



We started Fallen Heroes Tattoo // Art by asking the question, “What’s your story?” and now, for the first time, we’re being asked to tell ours. Neither of us are writers, hell, we spent most of our high school careers sneaking out of class to see each other, but here goes...

Not sure how far we should go back, so we’ll just go back to our beginning;

DB - We met in high school, Brenda was 14 and I was 16. I was singing in a band, had long hair, acne, and bruised knuckles. She was stunning... not the bombshell she is today, but man was she different. I sang to her one night in the basement of a party, just us, alone in this poorly lit basement... and she liked it... she liked me... and I’d never felt that before. She instantly became all that I could think about.

BB - I was 14, and he was 16 going on 4. He never had any money, his car was literally duct-taped together. Him and his buddies were probably all supposed to end up in jail someday, but there was something about him. He talked about his dreams, he held my hand, and he wrote me poetry, he sang to me, and his hair (LOOONG) was prettier than mine.

DB - I guess we just kind of liked each other, so we kept hanging out... (every minute of every day)... 1986 quickly became 1989, I was in the Army and had already been to my first conflict. By January of 1990 our first son (Jake) was on the way, and we had no idea what we were doing. Brenda was waiting tables and I was dressing up like a tree for a living, but our time together became more and more rewarding... we started to realize that we were a team, and that it wasn’t going to change.

BB - 17 and having our first man cub... It felt like everything was coming to an end, but then Jake arrived and the three of us saw a new beginning. I was a part time waitress and a full time mom while David played soldier for another 4 years (total of 8). When that 8th year ended, and the decision was made to come home and leave the Army, it wasn’t long before our second son (Tyler) was on the way.

DB - I left the army in 1994, and in May of 1995 our second son (Tyler) was born. I went to work for Brenda’s Dad (still not sure if that grumpy bastard likes me or not) painting houses and local businesses. This was our life, and while there wasn’t ever much money to spare, we took care of each other, and we loved each other even (perhaps even more so) when times were really hard.

BB - When David came home from the Army, he had an education (BS Computer Science) that no one wanted. It was ‘94 and computers weren’t really “in” yet. So he worked for my dad and



ate the little sandwiches I'd make him for lunch every day. We rented our first "non-apartment" in 1996, adopted our very first dog (Becca the beautiful Rottweiler) and the four of us felt like we'd "made it" :).

DB - 1996, our boys were getting bigger FAST, and even though I had moved on to a technical job using my education, money was tight. We talked, and one thing was clear. Brenda was NOT interested in leaving her boys with strangers or daycare after school and Tyler was not interested in being left with strangers. We talked and thought, even argued a bit, then we realized that her passion was kiddos, so we looked into opening a daycare.

BB - I opened "Brenda's Brats" so I was able to put Jake in a charter school and Tyler would not be asked to leave anymore daycares. Tyler had separation anxiety to the point that the babysitters would ask me to come get him and not bring him back. We decided to do daycare for low income families through the state. This insured that I would get paid and I wanted to provide a safe place for kids even if their parents could not afford an upscale daycare. This is when we learned how heartbreaking it is to see the world through the eyes of children. My daycare was at capacity in the 1st month. So many small humans running around and I loved every minute of it.

DB - Brenda's daycare was a hit, and people all over town were talking about this epic lady and her massive Rottweiler that would watch the kids like her puppies until it was time for them to go home. Things were amazing, little lives were changing, and everything seemed perfect. Until the parents stopped picking up their kids. Literally left them. No call, no check in, no nothing... just an extra couple kiddos without an extra couple beds.

BB - I remember the day Bree and Corey came through our door. Corey was 3 and Bree was 3 months. Their mother was a single mom and to say the least had not had it very easy. Corey was a spit fire from the 1st second and when I picked Bree up she melted into me. This was the beginning of many heart breaks. These girls stole my heart from day one and it didn't take long to figure out this was where they were supposed to be. Their biological mother worked odd jobs, was homeless off and on. I believe she did the best she could for the girls but it didn't always work out like she had hoped. We came to an agreement that if she didn't have a safe place for the girls she would not take them. This went on for years, until the state changed my license to a 24 hour daycare so the girls would not go back into state custody.

DB - First Girls... Briana and Corey... man did they rock my planet. I'd worked hard for our two sons, but when these two angels showed up, I felt like I simply couldn't do enough. The boys were rough and tumble and up for anything. These little ladies were tiny, fragile, and scared me



to death. I watched as Brenda took Bree and Corey through the “girl steps” and eventually, figured it out. I had to 100% of the time behave like the man that I would one day want to see them with. My “softer side” is hard to find, but these little girls found it on day one. We had Bree and Corey, along with another 54 kiddos over the years, and each one of them came with their own little worlds and their own little perceptions of how we (adults) would treat them. We worked hard to afford them another view of “family”.

BB - Teaching a frightened child to trust the idea of “family” is tough enough without the constant change of parents in and out of jail, on and off of drugs and taking out their own shortcomings physically on some of these kids. Our hearts broke daily with some of the little people that we cared for. We told ourselves that one day, later in life, these little minds would recall a place where they were equal, loved, and not ashamed or in the way. To this day, we remember and talk about those days when we didn't have much, but gave everything we had to help little hearts and minds have the opportunity to one day do great things. Some will, some might not, but every single one of “our kids” knows what love, honesty, kindness and generosity looks like.

DB - Once we had seen the good and bad sides of foster care, we set out to simply adopt the ones that we have currently, and call it good. Not throwing in the towel, but focusing what we had on the ones that we had, rather than the cycle of foster care, heartbreak, etc. This quickly became about a two year ordeal, and a ton more heartache, but we got it done. We had only two kiddos that were not adopted, and they (Koby and Kaiah) were foster kids from the beginning, so we knew that they would soon be reunited with their birth mother as soon as she was better. With ten kids under a 1200 square foot roof, we decided to buy the biggest house that we *couldn't* afford at the time. We moved out east of Colorado Springs to a 5800sf home on 43 acres.

BB - The new house started with new adventures, missing our neighbors and friends (only 45 mins away but sure felt like more) New schools, new friends, new schedules and a ton of rooms to clean. Not long after we settled in, our beautiful Rottweiler, Becca (possibly one of the greatest friends we've ever known) was diagnosed with cancer and passed away. David was overseas at the time, but his tears landed as close to home as mine did. Becca had been a bit of an anchor for us, our kids, and everyone that came through our door. She is missed as much today as the day that she closed her eyes for the last time.

DB - I came home after a stint to South Africa, and nothing was the same. Becca was gone. No more 140lb “lap dog”, no more super slobbery kisses, no more of that look from her that just spoke volumes about trust, compassion, and friendship. I would find my way to my closet a couple times a day and just hope the wall could hold me up as I broke down and cried hoping



no one could hear. Becca was irreplaceable, I knew that. But I also knew that Brenda and the kids were hurting just as badly as I was.

BB - When David came home with Abi, she fit in the palm of his hand. She was a runt, she was a miniature pinscher, and she was immediately loved by everyone in our home (10 of us at the time). Not sure about reincarnation, fate, etc... but even at that tiny size, when Abi looked up at us, we could see Becca's eyes... full of the same love and trust that her massive predecessor showed us. I know it's odd that we mention our dogs as much as we do our children, but to us, they are the only witnesses that have been able to watch our family grow from any other view than our own. They also helped us teach our kids that in this life, there are others that can never ever repay you for acts of kindness and generosity, but that they deserve it just the same (if not more) than others.

DB - I'm trying to hurry this along, but talking together about our past is so awesome... I dig this chick and everything we've seen and done together. Soon after we moved out into the country for the kiddos, I had started my first security contracts overseas. Africa, Brazil, Chile, UK, Canada... every continent but Antarctica had some of my footprints on it, but South Africa was my "home base" for traveling. A kind of 3 weeks on - 2 weeks home schedule goes on for nearly a decade. We moved the whole family to South Africa for about 2 of those years, and Brenda traveled with me whenever she could as the kids got bigger and able to look after each other.

BB - Our time in Africa was incredible! The kids thrived and enjoyed the new sights and sounds that are just not available anywhere else. The food, friends, and the incredible scenery are memories that I'll never let go of. David was making a great income, and while the work was hard, we both knew that it would one day be worth it. We saved every penny that we could in our "someday fund", and in 2016... someday happened.

DB - It was early 2016 when I had pulled some strings to land one last stateside gig. This kept some money coming in while we worked day and night to make Fallen Heroes Tattoo // Art a reality. I enlisted the help of a few of my South african friends to come over and help set up shop / get us started with artists in stations while we hunted down some of the best in the US. Brenda would work all day driving contractors and perfecting her idea of a "welcoming and warm place" for people to *experience* what a tattoo could be. I worked my day job and then joined her for construction work at night. It was a really hard 6 months, but she led the way and made it seem easy even on our toughest days.

BB - When David said let's open a tattoo studio I thought sure 10 to 6 Tuesday through Saturday no big deal. I was so wrong more like 15 hour days min and 6 to 7 days a week. In the



beginning it was just Darin and Aaron, plus David coming after his “day job” so the hours were crazy. Who would have thought we would start off our 1st month in the green? :) Certainly not us, but word got around and we grew quickly from 4 stations to 8 stations in our first year. We then added another four the next year and 5 more this past year, and there were two more in the works as we penned this letter, and now, we are America's largest single tattoo studio with 28 stations! We truly have been incredibly fortunate to find such amazing humans and skilled artists that are not only driven by this craft, but by their passion to be part of something “bigger”.

DB - I can still remember that day like it was yesterday... the day that we “Burnt the Boats”. We took every penny that we had worked for, planned and re-planned... and then we went all in, sink or swim, hell or high... well you get the idea. We worked harder than we ever had (and still do) to make our own place amongst this community of giants that we call home.

Kind Regards,

David and Brenda Brown
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