

### The Honest Truth

It took years to convince my mother to get a mother-daughter tattoo. Finally, she gave in. When I turned eighteen, the legal tattoo age in Massachusetts, we got inked. We had the tattoos put on our feet, in script, very small. She got the word “Beyond...” and I got “...belief” because growing up I would always ask her if she loved me and her response would simply be, “beyond belief.” She had always despised tattoos, but she loved how ours came out. Despite her change of heart and love for our sentimental tats, after we got them, she told me, “It stops here”—there were to be no more body modifications.

Less than a year later, after a long day skiing in New Hampshire with my best friends, Kendra and Izzy, we found ourselves a little bored. My mom always hated when I drew on myself, but we didn’t have paper, so we didn’t have much of a choice. The more we doodled, the more we liked what we drew. When Izzy brought up the idea of getting her doodle permanently tattooed, Kendra and I looked at each other, smirked, looked back at Izzy, and then we all agreed.

On the way home the next day, we made a pit stop at Pino Brother’s tattoo shop in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It wasn’t exactly on the way home, and we didn’t exactly tell anyone. But we had our designs. After stopping at the bank, we were good to go.

On the drive home, while Kendra and Izzy admired their fresh ink, I started feeling guilty. The tattoo couldn’t be undone. My mom was going to be mad. She had made it clear to me that I was to get no more tattoos or piercings. However, like my other tattoo, this one was very small; rather narrow and only an inch and a half long, I designed the hamsa to show elegance in its detail, while serving its purpose—protection from evil. It was just a simple black outline with a speck of green that colored the “evil eye.” I could justify it. Couldn’t I?

Izzy and Kendra told me to keep it a secret from my mom because it was on the inside of my wrist and could be easily covered by a bracelet or a sleeve. “What she doesn’t know won’t kill her!” they told me. I wanted to agree, but that was not how I was raised; keeping secrets and lying to my parents was so “not me.”

Just because I’ve had an open relationship with my parents doesn’t mean I don’t know about lying. Kendra’s sister was a heroin addict. If there is one thing about addicts, it’s that they lie. She’d lie about where she was, what she was doing, and whom she was with. She lied to hide her addiction. She lied up until her death when everyone believed she had been sober. But that just wasn’t the truth. I’ve seen what lying and keeping secrets did to that family; they didn’t know how much trouble she was in and now they’ve lost her forever. Keeping secrets from people, especially loved ones, erodes relationships. By no means would I ever want to reap the consequences of dishonesty.

So when I walked into my house that night, I told my mom the truth. The whole reason why I wanted to get my first tattoo with my mom and why she actually went through with it was because of the relationship we share. It is built on love, trust, and honesty, and always has been. I have learned from our relationship that honesty results in trust. I figured she would find out eventually. If I just told her, though she might be mad initially, in the end, she would appreciate me coming forward with what I had been harboring as a secret.

I was right. When I told her where I had been that afternoon and showed her my wrist, she first shook her head with disappointment. Though she didn’t like that the tattoo was on my wrist, she was mainly upset that I disobeyed her. She expressed her disapproval as she called my dad on the phone to tell him what I had done. When my dad didn’t show much of a reaction, as it was a very small tattoo—and in my dad’s opinion, not that big of a deal—I think something bigger than the tattoo hit my mom. Sure, she would have preferred I didn’t get it. But just as I predicted, she was grateful that I had the decency to show her what I had done and explain my choice rather than

keep the secret. It only took her about three minutes to calm down. Then, she even told me she thought it was “kind of pretty.”

The truth is, it was not her approval I wanted. Though support would have been nice, what I needed that day—that moment—was to be on the same page as my mother. Whether we agreed or disagreed, or agreed to disagree, I needed to put it all on the table. There is no mother I would trade her for; there is no relationship stronger than ours. Our relationship is built on the core values she has instilled in me since I was old enough to know right from wrong. She has never made it hard to tell the truth and because of that, I’ve never felt I’ve had anything to hide. As I grew up, I cherished having her as my designated driver on nights I became too intoxicated to drive home from a house party in town. As opposed to some other moms around, it was *okay* to tell her where I was. It was *okay* to tell her I was drinking underage. She always came to my rescue. She has given me every reason to believe that there are benefits that come with honesty. For us, it is the benefit of a mother-daughter bond stronger than any friendship out there. I’d hope if there were ever something of greater severity, I’d be able to tell her without regret. She knows that when I tell her anything, I am telling her the honest truth. I never have to lie to her, for she will always love me—even after getting a second tattoo!