value was estimated to be over a million dollars.

CARROLL IS CHOSEN TO HEAD ST. PETER'S BASEBALL GROUP

Senator Carroll has been chosen to head the new group that will be responsible for the construction of a new baseball stadium in the city. The group has been formed to raise funds for the project.

SENATE PUTS D. K. ON NAMES

The Senate has put the name of D. K. on the list of those who have been accused of embezzlement.

THREE MIAMI MEN RESCUED

Three men were rescued from the water after their boat capsized while out on a fishing trip. They were taken to the hospital for treatment.

EFFORT FAILS TO END STRIKE

The strike at the local steel mill has continued for several weeks without any resolution. The workers have refused to return to work until their demands are met.

STOLEN BOX LOWER P.

A box containing valuable items was stolen from the lower part of the city. The police are investigating the case.

JAPAN'S ANSWER TO YAP NOTE LEAVES SITUATION UNCHANGED

Japan has refused to accept the Yap note, which was issued by the United States as a means of payment for goods.

The Hamon Triangle

The Hamon family was known for their wealth and influence in the community. They were involved in various business ventures and were active in the community.
likely Harding’s wife, would not accept Jake’s mistress in Washington. Jake would have to reconcile with his legal wife. It’s reported that Jake and Clara were known for drunken arguments. Their tensions crescendoed on November 21, 1920, in Ardmore, Oklahoma. Clara shot Jake in the liver. He died five days later. Jake’s story flip-flopped from self-inflicted to a desperate plea for leniency for Clara. The murder trial became national headline news followed around the country. Despite Georgia’s damning testimony and demands for the electric chair, Clara was acquitted on self-defense. One of Clara’s legal defense team was the twin brother of the judge! Obviously, the soundness of the jury’s verdict has been debated.
Despite the controversy, our piercing pioneer Georgia Perkins, the now widower Mrs. Jake Hamon, bounced back! In 1922, our protagonist married a wealthy Chicago banker, only to divorce him a year later. The cause given was domestic cruelty. Reportedly, her new husband “practiced his ju-jitsu” skills on his wife.

After her second marriage, Georgia started playing ranked golf in the nascent women’s tournaments. At this time, there were no “pro” females, the prizes were strictly honorary. Once cash was included, winnings still remained much lower than men’s. Even so, Georgia’s prowess on the green would keep her name in regional papers for most of the next de-

Above, excerpt from the book African Giant, pre-1955 photo of Men of Mungonge Dance by Rehna Cloete near Kwango Congo. This is the type of image that might have inspired Mrs. Hamon. Left, “Madison” piercing with monofilament weed eater line as a retainer, photo c. early 1990s.
cad, albeit, not headlining or sensational.

After the criminal and political scandals of the 1920s, much less information is available for Mrs. Jake Hamon. We know she traveled exclusively, including parts of Africa. However, it remains elusive from which peoples she drew inspiration for her throat pin piercing.

Then Ripley’s strange cartoon depicting “Mrs. Jake Hamon” with a throat piercing published in national syndication, December 15, 1933. As was the custom with the Ripley’s series, the following day, they released the details of whatever strange custom appeared the previous day.

So should this Ripley’s explanation be taken at face value? Did this throat pin really serve as a memorial to Jake Hamon, the selfish, politically corrupt, drunken, and child-abandoning adulterer?

I’ve been unable to find any additional representation of her piercing or information on her motivation or background story of the peoples she witnessed in Africa. Unfortunately, the Hamon Library in Dallas says they have no personal papers or letters for the first Mrs. Jake Hamon.

Forgive my digression, but this family’s colorfulness doesn’t quit yet.

Georgia’s son Jake Jr. went on to marry a beautiful young woman named Nancy, an aspiring actress who had one role in a movie with Mae West, The Heat’s On. This marriage began the illustrious escapades of the second “Mrs. Jake Hamon.”

The couple were faithful Republican supporters and hobnobbed with presidents such as Johnson and the first Bush. After her husband’s passing, Nancy became a fabulously wealthy widower worth hundreds of millions. She is rumored to have said she wanted to live her life in such a fashion that her last check would bounce. She was a well-documented Dallas socialite, philanthropically shaping the city’s institutions, while throwing extravagant theme parties with elephants and performers such as Louis Armstrong. Of particular interest, she had lost her finger in a blender accident. Carlo Rambaldi, the special effects artist for E.T., personally created her prosthetic finger with a graceful arc for cocktail parties.

I couldn’t make this shit up.

“Vampire Bite” piercings
Thank you for celebrating the women of the piercing industry with us. We know that there are many more influential women that have greatly shaped our role in the industry. We hope that you will join us in Issue 85: Our History and Where We Came From. (winter, 2018) where we will look at some more of the most influential pioneers of our industry, such as Elayne Angel, Jim Ward, and Fakir.
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