

Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois

Carrie Davini Oral History Interview

Tyler Swanner, Interviewer

Evermore Gallery, Edwardsville, Illinois

October 11, 2018

Tyler Swanner (TS): The following interview was conducted with Carrie Davini on behalf of the Madison County Oral History Project that is part of Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois. The interview took place on Thursday October 11, 2018, at Evermore Gallery in Edwardsville, Illinois. The interviewer is Tyler Swanner from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville graduate M.A. program. So, first off I would like to start kind of talking about your childhood a little bit. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Carrie Davini (CD): Oh, wow, wow. Okay, I grew up in Rockford, Illinois.

TS: Okay.

CD: Um, I moved here probably about twenty-five years ago, with a boy, a college football player. Um, that didn't work out. Um, my father was a graphic designer, back in the day of cut and paste, you know, or no computers. And when I started tattooing, we didn't have a computer in the shop you know. So, um a lot of what I... like, trying to transition into modern technology has been hard for me because I want to cut and paste everything, you know cause' I learned that from my dad. Um, uh, Rockford was pretty boring, it was a small town at the time. So we found stuff to do and got into a lot of trouble, I was a bad kid, I was a bad kid. Um, moved out of my house as soon as I was uh 18 and um then came to St. Louis.

TS: So, can you tell me a little bit more about your, your dad or both of your parents?

CD: Uh, my dad could talk to anybody, to the point where it was obnoxious, and I think that I gained that from him, you know. Um, my mom was isolated a whole lot. Um, she really wasn't present a whole lot and I gained a little bit of that from her as well. So, you know I had an okay childhood, I was just a bad kid. I hung out with, you know, I was a gangbanger, you know, I hung out with, you know, a rough crowd. Um, but it got me where I am today, and I appreciate all the shit I went through [chuckle] to get here today.

TS: Yeah, Definitely...

CD: Yeah

TS: ...definitely. Um, so how did you get into, um, I guess, besides your father, like art and drawing, like what, how did that come about?

CD: Oh gall, I don't know, it was probably my dad mostly. I mean, he had a skill, like Thomas here can, he can just draw right out of his head. I've got to see something, you know, I've got to have reference. Um, so I think that was a huge influence. Um, the whole tattoo world though, I um went to Chicago and

went to a tattoo shop to get my eyebrow pierced, super nerdy right. Um, and there was a female tattoo artist there and I had never thought of tattoos as art, I always thought: “oh you get a name, you get a mom heart,” you know, stuff like that. But, when I saw the art she was doing, I was like “that's what I want to do.” And being a female in the industry, especially back then, was way harder to get in. You know, because everybody mocked, nobody wanted a female tattoo artist, you know. Um, so that was the hard part, is getting in. But when I saw her and saw what she was doing, that was my goal. And then I eventually ended up getting tattooed by her, so that was pretty cool.

TS: Yeah, that is really cool.

CD: Yeah.

TS: That is really cool. Um, so I know you mentioned uh that you briefly went to uh SIUC for a while. Can you tell you tell me about that experience a little bit?

CD: Oh gol-

TS: And what you were doing?

CD: Oh god I partied my ass off way too much. Yeah, so I didn't really, um, you know, I did have art classes there. But, I was just a stubborn kid, you know it was the artist was the grass is green, the sky is blue, and I'm like no way. So, we had this art show that we had to do and I was not allowed to be in the art show because of the subject matter that I was, uh, drawing. It was um, bondage type art, which is weird, I mean it's not something I'm into at all, I just thought the pictures were very interesting, you know, and I wanted to recreate those on charcoal, so yeah I was banned from the art show. Um, so a lot of it was me playing the victim role, you know, and so when I came back, and I was supposed to go back yet another semester, I balled my eyes out. And I was like, “I just can't do it, I don't want to go back, so just please don't make me.” So then I, you know, did community college for little bit in Rockford and then I just, you know, I just, for me for an individual it is more important for me to be street smart, rather than, you know than college smart.

TS: Yeah.

CD: So, and that got me where I am today too, so.

TS: Definitely, um so you talked a little bit, you know, about coming down to St. Louis and how you have been here for so long. What made your decision to come to St. Louis? Like what [chuckle] were some of the things, that um, made you think St. Louis is the place where I want to go?

CD: Uh, I had to leave.

TS: Mm-hmm.

CD: Um, I guess I can't really tell you the reason why.

TS: That's fine.

CD: So, hard to say, uh the guy I was dating was moving here. It looked like an easy out to me, to where

the position I was in. So, when I first came here I just, oh my gosh, I thought St. Louis was the biggest city ever. It was so overwhelming I'm like how can I do this, this is crazy. And his parents lived in Chesterfield, you know, which is whole different part of St. Louis, you know.

Interesting the first time we went out, you know, they were showing me all the sights and stuff, they took me to the loop because that was like, you know where I would fit in. Um, and his dad had an open Heineken. I mean we are talking like in the morning, just driving around, and he was like welcome to St. Louis and I was like, oh my god. Part of me is like, "this is great, but not good for me." Um, so yeah I just thought it was the right move, the right direction and it ended being the right move, so yeah.

TS: Mm-hmm. Definitely.

CD: It was an easy out and I took it.

TS: Yeah, definitely, definitely. So when you moved here, um what were some of the or like the first job you had or what did you do once you moved here?

CD: I've always been in the service industry...

TS: Ok

CD: ...and I've always worked my way to the top of the food chain. So I always worked fine dining and that is a huge part of my life. I, oh my gosh, Anthony Bourdain's suicide is still messing me up. So, I was going to go to culinary school. And um, I'm glad I didn't because most chefs I know are just so tired, so burnt out, and just not happy. And so now I love to cook as a hobby and I love my job so, you know I think I made the right choice for sure. And then there is a part in there where I was going to be DJ.

TS: [Laughs]

CD: C'mon. [Laughs]

TS: Do you want to tell me a little bit more about that?

CD: No, that was kind of just like a thought in my head.

TS: Just a thought.

CD: I guess it was just mostly the music I was listening to at the time, you know. So, um an opportunity happened that got me into a tattoo shop, so.

TS: Oh, really. Uh, can you tell me about that opportunity?

CD: Yeah, for sure. Uh, so, uh I'd been begging and begging and really super nerdy. And now being in the industry, I see how kind of nerdy it is. You know, I brought in my drawings and stuff like that, it was just cheesy stuff I had traced, you know. Um, so basically it's work ethic and that's what we look for in the tattoo industry because artists are flaky as can be. And I'm sure you've dealt with some, like I've thrown art shows and it's seriously like five minutes to the opening of the art show they are getting their art work on the wall, if they get their art work on the wall. So I had the opportunity to work the front at a tattoo shop. Um, it took me about two years until they started training me and I had to prove myself, you know.

They saw that I had a strong work ethic, and that's what got me in the door basically.

TS: What tattoo shop was that?

CD: That was Iron Age.

TS: Iron Age, Okay.

CD: Yeah, Yeah. And that was when it was above Vintage Vinyl.

TS: Oh, Really?

CD: So I worked there and worked at the newer location as well.

TS: Okay, did you enjoy your experience there?

CD: It was tough especially being a girl. I never let them see me cry, I would always go in the bathroom. I had never been talked to like that by anybody. Which is crazy considering how I grew up. Um, the things they would say to me, here's an example: I was dating one of their friends and they said "That's the best thing about female shop fronts, is they'll sleep with all of your friends." So at that time I was living in the loop, and like an idiot I walked home, right, like to prove myself, you know, I'm like: "I'm out of here!" I didn't let anybody know I was leaving and that was the time of caller ID, so Iron Age pops up on caller ID, their like "Where are you?" I'm like, you know, I was just like I couldn't confront them, you know, I'm like "I just went home", their like "Well can you come back?" And I walked back and never said anything about it and that was me trying to be tough. Which yeah I didn't prove anything, so basically I just kept my mouth shut and just did what I was told and my apprenticeship was ridiculous. I mean it was very old school, like when my boss was out of town, I had to take care of his mom, I had to walk his dogs, just ridiculous stuff like that. It still goes on a little bit nowadays with apprenticeships. I feel nobody should be belittled or earn an apprenticeship in the way that I did and nobody ever will here, you know. But, there is also, we worked really hard to get where we are at. So, when see tattoo artists that just sneak in and, you know learn how to tattoo in a couple of months, it pisses us off, you know, because we had to work so hard to get where we are at.

TS: Yeah, definitely.

CD: Yeah

TS: Do you think there has been some of that transition away...

CD: Yes.

TS: ...from those type of apprenticeships?

CD: Yes, Yes. Well it depends, women are still taken advantage of in this environment, um not only getting tattooed, but as being a female working in a tattoo shop, if you let them, if you let the guys. I mean and there are girls that are, that live off of giggling, you know, and that's how they, that how they get their job, you know. And that pisses me off, [laugh] you know.

TS: Yeah, definitely. So moving kind of backwards a little bit, uh what was your first tattoo?

CD: Oh my gosh, this is so nerdy and awesome. So, somebody's basement right, my friend Jim had gotten a tattoo on his head, which is weird, like a yin yang. And all he could talk about is how bad it hurt and like an idiot I'm like, "I want one!" like what? So, of course it was, it was like a big production, you know, and now it's like, it is what it is. So, it was a black lizard, that I drew myself for Jim Morrison, because you now, I was a huge fan. Well got it done, in some guy's basement, you know, it was horrible. Went to another shop and got it redone, you know still horrible and now it's covered up. So, I don't have it anymore, but I was fifteen when I got my first tattoo, um awkward experience. I think this is what people, you know, kind of expect still today, the guy's basement was covered with like naked chicks on Harleys and stuff, you know, and like Jack Daniels bottles around and stuff like that. So I think some people are still intimidated by tattoo shops because that's what they think are going to get and we definitely are not that type of shop.

TS: Yeah...

CD: At all

TS: ...definitely. I mean I've been tattooed here as well. So I mean, it's definitely a different experience than that.

CD: Yeah, so, we're not a bunch of tough guys and yeah, we're all equals you know. Cause there is that, and there always has been in this industry a lot of ego and a lot of better than and I'm not better than anybody else, you know we're all equal.

TS: Definitely. Um so after you moved from Iron Age and your apprenticeship. Can you tell me about you got your first job as a full-fledged tattoo artist? And how that came about, I guess I could say.

CD: okay, actually the guy who I can't stand who owns Iron Age, don't put that in there, but I think most people feel the same way about him. But he stood up for me, I couldn't believe it. There were two business owners, one was business, one was art.

TS: Yeah.

CD: So, the business side saw that I had a strong work ethic, you know. So he kept his mouth shut, he left me alone, you know. And he was actually very kind to me and awesome, he wasn't to everybody else, so I really admired that and he respected me because I was a hard worker. Now the other owner, the art side, artist mentality, you know, was a whiny little baby. And it was, I would always go in early, stay late and when I would hear that door open [Door opens], and I knew that he was working that day my stomach would just flip, what mood is he going to be in today. And how I left that shop, that's a great story, that's going to be really good too. So, um yeah that was back in the day, when we were making needles, so I would go in early and would be making other people's needles. So, um he is actually the one that stood up for me, and so finally after two years, I'm like, "Hey guys when can I get on the floor, is this a thing?" And he likes, "Yeah, either you guys are going to teach her to tattoo or I am," and that's when they bucked up and everybody taught me a little bit. So I wasn't apprenticed under one specific person, it was just gaining knowledge from a little bit of everybody.

TS: So, before we move into how you left the shop. I'm more curious right now about how you've seen, what kind of changes took place, in terms of like, the technology of tattooing, like things you have seen personally. You've said in terms of needles and other things like that.

CD: Um, there's been a lot of change and for me I don't like change, nobody likes change, you know. And I'm a little weird and superstitious and I had a hard time replacing the chair that I sit in because it was a buddy of mine, who was part owner of this shop, it was his chair and I was weirded out. I was like, "Oh my gosh, if I throw this chair away, my tattoos are going to suck," you know. So, I have a hard time trying out the new stuff. Machines have changed, there are rotaries now, they make no noise whatsoever. Um, they are already tuned up for you, you don't have to tune them or anything. I've never used one, you know. Some of the guys use them here, they love them, I just have never picked it up and used it, you know and Bouie is like always setting it in my station, like "You should really try it." I don't know why, maybe I should. And um, making needles, uh gol, that was very time consuming and for me to change into actually buying needles, it was like they are going to be more expensive, like it's you know, it's more cost efficient if I make my own needles, and then finally I just gave up, I'm like "I don't have time," you know. So, um, inks have also changed, there was a period where red ink was causing a lot of issues with people's skin, people were breaking out. They were putting plastic in the ink, is what it was. I don't know why it was specifically the red, um but it's different companies, that's what I like to use. It's like certain companies have better reds, certain companies have a better blue, but inks have changed definitely. They are brighter, they go in a lot easier, but it's just kind of um, you just have to try it out and see what you like. I'm trying to think if anything else has changed as far as technology, well computers! Yeah, you know, like I always did, lettering is huge right now and everything I always did by hand because that's how I was taught by my dad. That's how I was taught at Iron Age, you know. So that's changed, and within the past month I just got an iPad and I was so against it, you know I'm like, but I have a drawing to do tonight and I'm not mad, [laugh] you know because generally it takes me forever to draw something and for somebody to be last minute. Hey, I'm going to take this appointment, this is what I'd be like there is my whole day off, you know and I'm not mad, I'm like wow, I get to draw tonight on my iPad and I'm kind of excited.

TS: Mm-hmm, yeah, Definitely.

CD: So, that has changed for me and has been very helpful.

TS: Do you think, now, that you have seen that transition with technology and you being before that technology, do you think maybe have a little bit of an advantage over maybe some newer tattoo artists that have not been exposed to other side, before technology existed?

CD: I personally do not, there are so many good tattoo artists out there right now that have been using this technology, I mean, you know, five to six years. Um, my tattoos have not changed because of it, I'm still super slow. [laugh] I wish my speed would pick up, because yeah I would make more money, but money is not a motivator for me, my my clients are, that's the most important part of this job for me personally. Um, so time saving yeah, that has changed and that has been very helpful, but as far as, yeah I guess yeah time saving really for me, that has been the most helpful part.

TS: So I know there is, and you have brought it up yourself, but some stigma around tattoos and either tattoo shops or people with tattoos themselves.

CD: Mm-hmm.

TS: Um, have you seen some of, of that taking place within your experiences, whether inside the tattoo shop or outside?

CD: Absolutely, more so back in the day. When I started getting tattooed, I would wear long sleeves everywhere, I didn't want people talking to me, people would give me the weirdest look. And it's, you know me now, right. And so for, this happened, for me to stand in line at a Target, have a parent pull their kid closer to them because I'm behind them and they think, you know, like what am I going to, and now you know me, you've talked to me and you know I'm not that type of person. My buddy Ryan, very, I call him very preppy, you wouldn't imagine he would have tattoos. He started going off on a friend of mine that had a face tattoo, or maybe it was somebody that had walked in, I don't know, but they had a face tattoo. And, I go Ryan if you didn't know me and were just looking at me and judging me would you think I was a huge Satanist or something. He's like, probably. Now, today if you don't have a tattoo it's weird. And I don't get looks as often and I think a lot of that was more mental for me. I had to say hey Carrie when walk in a room, not So it definitely has changed, now it's not so much an oddity, but now I think people because of the shock value, now they are putting them on their face and stuff like that, you know. So you do see um, more hand, neck, face tattoos and back in the day we would never do that if you didn't have sleeves already because it was kind of like you had to earn it. Um, now were like if you want this stupid thing on the side of your neck, awesome, you know. So that definitely has changed.

TS: Yeah, definitely. So, then moving back a little bit then from your transition, like I said to your first tattoo job, and then, where was that again?

CD: Iron Age

TS: At, Iron Age, and where did you move after that?

CD: I went to All Star Tattoo.

TS: So you went to All Star, can you tell me a little bit about your experience at All Star and where that was?

CD: Okay, so All Star is in St. Louis as well, Olive-170 area. Um, both of the owners of All Star also worked at Iron Age and absolutely hated it as well. Iron Age is very McDonalds, it's turn 'em and burn 'em. My bosses would constantly come in and say how much time do you have, time is money. They would say that in front of my clients, we hated it there. So I knew that they were going to go open a shop, you know. They had left before I did, I was sticking around, you know, knew in my head I was gonna leave. And then it came to a point where I had to leave and um my boyfriend at the time beat up the owner [laughs]. And I missed every minute of it, which I would have loved to see, man. There were no windows and it happened out back, um and he got what he deserved, he's an ass he really is an ass and it sucks that I missed that. But, in my head I'm like alright I'm going to stick around until the weekend and then tell them some, you know, he made it very uncomfortable. The day that I decided that I was going to leave, I said "Hey I gotta talk to you guys." I had went in and the Sunday before packed up all my stuff so it would be a quick out and kind of set it aside so they didn't know. And he said "You need to wait until the business side of ownership comes in." So I had to work that entire day knowing I had to have this conversation with them, you know. They knew exactly what it was about and they knew what I was going to say and they said get out. So, I was probably ten minutes, I got out of there. I was, Van Halen was on the radio, I was blaring it, I was like life is so good. So then I went to All Star and we basically built that from the ground up, which is pretty awesome. I learned how to lay tile, you know, stuff that I'd never done before. Um, and we got a lot of our clients from Iron Age, um but still they're still attitude at that shop, you know. They put me in the front because they knew I would talk to people. Um, it is nicer to see, um

females are more approachable you know, so it is nicer to see a female up front. Um, but, it just got to the point where I was doing everything, you know. Um, and getting overwhelmed and um and yeah, the attitude, there was still attitude there's still better than um. And I just don't work well in that environment, and maybe it's an insecurity thing, or it just ticks me off really.

TS: Mm-hmm, definitely.

CD: yeah, so I worked there probably for about four years or so, three to four years.

TS: And that was from when to when?

CD: Oh, gol, I don't, my dates are so bad.

TS: like relative.

CD: Ok so, let's see, Iron Age would be like '99. Oh gol, uh... man I don't know. That would be a rough one to, I'm going to say. I'm going to say 2012, is when I started there, roughly.

TS: Okay

CD: Yeah

TS: So, moving from Iron Age to All Star

CD: Mm-hmm

TS: And through that you've mentioned a lot about being a woman in this profession. How has being a woman, how has that experience affected you personally?

CD: Um... as far as...

TS: As far as, being in the profession and from where you were to where you are now. If that makes sense.

CD: uh, meaning how has that changed as women in the industry?

TS: In particular, yourself as well. How has your role become.

CD: I've taken over.

TS: Taken. Mm-hmm.

CD: Yeah and, and not to be an ass or egotistical, but it's um, I've worked pretty hard and people recognize that. So, I have feel like I've earned my way in um so I am proud of that. And it has gotten me an insane schedule, where I am booked two years out and for me, I don't get. The biggest trigger for me is getting overwhelmed, and that's what I can't do, you know. Um, so it's just like week by week, I see what I draw for that week. And I think the hardest part for me now is telling people: wait for a cancelation, wait for, because constantly I get like five texts a day, you got anything, you got anything. And I don't, I can't be a dick, you know, I'm grateful that people want to get tattooed by me but I don't have enough

time, you know if I could I would. So, trying to fit people in right now is probably the hardest part of my job, besides that I got a great clientele and I think I've really with my personality weaned out the assholes and even the people that started off as assholes, now they respect me and realize oh she knows how to do her job, maybe I should let her do it, you know. Um, I just have one client now like that now and he's chilled out, and it's funny because I used to work for him, he was a chef.

TS: Really?

CD: Yeah and had that chef mentality and now he's kind of chilled out, and so yeah I have a great clientele. So that's what I have gained for sure.

TS: Have you seen the, um the same experience that happened to you at Iron Age happen to other women in the profession?

CD: [Laughs], No, no I have not. I've seen a lot of women with short skirts, giggle their way to an apprenticeship and sleep with people, you know, like. I have not seen, yeah. There is, we do have a very rare jewel that works here and she is amazing and she has earned everything. Um, and she is not that type of person at all. Yeah and it's like...

TS: Who are you talking about?

CD: ...it's our piercer Miranda, and she is going to be tattooing soon. Um, I will think of something that needs to be done and she is doing it, you know like I'm about to cry [chokes up], sorry Matt. She is getting married on Saturday too, like I am so fortunate to have her in my life and to actually, hey there is a person like that, that's a female that still exists and yeah she has earned everything she has gotten.

TS: That's awesome.

CD: Yeah

TS: Yeah, that's very awesome. So then speaking of Evermore, um how did this come about? How did you get your job at Evermore?

CD: The owner died in a drug-related accident. Um, actually don't put that in there, he died in a car accident. Um, the drug part yeah that's what I'm saying, I wouldn't put that in there. Uh, and when I was at the funeral and I saw his body I just fell, I fell to my knees and just started balling. So, I went to the other owner of the shop, who is amazing and has done so much for me and put up with my shit for years, you know, because I've pulled some shit. I really have. And um, he has seen past it and I walked up to him and I said I feel there is a reason, I said, "I want to work at Evermore, I feel there is a reason I need to be there" and he's like, "When can you start?" That's how I got the job. Yeah.

TS: And did you become manager right away or how did that work?

CD: I did, [laugh] which didn't work out too well because, you know, there's guys in the shop and they still back then, there was a little bit of the stigma of a female. Um, so he saw that, he already knew I had a strong work ethic because he had come and visited me at All Star, and he wasn't even in the tattoo industry at that time. But, the owners of All Star were frickin' pissed that he was in their watching me tattoo because they thought, "Oh what is he stealing?" you know. He ended up opening up successful shops, he

is an amazing person and that's how I... I look at the person, I look at the individual, you know, I'm not looking at the stories that you tell me about them I look at how... and he's amazing. So, I will, I will never leave this shop because of him, I will follow him everywhere and I will... yeah, he's done so much for me I would never leave him stranded. Respect. And he even says that there is no respect, there is no loyalty anymore because there is so many tattoo shops, that you . . . we have a boss that's done everything for us, you know. He buys a lot of shop supplies that normally most shop owners don't. And then you have people, you know tattoo artists, that just walk out, shit all over you, steal, you know, so that's part of this industry that sucks, but you get that in every industry, you know. So, right now we've got a great crew, I'm very, very thankful.

TS: Um, Definitely. Can you just tell me a little bit more about your experience, in terms of managing Evermore?

CD: Um...

TS: Maybe some of the difficulties or some of the things you have done or...

CD: Um, the shop really manages itself, as long as you have great employees, you know. Um, my job is to everything so they don't have to do much, all they need to do is tattoo. So, I try to make it so that's what it is all they need to do is tattoo. It's just pretty easy, just ordering supplies. The hardest part [laughs] is having to fire people.

TS: Mm-hmm

CD: and my boss, you know what he told me is, "Carrie it's a business decision." Still you know it's hard, it's hard but there are some people that make it pretty easy, you know. Like, you're, we, yeah. There have been some interesting experiences for sure and where people make it easy. Easy to fire them, but then hard, it's like, oh my gosh you pulled all this shit and now you're begging me for your job back and you're crying. Um, it gets easier each time, you know. Um, there was one time in particular and it was pretty hard and actually that was the first time I had to do it. And to my boss I'm like I can't believe you're making me do this, he goes "Carrie I'm not there," he's like, "You see everything, if it's coming out of my mouth," you know. So, I had to buck up, you know and it does, it gets easier each time but right now we got a great crew. That was probably the hardest part, but another part is smoothing over angry clients and we don't get that too often. And, um it's a lot easier when they get a woman on the other end of the phone or when they see a woman come up front because then they start relaxing and kinda easing down. Uh, still confrontation I'm horrible with, I sound like I'm crying when I'm angry and I don't stop, my voice gets real shaky. So, I'm not intimidating whatsoever, so usually I can kind of with my wits, smooth people over. Um, so that's another hard part but besides that, that would be it for me, yeah.

TS: Yeah is there any particular customer confrontation that you remember, that you would be willing to share?

CD: Yeah, when I was at All Star. Um, there was, in St. Louis you can sign for minors to get tattooed. There was a woman that brought her fourteen-year-old daughter in and wanted to get her fourteen-year-old daughter's boyfriend's name on the side of her neck. There was no confrontation there because there was no explaining to her why she was a bad parent, you know. But I do remember that, I do remember that, I also remember a girl coming into Iron Age that had a small swastika on her ankle and she wanted

to get covered up, she said she had gotten it done when she was twelve and I said, “Oh my god who did this to you when you were twelve?” And she said, “My dad.” So with this you hear a lot of stories, you know, and I am part-time therapist, you know. Oh, here is a great confrontation. This is a good one, and this happens here. There was a guy here and he came in very pleasant, it was super weird. Um, he came in with, I’m assuming both of his daughters. He signed for one, I’m not sure what type of piercing she was getting, it was something like ear, or something like that. Busy Saturday, shop’s filled, filling out paperwork, you know like copying IDs, all that stuff. She is back there, he just starts getting real... Oh wait! Oh, he went to his car with his other daughter, then comes back and is just acting really weird, where he starts pacing. When people start pacing, it makes me uncomfortable, you know I’m like something’s up. So he comes up front when it came time to pay, the price was forty dollars. I was tattooing at the time, the counter person said, “um, Carrie do we have receipts?” and I was like not really, I’m like I can write something up. This guy wants a receipt for his piercing. So I come up front, I’m like we don’t have any receipts, I can, I can, you know I am just trying to ease him over, this is what I can do for you basically, but he didn’t want to hear that. Why is it forty dollars? It took five minutes. So, I started to explain and he was so angry and crazy and out of his mind, like his daughters are crying, they’re so embarrassed. So, then I realize its past the point, the guy doesn’t care why it’s forty dollars, he just doesn’t want to pay for this, you know. So, his daughters are crying and that’s when I go, “Cool dad.” And like I just starting laughing, because it’s a funny YouTube video. But I was like cool dad, your kids are crying in front of all these people, you know. So as soon as he left everybody applauded, they were like that guy was such a... and this is what he said as he left, “I’m going to call the better business bureau.” Okay, what? So that was pretty entertaining.

TS: I can imagine you get something like that every once in a while.

CD: We do, not too often. We are not open late enough that we get a lot of the drunks. But, definitely he was on something. And I’m always good at “name that drug,” I think he was on meth. But, the thought of him going to his car with his daughter and coming back different, that freaked me out. I’m like “Are you doing this in front of your kid?” You know. Yeah, I see all sorts of things.

TS: Speaking of, [clears throat] coming in with people intoxicated, do you ever get any experience like that, I know the Stagger Inn is right across the street and there are a couple of other places around here, but.

CD: Not too often, [coughs]. I am better with confrontation now and telling people what needs to happen. I mean, back in the day I would be like I’ll just deal with it because I don’t. Honestly people that are drunk, it’s, if you’ve drinkin’ a lot the night before your blood is going to be thin. Honestly if you drink two hours before it’ll be fine, they move they don’t realize what they’re doing, they are just hard to deal with. They are just really obnoxious and it takes forever to get a tattoo done. We don’t get too much of that; we did have St. Patrick’s Day here. We saw this guy he had a pair of overalls on, he kept coming back in, coming back in, is it my time yet? It must have been on a Saturday; it must have been a walk-in day. He had filled out paperwork and we saw him, he would go across the street, stand outside with his green beer, come back like even more intoxicated. So we were just having fun with it at that time. “I filled out paperwork and everything.” Were like, our counter guy was going through everything ridiculously, like stickers and business cards, just like I don’t see your paperwork anywhere, you know. So we were having fun with that one, but it’s never gotten, we’ve never gotten like angry people or anything like that. Iron Age, Oh my gosh every night, every night. Yeah that was . . . And I didn’t have to deal with that because we had counter people that dealt with that. And Iron Age the rooms were more private so I didn’t see a

whole lot of that, it was just more I heard a lot of it.

TS: Mm-hmm, definitely. Yeah, I can see that being a bit of an issue sometimes, especially down on the loop.

CD: Oh my gosh, yeah. And a lot people at Iron Age, just wanted to see what it's all about. Yeah and the worst people, and it's so funny because being a counter person then, I'd be like there is a tattoo waiting for you guys. [Sighs], I'm not going to do it. Because they were rich yuppies, the owner would not tattoo rich yuppies. I'm like "What?!" This is ridiculous, so yeah artist mentality and dealing with babies. Yeah.

TS: Definitely. Because this is a small business. Um, is there any difficulties that you guys run into? That you would be willing to share.

CD: Oh yeah, when we first opened up. Um, especially being in, I want to say this location. Our old location, nobody could ever find us because we weren't allowed to put a sign out.

TS: And where was that?

CD: That was right next to Goshen.

TS: Okay.

CD: Um, so when we got this spot. We knew we needed a bigger spot. We knew we needed um, and our business each year has gotten better, being on the corner and I think just being nice, you know. Um, but yeah when we first moved in here they asked us can you please close all your blinds. A cop came in and he was embarrassed that he had to tell us this, nobody wants to see what's going on in there, we are having complaints that you are tattooing people naked and they're walking around the shop like that. I could see like, hey we're doing a chest tattoo and a guy has got his shirt off, but nobody's running around here naked, you know. So yeah, then we just kind of forgot about it, we smoke out back and I think I'm only smoker left, which is horrible, I need to quit. Um, so we're not standing out front like a bunch of juggalos, you know we don't. We are a respectful shop; the town knows us. Um we're respectful to every business in this town. Um, and yeah I think that's what it all comes down to, just being a honest decent business and. We don't even think about it now, our blinds are open. We have not had a complaint since and we do tattoo, I want to say like seventy percent of our clientele is military or first responders.

TS: Really, that was the next thing I was going to ask, in terms of like your clientele. Who are, I guarantee there is quite a variety, but who would say the general majority of people who come and get tattooed here?

CD: Women.

TS: Really?

CD: Yeah, a lot of women. Um, working class, a lot of working class. Um, college students for more piercings and smaller tattoos. Um, but that's not a huge amount our business, I would say working class would be the biggest amount of our business.

TS: What kind of tattoos? Or is it all over the place?

CD: Oh gol, being in Illinois, it was browning symbol, a lot of deers, a lot of, Cole gets to do a lot of that work because he does photorealistic and that's the type of style that working class generally gets. So he doing a lot of deer, he's doing a lot of American flags, uh gol, what else does Cole do a lot of?

Counter Person (CP): Hour glasses, clocks, lady faces.

CD: Tiger Heads

CP: Tiger heads

CD: Lion Heads

CP: Tigers

CD: Bears

CP: Maps

CD: Yeah, but a lot of American flags.

CP: Yes

TS: Really?

CD: I mean he probably does an American Flag a week. Oh! Eagle, got to throw an eagle in there. Yeah.

TS: Definitely. Um, sorry. So, you said there are some students here and you said the students... Do you get a lot of SIUE students coming in or

CD: We do, yeah.

TS: Is it, so would you say, I don't know, if you could give somewhat of a percentage or something like that, would you say your clientele is generally?

CD: I'd say fifty percent.

TS: Really?

CD: Yeah, I think that we treat better other, we treat people better than most of the shops around here. I'm not talking shit on the shops around here, they all do great work but we are nice to everybody we're not going to push any business out the door, you know. Because a lot of them are like, it's that better than, I'm too good to do an infinity knot kind of thing. And were not like that we'll take it all. Yeah.

TS: You mention the other shops, um opening up here on Main Street in Edwardsville.

CD: Uh huh.

TS: Has that done anything to your business? Or do you have any type of relationship at all?

CD: Um, I do. They have always been great to me, well I've always been great to them. If I've ever

needed anything, I've had to ask and it sucked and was humiliating but they were, [Laughs], they. In the beginning they weren't quite as friendly but then you know smoothed them over and yeah. We're on great terms and if I ever need anything or have questions I'll go right to them and I think that is better for us. We don't talk shit on them, they do great work and it would look bad if we talked shit on them. There was a shop that did open up on Main Street. We were not worried about at all, you know just because of his demeanor and because of his attitude, we were like "This guy is not going to last at all" and it didn't, he did not last.

TS: Mm-hmm, definitely. So I have done a little bit of, you know, some preliminary research and have seen that you have partnered up with organizations like Got Your Six and Worked On fundraisers and stuff like that. Can you tell me a little bit about how that came about and yeah...?

CD: We get a lot of people coming in there, like their kid has a cold and they want a gift card, you know. So it's like you kind of have to wean that stuff or else were just giving everything away. So it was a busy day, my now friend, Heather comes in and she's like "Hey Carrie somebody wants to talk to you." And I'm putting a stencil on and in my head, and it gets me every time and I'm bad at judging people, and then they always smooth me over and I'm like that's what you get for judging people, you shouldn't do that. So I'm like great, you know. I go, give her a \$25 gift card, actually she wants to talk to you, and in my head I'm like, god I don't have time for this, whatever. So when she told me what the cause was for, um I am the type of person, when I say I am going to do something I'll do it. So I said let me talk this over with my boss, you know. She had asked if we could give anything, really. So you know when she told me what it was about, when she told me it was about PTSD. I have been diagnosed with PTSD, at the time I was dating somebody who had PTSD. To see a two hundred and fifty-pound man that was in the Air Force, and him finally telling me what he had to do, balling, and you can't help him. It was so hard because I want to help everybody, you know. So when she told me what it was about, I was like I'm on it. So she, she is good, she's like alright, I'll call back on Monday. And I hadn't talked to my boss then and um, so I told him what it was about and I asked for a Saturday, you know which is, it's rough that's a lot of money he's giving up, you know for a Saturday, do it. So, I said how about we'll pick this Saturday and one hundred percent of profits go to Got Your Six. She started crying, she's like "Oh my god Carrie," I was thinking like twenty percent. So now we do it every year and the line is around the block, you now. And um, it's selfishly, that's not the reason why I did it. I'm not doing it to get more business here, but it has brought more business here, which is awesome. Um, now that's been part of my life too, so I am part of that organization and trying not to get overwhelmed but I'll do anything to help them, man, because they are really helping a lot of people. These dogs are amazing what they can do, it's unbelievable.

TS: Definitely, I did some research and I, it seems like a very good cause.

CD: Oh, they're great. Yes.

TS: Definitely and I looked there is training and other things you can do to get your dog involved and I thought that was really, really cool.

CD: And that I leave to them. And I hate when people say anybody can train a dog because that is not true whatsoever. I went to one class and like alright I'm going to leave it to them. So I uh, what do you guys need, I'm the money hustler and um yeah, so that's how I got into that organization.

TS: Is there any other partnerships you have gone about um doing with either another organization like that

for instance or a partnership with another local business, say like Cleveland Heath or anything like that around Edwardsville.

CD: Um, well with Got Your Six we do use a lot of the local businesses, but as far as other organizations, no. Personally, I do go speak um to women that have suffered from um sexual and uh just like, that have PTSD as well. I will personally go and speak at certain places, um but as far as us as a shop with other organizations, no. My boss does own another shop in Centralia, he also owns a coffee shop right next door.

TS: Really?

CD: So that's his part and then he, he'll do everything to support us and Got Your Six because we do everything to support him, for, sure.

TS: So, being here, you said you've been here for how long again?

CD: Oh gall, [Talking to an artist in the shop] How long do you think I've been here eight years?

Tattoo Artist (TA): You? You've been here fourteen years.

CD: I've been here fourteen years?

TA: Fourteen yeah. I started right after you and I've been here thirteen.

CD: Fuck.

TA: 2006

CD: God, I can't believe I've even been tattooing that long. I think like I've only been tattooing, twenty years is a long time. I've been tattooing longer than that?

TA: Yeah because you had All Star and Iron Age before that.

CD: Yeah that's like when we were like dates, I'm like oh golly, here we go. Yeah, yeah. That's insane, crazy.

TS: So since you have been here for so long you have probably have observed some of the rise and fall of other businesses going on. Has that, because Edwardsville has kind of been rising a little bit as of recently? Has that um had any growth in your guys' business, since you've been here have you seen that? Or you know what, how has Main Street kind of changed?

CD: Yeah, I've seen a growth in business um but I personally think it's because it's who we are. I also think the location helps to. Being right on the corner, you know people are right at the intersection they're forced to look, you know. And also word of mouth is the best advertisement. We don't do whole lot of promotion, social media wise, or anything like that umm word of mouth has been our best promotion. Um yeah, but business has gotten better each year for sure.

TS: Definitely. Alright, well is there anything else you would like to share with me today?

CD: Hmm... no I guess that's it. I'm truly grateful to be where I am today. Um and being a woman in this industry was very hard, it was very hard. Not so much today, but uh I'm just truly grateful to be where I am at, yeah that's it that's all I got.

TS: Well I do have one last question for you, um...

CD: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Um, what would say your, or one of your favorite things to tattoo is? Or kind of tattoo.

CD: Flowers, that's the first thing that came to my mind so I'm going to say, I love doing, doing girly stuff and love doing bright colors, so flowers. And this lady today that I have to draw for, she's like do what you want and I'm like I'm drawing a flower, you know. I love doing flowers.

TS: Is there any specific tattoo that you can think of that you've done, that has been um your favorite or one of your favorites, or particularly doing.

CD: I would say, Dr. Doom tattoo, a lot for people see that, a lot of people love it. And I think it's just the size of it, it's just its intense and I'm pretty proud of it. That poor kid man, wow.

TS: Was it... what kind of, where was it located?

CD: It's a back piece.

TS: Oh, it's a back piece.

CD: Yeah, but I think that just because of the size and just the subject matter, that's probably the first thing that pops to my head. It's probably one of my favorites.

TS: Well thank you very much.

CD: Absolutely.

TS: It was wonderful interviewing you today. Thank you for doing this with me, I really appreciate it.

CD: Yeah, yeah.