

# Are **YOU** brave enough to tattoo your brows?

by Marion McGilvary

**T**HERE'S a bit of a trend among women, usually just as their children hit adolescence, when they suddenly decide to throw caution to the wind and get a tattoo.

It's as if having a dolphin on your ankle or a heart on your hip will keep you feeling young and edgy. I don't understand it, and yet, here I am about to get tattooed. Any minute.

Okay, it's my eyebrows I'm having done, not a soaring eagle on my chest, but this feels like pure semantics as Karen Betts, Britain's Brow Queen, leans over me holding a very sharp instrument in her lovely manicured hands, ready to give me my first ink.

Why did a person who flinches at the word 'needle' ever think this was a good idea? I'm numbed up with anaesthetic cream, but I'm still wary.

'On a scale of one to ten, tell me honestly, how much is it going to hurt?' I ask. Karen admits to around a four/five, but says it will only be for a few minutes. 'Then the cream sinks into the skin and you'll just feel a scraping.'

I feel reassured. After all, this is something I previously thought was an impossible dream — having great eyebrows. Mine have always been a little on the sparse side, and then the menopause hit and they got even thinner (unlike my waistline). With over 20 years' experience, Karen usually trains other beauty gurus in the art of the beautiful brow, and although permanent make-up has become the latest thing on the groomed woman's wish list, there's also a serious side to the business.

As well as cosmetic work on lips, brows and eyes, Karen is also an expert in the field of medical tattooing, helping sufferers with breast cancer, burns and scars.

I calm down and repeat the mantra: breathe, don't bolt.

**K**AREN begins by asking me what sort of effect I want to achieve — how dark I want the brows to be — and what shape I prefer. I tell her somewhere between Angelina and Nigella, not the full Cara Delevingne, and she draws on a perfectly symmetrical pair of eyebrows for my



approval. Frankly, it looks good enough to stop there. I'm impressed already, but then the work begins.

The easy stuff, you'd think, would be removing a few stray hairs to get the perfect line, except I'm practically levitating off the couch with pain. Should I have told her the reason my brows look like an untended garden is because I find plucking too painful?

'I just need to thread these few stray ones,' she says and holy mother of Go... there's a bit of water leaking out of my eyes.

'That's the worst part,' she soothes. 'People often find the tweezing worse than the treatment.' But I'm the wimp who takes pills before she goes to the dentist for a check-up.

However, she's right. When she gets down to business, it's nothing

like I expected. For a start there's no loud whirring electrical machinery. It's all very calm. The actual procedure stings a little, but it is fairly low on the scale of common or garden knocks and scratches, where ten is maybe a stubbed toe.

Karen makes short little strokes with her own specially developed needle almost as if she's drawing with a pen. She makes several fine, narrow cuts, each delivering a layer of pigment into the skin.

Then she wipes each brow a few times, and then... that's it!

This technique is known as micro-blading. Many people refer to it as permanent make-up, but this isn't strictly true, as Karen explains. It is actually a permanent procedure but over time — 12 to 18 months — it will fade, especially if you spend



**BEFORE**



**AFTER**

**High brow: The procedure, left, gave Marion great results, above**

time in the sun, and the colour and line will become diffused. She recommends a repeat application about once a year.

I've never been much good at make-up. My cosmetic skills end at bright red lipstick and dark glasses. And I've never known what to do with my eyebrows which have always been an indeterminate shade somewhere between blah and beige.

If it's true what the beauty gurus say that eyebrows are the architecture of the face, then the foundations of my building were crumbling. Due to my failing eyesight, if I use pencil on them it looks like a five-year-old has drawn on me.

**S**O, I've never been able to make them frame my face or define it in any way. Karen maintains that strong eyebrows change your whole look, and that the right brows are like having a mini eye-lift, but can it really make that much of a difference?

While I don't think that a pair of caterpillars draped across my brow are going to turn me into a movie star I can't wait to see the results. I'm not expecting a miracle here... until she holds the mirror up.

Honestly I was amazed. Granted I was lying down at the time which, after a certain age, is how all we full-faced women look our best, but I could not believe how wonderful my eyebrows looked. They really do give structure to the face and the tattoo blends almost indistinguishably with my natural brows.

It is faster than a face lift, significantly cheaper, between £395 and £895, depending on the practitioner (Karen obviously is top class and top price). Choose a reputable therapist. It's easy to see how in less professional hands, the treatment could go horribly wrong.

When the photographer showed me the before and after shots — during which I was wearing the same make up — I instantly see my face has changed. Do I seem a smidge less sleepy? And is there a hint of cheekbone? Nigella would be proud.

## Is it just ME?

Or is everyone else delighted summer is over too?

I DON'T care if I sound like an unseasonal version of the Grinch, I've had enough of folk

banging on about their wonderful, Facebook-friendly holidays, their bikini bodies and beach-happy children.

My body has never been ready for a beach in 52 years so isn't about to start now. I am no good in scanty clothes; I feel hot and self-conscious.

Now, at long last everyone can put away their bronzed limbs and blonde hair back-lit by the sun, and settle into the more reasonable and sober business of covering-up.

Those of us with less than perfect ageing figures feel reduced somehow during those months when stripping down is de rigueur.

Now we can feel the comfort of black opaque tights, closed-toe shoes that conceal gnarled toes and bunions, as well as hibernate into chunky jerseys and long skirts after too many days drinking rose and eating feta 'salads' and messy ice-creams.

And how many holidays do people go on these days? At

*Holidays are like being at home, only too hot, too expensive and more stressful*

the school gates they say: 'Tuscany and Greece and Scotland and the Seychelles. Forget! A weekend in Ibiza! Fabulous!' It's all a blur to their children, and when you ask them how it was, the answer is invariably an underwhelmed, 'Fine.'

Why do they bother? As one said to me: 'It's like being at home, only too hot, too expensive, and harder to cook in.'

I had a week in Norfolk, then it was back home again. If you live in a town in August, every house and shop seems devoid of life, and texts, emails and phone calls seem to cease.

Now, at long last, the cafes are filling up, the streets are alive with little knots of people hugging and gossiping.

I am thrilled it is back to normality. September hails the excitement of new challenges at work, the promise of a new academic year, and lovely evenings revelling in the nights drawing in.

Thank God for the seriousness of winter instead of the never-ending silliness of summer.

by Candida Crewe

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