My math teacher turns around to write an equation on the board and a sun pokes out from the collar of her shirt. A Starbucks barista hands me my drink with a hand adorned by a small music note. Where I work, a customer hands me her credit card wearing a permanent flower bracelet. Every day, I am on a scavenger hunt to find women with this kind of permanent art. I'm intrigued by the quotes, dates, symbols, and abstract shapes I see on people that I interact with daily. I've started to ask them questions, an informal interview, as an excuse to talk with these diverse women whose individuality continually inspires me. You can't usually ask the sorts of questions I have been asking and have the sorts of conversations I have been having, so I've created this project to make these kinds of encounters a bit more possible and acceptable.

There is no school assignment, no teacher to give me a grade, and no deadline. I don't have a concrete outcome in mind besides talking with a mix of interesting women with interesting tattoos. So far I've conducted fifteen interviews with a range of women from my hometown to Hawaii, teenagers to senior citizens, teachers to spiritual healers. The same set of questions has prompted interviews lasting less than twenty minutes and over two hours. I'm being told stories about deaths of a parent, struggles with cancer, coming out experiences, sexual assaults, and mental illnesses. All of these things that may be taboo in today's society, these women are quite literally wearing on their sleeves. I'm eager to continue these interviews in college and use all of the material I've gathered to show the world the strength and creativity of these wonderful women I've encountered.

I want to explore the art and stories behind the permanent transformations of personal landscapes. I attempt this by asking questions about why they decided to get their tattoos, how they were received in the workplace, the reactions from family and friends, and the tattoo's impact on their own femininity.

Through these simple questions, I happened upon much greater lessons regarding human interaction, diversity, and connectedness. In my first interview, a local businesswoman told me about her rocky relationship with her mother, her struggles with mental illness, and her friend in jail, within 45 minutes of meeting her and in the middle of a busy Starbucks. An artist educator I worked with told me that getting a tattoo "was like claiming a part of yourself and making it more visible and unavoidable." A model/homeopath said that having a tattoo is like "giving people a little clue about you." A psychologist shared how she wishes that she could turn her tattoos "on or off like a light switch to match different outfits and occasions." I've realized that tattoos show the complex relationship between the personal and the public (and how funny that can be when a Matisse cutout is thought to be phallic, or how a social worker's abstract doodle is interpreted as a tsunami of sticks, alien spaceship, and a billion other things by the children she works with).

I've learned so much about the art of storytelling and storytelling through art. I've strengthened relationships with people that had conventional roles in my life and created friendships with some unconventional characters. Most importantly, I've realized that with the willingness to explore a topic and the willingness to accept not knowing where it will go, an idea can become a substantive reality.