



Inked Up

Tattoo artist **KAT VON D** on her two greatest loves: tattoos and family

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I was born in Mexico, but I moved to the United States when I was four years old. I have really faint memories of Mexico, but I do remember not having any electricity and taking baths in plastic buckets. For my birthday last year I went back to the town where I was born. I hadn't been back there for eleven years. It's funny to think that the dirt roads that seemed so huge to me as a kid look like little tiny cobblestone driveways to me now. My parents are originally from Argentina, but around the time I was born, they were missionaries for the church. My dad, who was a doctor, and my mom, traveled throughout Mexico building clinics in the most needy areas.

My family is the most important thing to me. They are all so unique and amazing. My grandmother was a pretty famous German pianist back in the 20s, and she had an obsession with Beethoven. She introduced me to the piano when I was six, and now I have an obsession with Beethoven too. At my new shop High Voltage in Los Angeles, in my private room, I have a homage to him. I'm not sure if I'll ever be as good as my grandmother, but we bonded over the piano and now I have a collection of pianos that I play everyday. Classical music is just one of my loves though, I'll always be a punk rocker at heart. Tattooing is like the punk rock version of being an artist. And one of the coolest parts about it is that its very music driven, and music is my life.

"TATTOOING IS LIKE THE punk rock VERSION OF BEING AN ARTIST."



I was always around art, and to me tattoos were only natural. It was something that I became really interested in at an early age. I started tattooing when I was 14, and worked at my first shop at 16. But at that time I was surrounded by a lot of "ghetto" tattoos. It was the punk rock scene, and the majority of us were underage, so for us it wasn't even about how good the tattoo was, it was just about having them. My arms were filled up with crappy tattoos. By the time I got really into it, I realized what a good tattoo should and can look like, so years later I removed everything by laser because they were so poorly executed. I couldn't even cover them up.

My parents were pretty upset about my first tattoo, but you have to understand, they are a very conservative old school Latin couple. They didn't have sex before marriage, have never had a cigarette, and think that marijuana and heroin are the same thing. So for me to get tattooed was really hard for them. They believed the stereotype that if you were tattooed, you were either a prostitute, a drug addict, a prisoner or a biker. So even though my parents have always been supportive of my artwork, when I first started tattooing and bringing my friends home, they couldn't believe it. They would say "Wow, you made that out of little dots?" They were okay with the idea of me tattooing other people, but the minute I got tattooed they started bugging out. At first I hid my tattoos from them, but I love tattoos so much, to me it's a lifestyle, so I decided I'll just wear my passion on my sleeve. Now I have so many tattoos they don't even notice when I get a new one.

I was 22 when I got married. My parents were really upset. My dad felt like my husband was a coward for not asking him for my hand in marriage. To make it all more complicated, he was my first American boyfriend. I'd always dated Latin boys, and my mom doesn't speak English that well so it was totally a cultural shock for them. My husband Oliver is Texan, a sixth or seventh generation Texan to boot, so he 'tawks like *thiiiis!* My parent's reaction was 'Ay Katie, que estas haciendo?' But once they got to know Oliver, they loved him. After a while all they could say was 'Katie you just better not mess this one up!' I think that marrying Oliver was like getting my first tattoo. At first my parents bitched about them, but now they can't picture me without them.