

Grace Timothy (far left) was inspired after mum Annie got her granddaughter's name and daughter's initial tattooed on her wrists (below)

MUM GOT INKED



(and so did I)

After years of deeming them seedy, Grace Timothy's mother, Annie, is proudly sporting a tattoo – at 62. Well, two can play that game...

Photographs **Katie Wilson**

When I was 18, I had my belly button pierced, and my mother didn't speak to me for a week. It was the only rebellious thing I'd ever done, and the stony silence made me regret that barbell more than the agony of getting it caught in my tights.

It wasn't that I was scared of my mum, but that I'd never failed her like that. Suddenly it wasn't cool, it was stupid, and just as she'd warned me, the piercing went septic. I removed it, but there's still a little puckered scar, like a raised eyebrow, over my belly button.

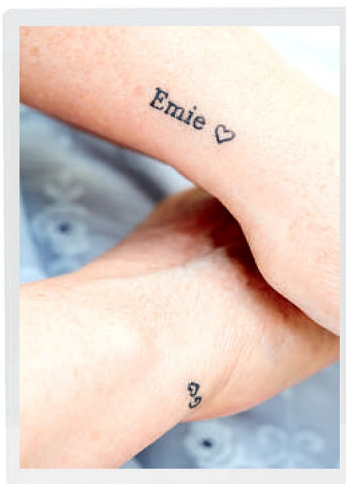
Gallingly, my mum is always right. She led a somewhat wild life pre-me and so when she told me that no good would come of something, I assumed she knew first hand – and when I did test her rules I always regretted it. My first pair of stupidly high heels did result in a sprained ankle. My first go at Southern Comfort did make me throw up. I did get my drink

spiked, I did miss the last train, I did lose my leather jacket and I did get my wallet nicked. Each time, she would shake her head in disappointment, never even needing to utter 'I told you so'. Her expression said it all.

So when I was toying with the idea of a tattoo at 19 – the Sanskrit word 'prasada' on the sole of my foot, because it means 'divine gift' (I think) – it was her voice in my head that stopped me. When it came to tattoos, her experience was mainly from smoky pubs in the 1960s, where sleazy builders with fish swimming up their necks and big-breasted mermaids leering from their arms would attempt to pinch her bum. As for tattoos on women? They were seedy and unsavoury. Not for nice girls. They will ruin your life, she told me. The only employer who'll hire you will run a circus or a ship. It'll seriously limit your choice of wedding dress. 'Imagine wearing your hair up when you have a bloody great crucifix on your back!' The final threat was the heaviest: you'll probably get hepatitis or blood poisoning, and ultimately die. That's what swung it for me.

The desire to get a tattoo never went away, but essentially, I'm too well-behaved. Along with leather trousers and double denim, rebellion doesn't suit me. And nothing's so pretty that it's worth crossing my mum.

So you can imagine my surprise when my mother, Annie 'if you get a tattoo I will kill you' Timothy, thrusts forward her wrist and there I see my daughter's name, Emie, inked forever. At 62 years of age, she's got the tattoo I've wanted since I was 19. It's like being five again, and having to spend New >>



Year's Eve upstairs in bed while the grown-ups party downstairs. She's made the kind of statement about her love for my child that I would have liked to make myself, if only I'd been braver. 'It's on my wrist so I can kiss it goodnight every day!' she trills. I wonder, if I'd had her name tattooed on my arm as a teenager, would she have been as misty-eyed as she is now? I suspect not.

It turns out my mum has done it to rebel. She likes the shocked looks her friends give her when they see it peeking out from beneath her cashmere, alongside a Cartier bangle. 'You're a total hypocrite!' I bellow. She's ready for this. 'Yes, I am, but you're only 29; you've got a lot of life left with your beautiful body and your perfect skin. I'm 62 - my skin's not perfect, there are no rules now. And who cares?!' What if you regret it, I ask, desperately trying to remember all the warnings she'd issued to me. 'How could I, it's Emie's name! It's like I'm carrying her around with me forever.' I can't really argue with that, so I look to my dad to tell her off. He is useless, at first thinking it a bit tacky, but within minutes extolling its beauty.

My husband Rich is slightly more helpful. 'Are you just annoyed she didn't get your name?' he asks. Within a week she also has a small 'G' and a heart on the other wrist. This time, I get stropky: 'WHY ARE YOU ALLOWED TATTOOS AND I'M NOT?!' She responds by booking me a consultation with her tattooist. *Her* tattooist - she has her own tattooist now?! But anger turns to anxiety when, a week later, Bill the tattooist asks me where I wanted to be inked. Bill himself is dressed all in black, and unusually has no sign of a tattoo on him. He assures me he has some, but thinks they should always be easily hidden. I agree - I want it on the sole of my foot, but Bill is reluctant. Apparently it'll be excruciatingly painful and may wear away quickly, but I insist. Next I need to choose a design. Surprisingly, none of the heartfelt, meaningful ideas I came up with as a teenager - Goo Goo Dolls lyrics, the paw print of my dead cat, a feather at the base of my spine (so I could bend over and shake my tail feather) - are appealing to the almost-30-year-old me. According to Bill, tattoos are more about fashion now, anyway - an artful sprinkling of stars on the wrist, perhaps - and not often about the meaning behind the design. But, he warns me, you're less likely to go off something that is linked to someone you love. Maybe that's why pets are a really common subject. On googling 'tattoo' for inspiration, I find a large illustration of a pet dog with 'RIP' worked into the fur. I also find a camel etched on someone's toe, and a cat on a man's stomach, his belly button forming its anus. How charming.

Now that the rebellion has been taken out of it, I realise being tattooed is more about satisfying the part of me that just loves nice images. I set up a Pinterest account, and alongside twee boards full of lavender and Anthropologie ceramics,



'She's made the kind of statement I would have liked to make myself, if only I'd been braver'

I start a mood board of designs. I love all the sailor tats - anchors, seahorses, compasses - but don't have an affinity with the sea. It would feel a bit like stealing from another's vernacular. Now that 40% of Brits have a tattoo, it's obviously far harder to find something unique, but that's really important to me. I find myself forcing meaning on things I think look nice. I like triangles and am happy to see that if it's point-down, it can mean 'mother'. There's a bird in white ink that I keep going back to. Could I pull off white ink? Will it look like impetigo?

I finally decide on my own nickname for Emie, 'Oof', which I first called her when she was in my belly - it was all I could say for the first three months of morning sickness - and have called her ever since. It was also her first word. I type out 'Oof' in loads of different fonts, settling on French Script because I love its painterly curves and flicks.

When I present it to Bill he suggests we put it on my ankle but I'm still sold on the sole of my foot, so I lie on my front and wait for the impending pain. It's actually nowhere near as bad as I'd been led to believe, and less than a minute later, it's finished. Bill tells me I'm as hard as nails, which I'm pleasantly surprised about, having cried throughout my first bikini wax and never returned for a second. I trot off, my foot wrapped in kitchen roll, feeling high as a kite. It's not like when I got the 'Rachel' haircut in 1997 and was surprised at how little I looked like Jennifer Aniston afterwards - the tattoo is just as beautiful as I thought it would be.

My mum loves it, but she's happy you can't see it when I'm standing up or have shoes on. My dad thinks it's sweet. Rich nearly dies laughing when he realises it says 'foo' if viewed upside down - 'foot' without the 't'. But I genuinely don't care. It is just for me, a fulfilled ambition, something I love. The only person I worry a little about is Emie. Without the fear I had of my mother's reaction, will she cover herself in tattoos? I hope my word is still more powerful than the little one etched on my foot. But if she does choose to disregard my discouragement and get a tattoo, I hope I'll see it as another part of her to love, just like my mum finally loves mine. ■