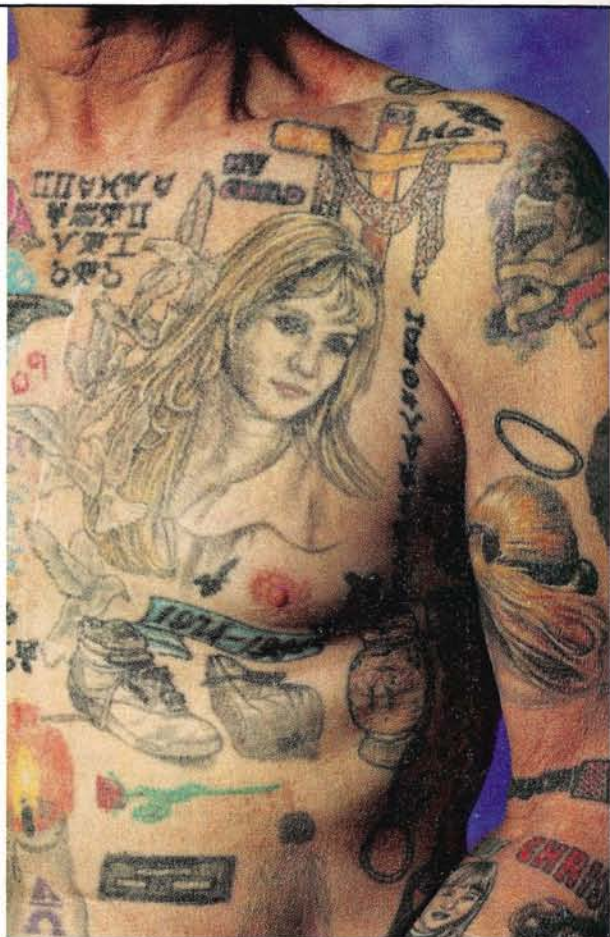
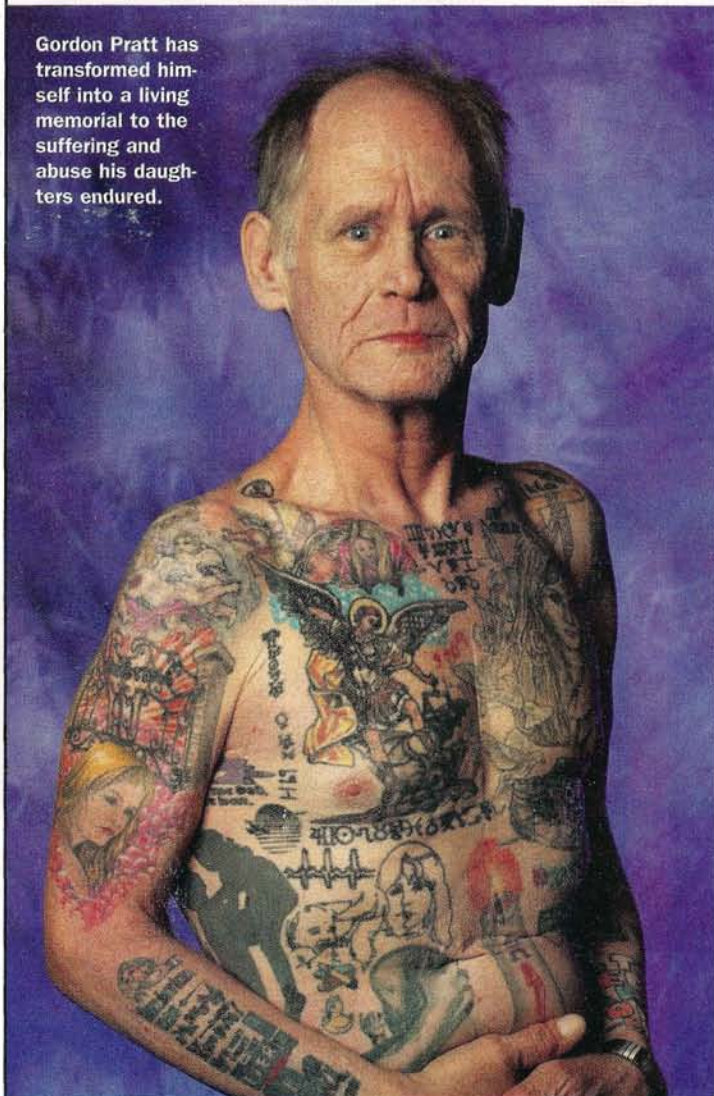


TATTOOS TELL A STORY OF ABUSE

Gordon Pratt has transformed himself into a living memorial to the suffering and abuse his daughters endured.



TATTOOS TELL A STORY OF ABUSE

BY TIM COLEMAN

PORTRAITS BY BERNARD CLARK



Gordon's beloved daughter and inspiration, Christina.

There can't be many stranger or sadder tattoos than those adorning the body of Gordon Pratt. The words and pictures depict the terrible saga of a Milwaukee father's grief, the loss of custody of his three daughters and a trail of systematic abuse. Today, only one of the daughters is alive. "Getting tattooed," he says, "was a way to make sure I'd never forget what my children went through—the living and tormenting hell with their mother."

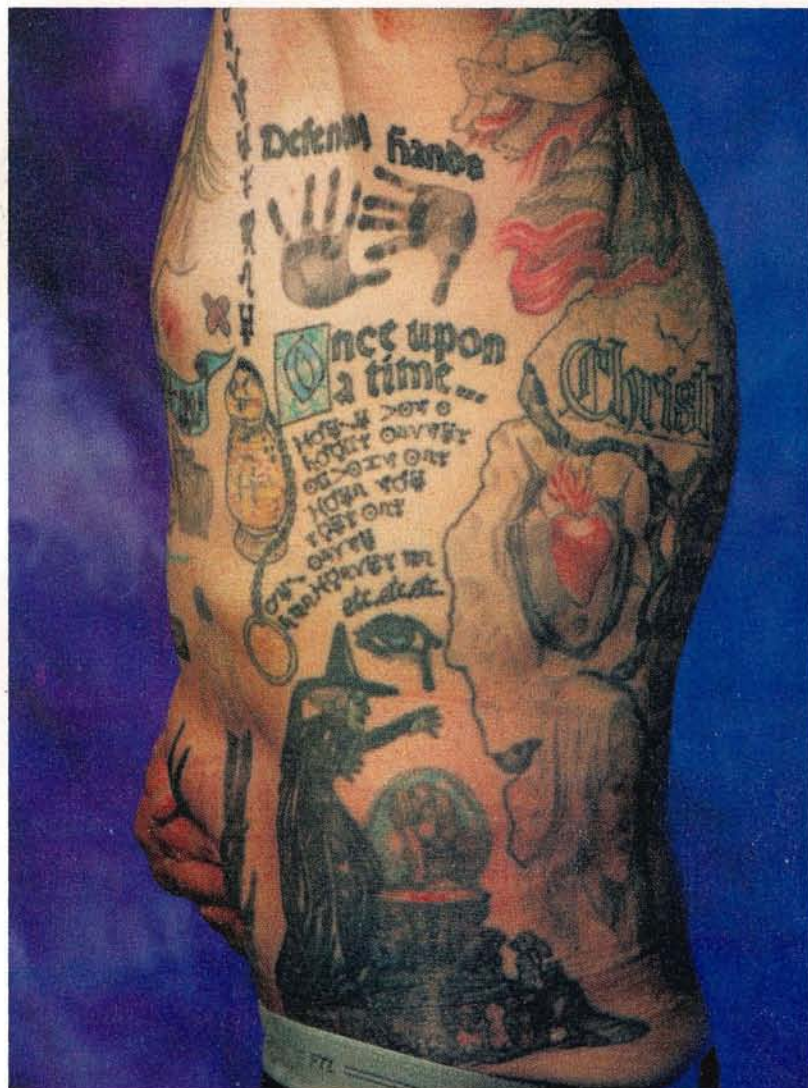
Leafing through the copious, illustrated binders that Pratt sent to SKIN&INK, it's clear that this poor man was driven to the limits of sanity. It is also clear that the child-protection system completely failed.

CHANNELING THE ANGER

Despite being repeatedly told by his daughter Christina that her mother and boyfriend were tormenting her, Pratt was unable to intervene, and his wife retained custody. How does a man deal with such agonizing torment and ensuing anger? Pratt's solution was to channel his rage onto his own body, tattooing both his back and chest with images that screamed to the world, "The system has failed me, and *you* need to know the truth."

In 1968, Pratt married his wife, Carol. It was the worst decision he ever made. During their 13 years of marriage, they had three daughters, Carlota, Christina and Ciprina. It was only after their divorce in 1981, when the courts awarded Carol custody of the children, that the abuse began. In his many pages of recollections and illustrations, Pratt catalogues the horrors that Carol and her new partner, David, meted out to Christina.

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Close-ups of his daughters' portraits on Gordon's forearms.



ABUSE AND DECEPTION

As well as abusing her children, Pratt's former wife, now remarried as Carol Spizzirri, has lied about her background. According to Pratt, she lied about having a college education, being trained as a nurse and having a Bachelor of Science in nursing. He also states that she perpetrated a scam on the state of Illinois by setting up a not-for-profit organization called the Save a Life Foundation (SALF), whose stated aim was to teach first aid to the nation's children. According to Pratt and a local TV news station, which investigated SALF, President and CEO Spizzirri's credentials are completely bogus.

Scamming the state of Illinois seems mild in comparison to the damage this woman has inflicted on her children and the pain and suffering Pratt has had to endure. In a statement to a court-appointed psychologist in 1985, Spizzirri admitted, "I sometimes sit at my kitchen table and plan out how I can hurt my children, because that is the only way I can hurt their dad. He loves them, but he doesn't love me anymore." The psychologist concluded that Spizzirri was not only a chronic child abuser, but also a pathological liar and a paranoid schizophrenic.

One of the tattoos at the top of Pratt's back is a painting by Michelangelo, a copy of God creating Adam, from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The figure of God points to an image of Christina, who is rendered as an angel.

THE FINAL CHAPTER

Perhaps the saddest chapter of this truly terrible story ended when, in 1992, Christina's troubled life finally came to an end. Intoxicated and not wearing a seatbelt, she accidentally lost control of her car, rolled it over and was flung onto the road. She died, about an hour later, in the hospital.

Not content with the suffering she had caused when Christina was alive, Pratt says, "Carol manipulated the circumstances of her daughter's death for financial gain. She falsely claimed," he asserts, "that Christina died on the highway and could have survived, if she had received emergency aid. She then used this bogus claim as a way of boosting funding for the Save a Life Foundation.

Perhaps Christina's haunting question tattooed on Pratt's back—the one which asks, "DAD, CAN MOM HURT ME ANYMORE?"—has now finally and fatally been answered.