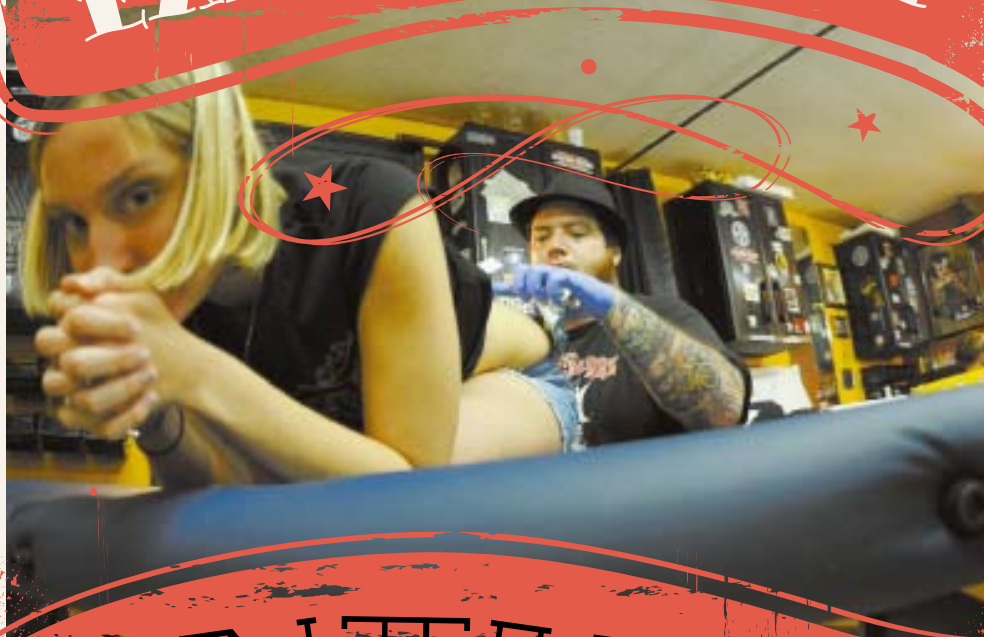


# A CLASSIC TATTOO EXPERIENCE AT



# ANTHEM

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As I waited in the front of Anthem Tattoo Parlor, flipping through magazines, the sound of buzzing tattoo machines resonated from the back. My adrenaline was rushing, my palms were sweating and my heart was pounding.

In about two hours, my body would be changed for the rest of my life, and I couldn't be more excited about it. I trusted someone that I'd only met one time before, to do a tattoo in a place I couldn't see – the lower left side of my back. If he made a mistake, I wouldn't be able to see him do it.

Lucky for me, Mike Mehaffey – my tattoo artist – had been tattooing on and off since he was 17 and professionally for the past four years. He's now 31 and one of the three owners of Anthem, which opened a year and a half ago. The other two owners and tattoo artists are Dave Kotinsley and Rob Barnes, who have been tattooing for about 10 years each.

"They were a huge part in my tattoo career," Mehaffey said. "I wouldn't be where I am without them."

I had come to Anthem a week earlier and made an appointment with Mehaffey for June 6. Although I came in with a design that I liked, there were a few things that I wanted to change to make it my own. Plus, Mehaffey said he would make it look more like a tattoo than a drawing. I left a \$50 deposit – to ensure that I was serious about getting it – and put aside another \$50 in my wallet for when the tattoo was finished.

Mehaffey said they get "burned" all the time by people who aren't serious. The deposit is to make sure that nobody is wasting anyone's time.

"We're off the beaten path," he said. "People who come in here are usually serious about getting a tattoo."

When my appointment finally came, my friend Amanda Kelecyc came along for support and to document the experience. Shortly after we got there, I turned to Kelecyc and told her half jokingly that if I passed out while getting tattooed to make sure Mehaffey kept tattooing. I laughed, but I was serious. I never pass out, and if I did for some reason, I didn't want to wake up with my tattoo unfinished.

Mehaffey said that with customers who seem nervous, he usually sets up everything – the ink, ink caps, alcohol, a soap mixture and the machine. He also puts barrier film on everything so it stays sanitized. – and then puts on a pair of joke glasses that make his eyes look big.

"I like to joke around to make people feel more comfortable," he said. "I'll usually grab the wrong arm with the glasses on, and then they'll laugh and not be so nervous anymore."

As I sat in Anthem, I became a bit uneasy. It wasn't that I was going to run out the door. I had wanted this tattoo, and it meant more to me than a rebellious mark on my body. It was more that I was excited to get it and was tired of waiting for what felt like an hour but in reality was only five minutes.

After sitting for a few minutes, I looked up at Mehaffey, and he nodded for me to come over and get started.

For anyone who doesn't know, the artist takes the design you want and turns it into a stencil – surgical dye on carbon paper – that can be transferred onto your skin. That way they have something to follow with the needle. It can be put on your skin more than once if you don't like the spot where it was placed, which is good for me, because I had Mehaffey move it three times.

When I saw what he had done to my design, I couldn't have been happier. It was everything that I wanted. He made it perfect.

By now you're probably wondering what exactly my tattoo is.

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— ALLISON CANDREVA





When I started getting tattoos, I promised myself that each one would mean more to me than just liking a design that I found on the shop's wall – these are called flashracks and are racks of designs on sheets of paper. Anthem doesn't have any. Mehaffey said they just didn't use them. "People would love the custom pieces a lot more," he said. "So we got rid of the flashracks."

I wanted each of my pieces to have a small story of their own. I got my first tattoo when I was 18. I was a musician back in high school and listening to music has always gotten me through a lot in my life. I couldn't find any designs that I liked, so I drew my own. It's nothing too crazy. It's just a 1 1/2-inch treble clef with three different music notes and three blue stars around it, along with some smaller stars. The theme of three notes and stars stands for me, my brother and my sister.

I found my new design last August. Yes, it was a year ago, but the best advice I've ever gotten about tattoos was to pick a design I liked and wait a year. If I still like it in a year, then I'll like it in 10 years.

The story of this tattoo is all about my older brother Josh. When I was 14 years old, he was killed in a motorcycle accident at the age of 23. No, I didn't get a motorcycle tattooed on my body. I decided on a lizard because of one of my fondest memories of him.

At one point when I was growing up, Josh had pet lizards in his room. I remember taking care of them when he would go away for the weekend. When I was younger, Josh wasn't exactly a lovey-dovey brother, and the few times he let me step foot in his room – which was off limits to everyone – let me see that he trusted me.

Why now? Well, my 21st birthday had just passed, and I felt it was time to get my second tattoo. I had been planning to get it for a while and decided that now was a better time than any to give myself the perfect gift.

Once I was happy with where the stencil was placed, it was time to begin. Mehaffey had the needle ready, and, at 8:25 p.m., the machine started buzzing. With a sharp tingle in my back, he started the black outline.

I really didn't think getting another tattoo would be so bad. I had gotten one before, and it didn't hurt at all. Well, I didn't take into account that the top part of the lizard was directly on a bone.

After about 20 minutes, the outline was done, and Mehaffey let me stand up and walk around before starting the color.

At 8:50 p.m., I sat back down to get the color added.

There wouldn't be many, only blue, green, and white and black for highlights and shading.

Some say the outline is the worst part, and after that is over you just wait for the color to be finished. I don't know what those people are on, but they are dead wrong.

The thing about coloring a tattoo is the artist has to go over the same spots a few times so the tattoo has some depth. Once again, I didn't take into account the placement of my tattoo, and the top part of the lizard was increasingly more painful than the bottom.

At one point during the shading, I had to have Mehaffey stop, so I could breathe for a minute.

I guess I would describe the "pain" as little electric shocks. Some shocks last longer than others, but either way, it's really about how long you can stand to be shocked. The longer the shock, the more actual pain you start to feel.

I tried to think of happy thoughts to take my mind off of the top part of my lizard, but I found myself thinking about school – about the weekend and the homework that I had to do before Monday. Not really something I would call happy thoughts. The shocks would bring me back to reality and away from homework. Then I started to think about my dog, which actually worked for a little while.

After 50 minutes, Mehaffey was almost finished. All that was left was to clean my tattoo with a soap mixture – which I used to think was the worst part, until I got this tattoo. It stung a little, but after it was clean and wrapped up, I was good to go. Or so I thought.

I managed to sit through the whole tattoo, color and all, with no problems. I even went to the mirror to take a look at the lovely new 4-inch addition to my body. Then, for some reason, I felt a bit faint. I didn't pass out or anything, and I don't know why it happened, but I had to sit for a minute and catch my bearings before I could walk out of Anthem.

I ended up being perfectly fine and even went to eat some pizza after.

Even though this experience was a bit more painful than my first tattoo, I've already started to look for my next couple of pieces. With its skilled artists and classic tattoo-shop atmosphere, I know that I would definitely come back to Anthem in the future.

For anyone who is considering going to Anthem, they're located at 102 S.W. Sixth St., or you could visit the Web site at [www.anthemtattoo.com](http://www.anthemtattoo.com).