

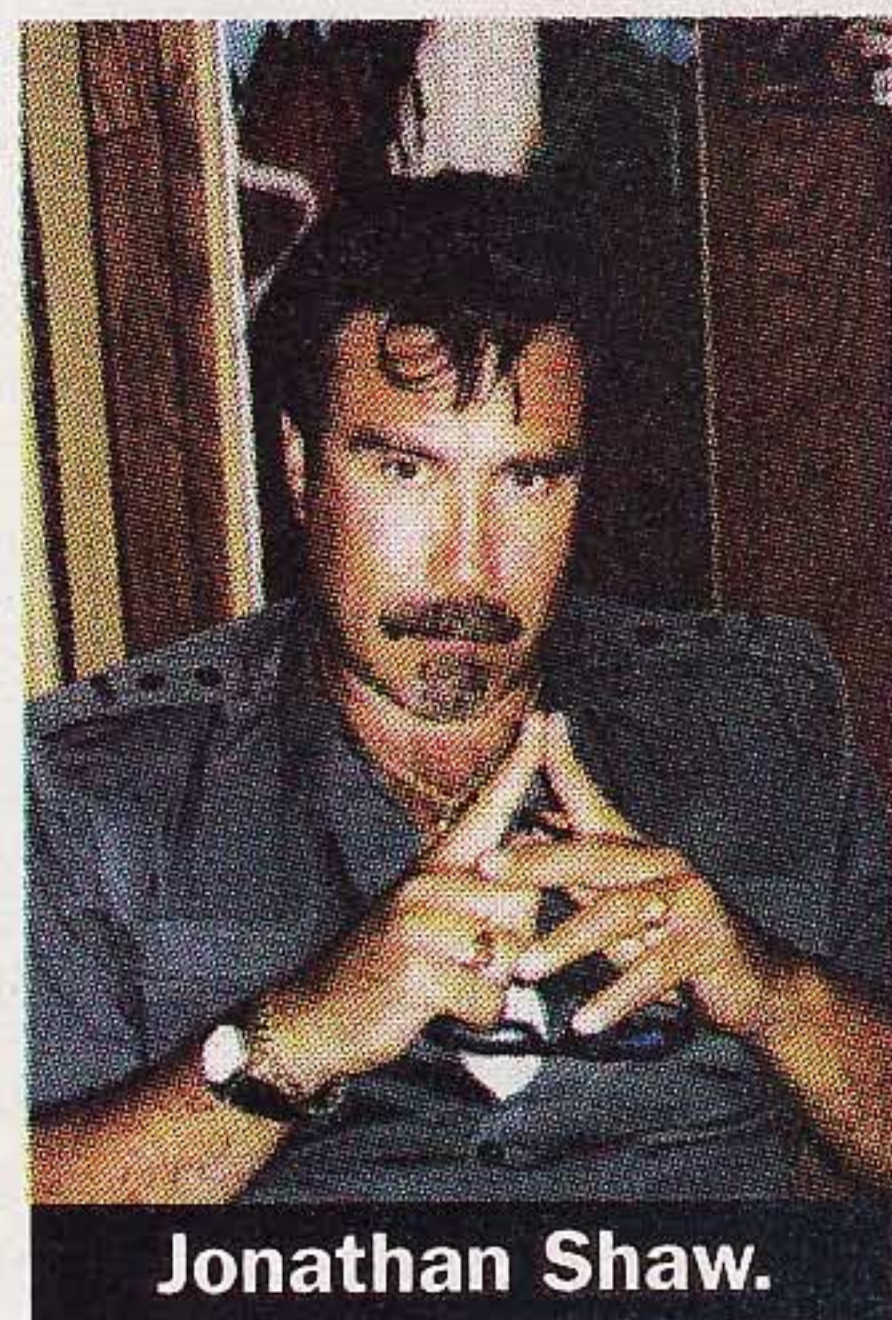
PUTTING THE FUN BACK IN FUN CITY

BY BOB BAXTER



When Jonathan Shaw left New York City, he took most of the feisty tattoo energy with him. But now there's someone to fill his shoes both artistically and as owner of his legendary shop, Fun City. Completely refurbished, the old digs have been whipped into shape. The new boss lady, Michelle Myles, runs the scene like a seasoned pro, with all the exuberance and energy of Shaw himself.

The owner of two shops in the neighborhood, Michelle was very accommodating and eager to tell the tale of how this internationally famous tattoo Mecca lost its luster and then came back to life. It is so different than what I had seen in pictures. I wondered if this was the original location.

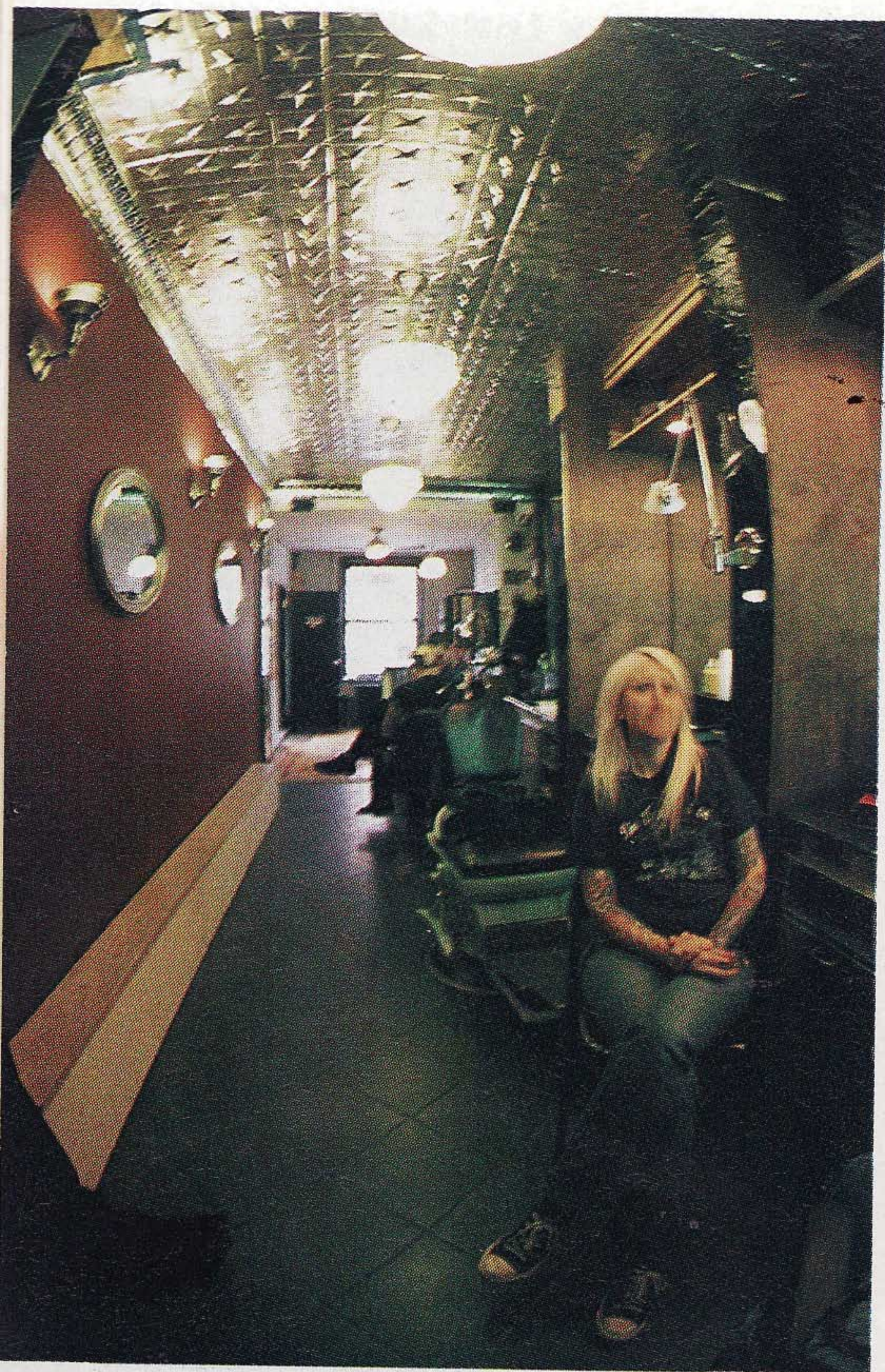


Jonathan Shaw.

MICHELLE MYLES: This is the original public Fun City. Before this, Jonathan was working at a place at First Avenue and First Street, but that was a private studio, only by appointment. But when he decided to bring it out and actually hire people—he had artists working here and set up a more traditional situation—this is in fact the location. That was about 1991.

BAXTER: Is the area, St. Marks, pretty much like it used to be? I remember back in the '70s, this was the place in New York to see the really far out people. Is that still the same?

MM: Absolutely. We still have Trash & Vaudeville. I think I saw on TV the other day that it's been open since '71 or '72, something crazy like that. You still have all the punk rock shops, T-shirts and everything. A lot of things are gone, like Andy Warhol's Electric Circus. It's been replaced by kind of a mini-mall now. But that's pretty true about everywhere in Manhattan.



BB: So, Jonathan was working at this location?

MM: Yes, up until a couple years ago. He was less and less of a presence, pulling away from tattoo. I heard from someone that he is interested in opening a restaurant



started, tattooing was underground and everybody knew everybody's business. We still had the Tattoo Society meetings that Clayton Patterson was doing back then. We were working to legalize. It was a totally different vibe.

BB: Tattooing became legal in New York in 1997, I believe?

MM: Yes. And when it did I called my friend Brad Fink. He had told me that, if it ever did come around, he wanted to open a shop with me. So, I called him and two weeks later we signed a lease for Daredevil. We opened that up together and we also own this one together.

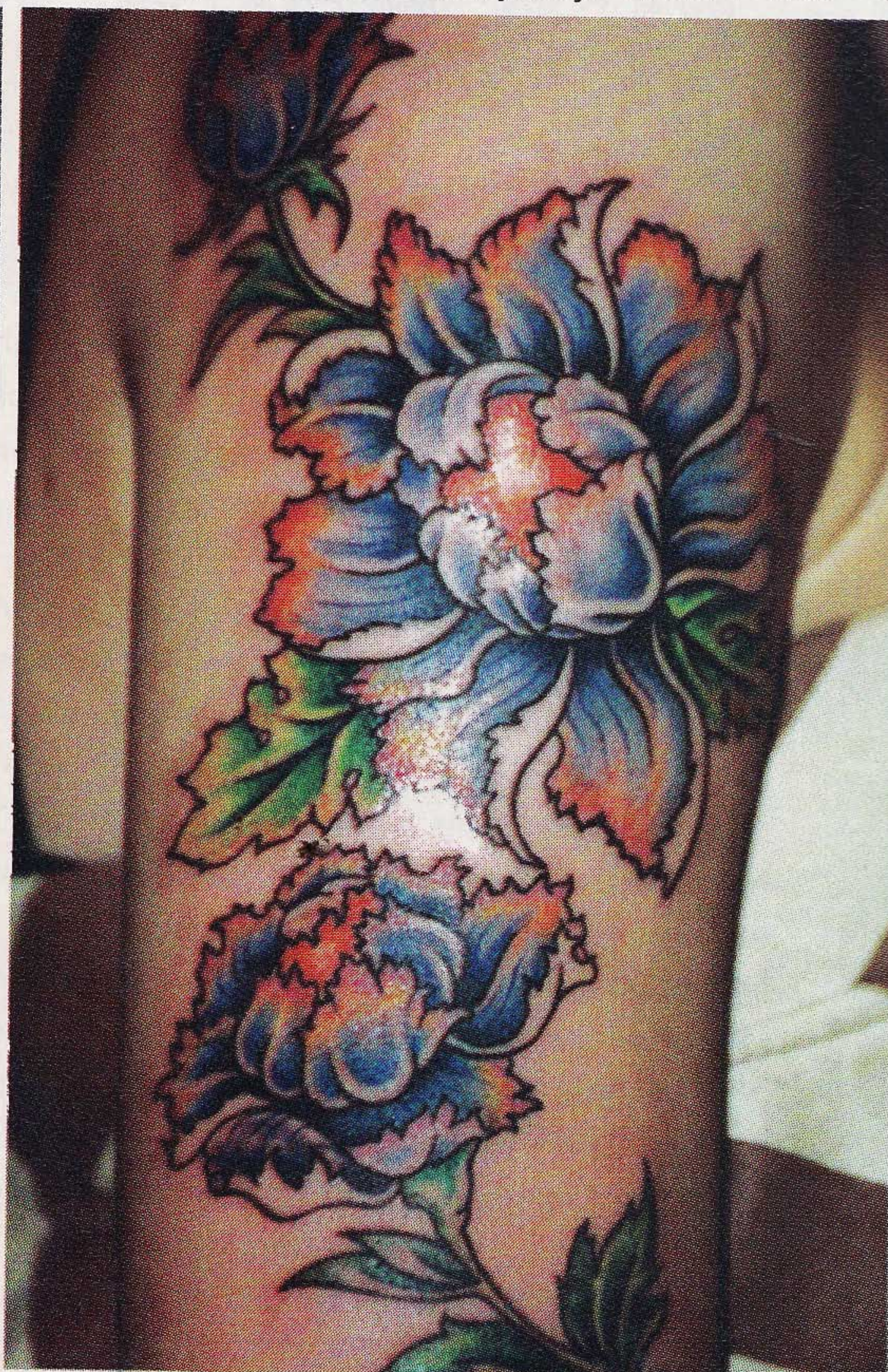
in Rio de Janeiro. He's spending pretty much of his time in Brazil. And I recall reading in the *New York Times* that he was writing a book about his father, Artie Shaw.

BB: Jonathan was the first editor for *International Tattoo Art* and the editor for *Outlaw Biker*. A very talented guy. And when did you start tattooing?

MM: I started about 13 years ago and, coincidentally, the first place I ever worked was a few doors from here in an apartment situation, Eastside Ink, because of the times. I remember when Fun City opened. Jonathan and I had some mutual friends, that kind of thing. In the neighborhood, everybody knows everybody. When I first

BB: So how did you become involved with Fun City?

MM: I was talking with Steve Pedone, who was one of the last people to work at Fun City under Jonathan. I was just hearing that Fun City was falling into disrepair and I put out the word to Steve to ask Jonathan if he was interested in selling. We had developed a pretty good crew of artists and we were kind of climbing over each other at



Tattoos by Michelle Myles.

Daredevil. Now we have ten artists working at the Fun City location.

BB: How is it operating two shops?

MM: I run back and forth between the locations, but I'm just beginning to settle into the idea of running two shops. Brad is back in St. Louis. He runs Iron Age and he comes to visit as much as he can, but I'm the one that runs the place.

BB: Let's talk about the tattoo scene in Manhattan. For years, when people talked about the best artists, the top of the list was always San Francisco. Currently, that's pretty much shifted to Los Angeles. The other major city, of course, is New York City. But if people ask me, "Name the strong tattooers in New York City," there's a big silence. People don't identify with the names. I mean, you don't have a Jack Rudy or Greg James or Ed Hardy. Let's face it, Jonathan was the guy and now he's gone.

MM: I agree with you one hundred percent, but I think we're changing that. I feel that New York suffered a lot, because we had to operate underground. We had a lot of great artists that started out here like Marcus Pacheco, Eddy Deutsche, Timothy Hoyer—they were all based in New York. What with the ban, it was difficult to make it here, so many of the artists left and went to the West Coast. I think we have a lot of amazing artists here now and they're just starting to be known more and more. Things are changing. There was, initially, after legalization, a lot of bad shops that opened up and now they are getting weeded out. All these people flooded in that weren't really from New York and it diluted the talent. I think New York is just starting to get its roots, as far as tattooing is concerned. The New York tattoo scene is alive and well.

BB: How is it being a woman running a tattoo shop in New York City?

MM: I love it. To me, it's fun taking what might be used against me and making it stand out. I remember working with another artist and people saying, "Oh you tattoo, too? That's sweet." People kind of underestimated me and it's kind of fun to turn that around and have one of the coolest shops in the city. There's shops in the city owned by women but the number of shops that are owned by women who actually tattoo is probably one percent.

That's a challenge. Maybe I get it from my mom, she's a stockbroker. She'll come to town with maybe 40 other brokers and she's the only woman.

BB: How is it being a small business owner in Manhattan?

MM: I remember calling around when I was looking for spaces and, when I would call, I got the cold shoulder. A friend of mine told me that when he was looking for an apartment and his wife would call, no one would ever return her call, but, when he would call, everyone would phone back. But I got it done and I'm more organized than before, because of the two shops. I love my job, love being a tattoo artist and being a business owner. My goal is to become so organized with my business that I'll be able to put more energy into my tattooing. I'm so happy

to have been able to bring this shop back to its former glory and build a solid team of artists. It's kind of easy to get so involved in the business-end of things that you can forget you're an artist as well. But, the more experience I get, the easier it gets. All in all, I wouldn't trade it for anything.

MICHELLE MYLES

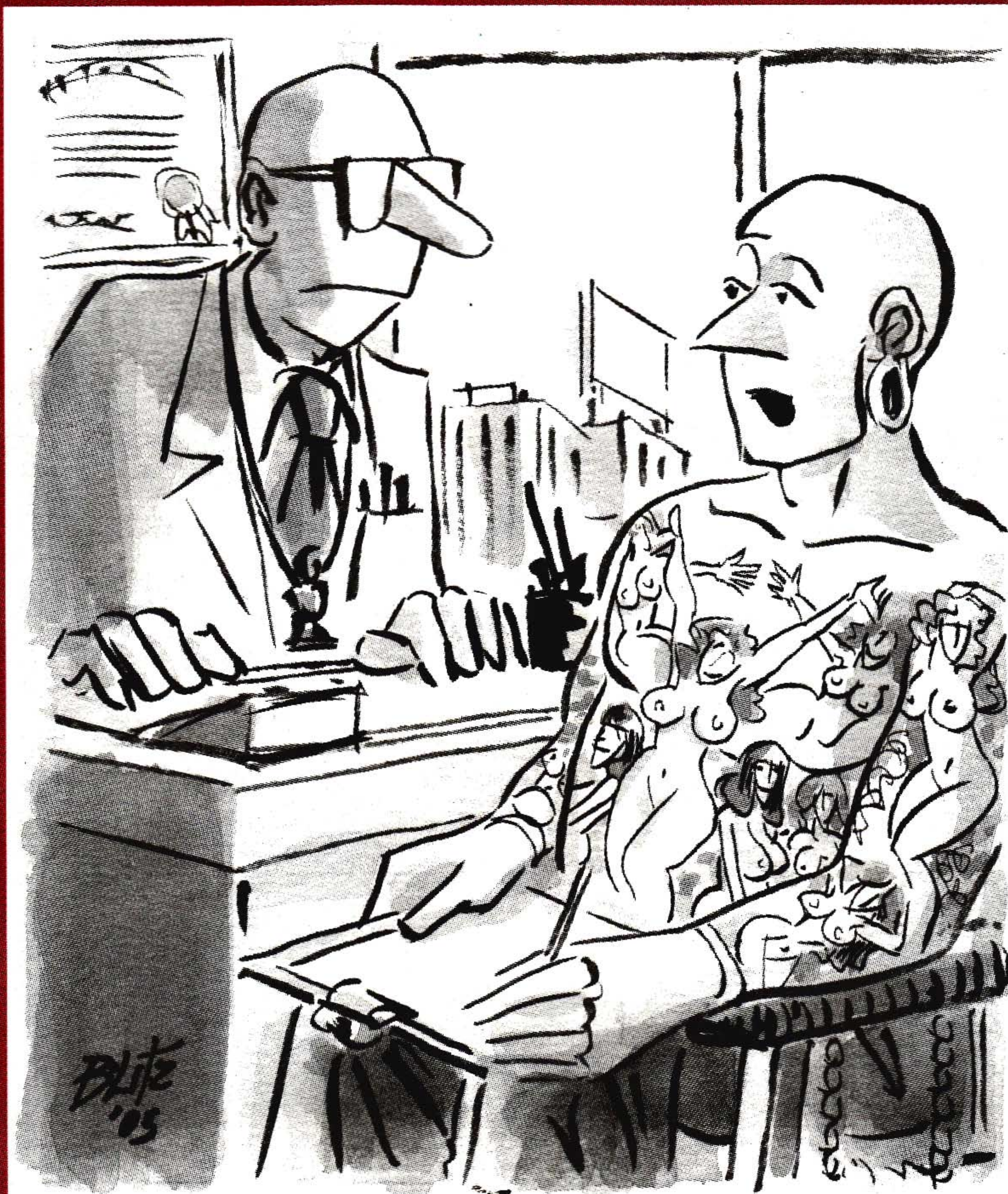
Fun City

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Daredevil Studios

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TATTOON BY BRUCE LITZ



I GET REALLY LONESOME IN ROOMS WITHOUT MIRRORS.

TATTOON: ORIGINAL IDEA FROM THE ELIZABETH WEINZIRL COLLECTION AT TATTOO ARCHIVE, BERKELEY, CA. THANKS TO C.W. ELDRIDGE, KEEPER OF THE FLAME.