

Couple's implant chips take love to a new level



CTV.ca News Staff

Updated: Wed. Feb. 15 2006 12:23 PM ET

Grand gestures of love take many forms on Valentine's Day -- flowers, chocolate, romantic dinners -- but a tech-savvy couple has taken it to a new level.

Jennifer Tomblin and Amal Graafstra have made the most modern declaration of their affection for each other, with implanted electronic chips that allow them unfettered access to each other's lives.

It's called Radio Frequency Identification, or RFID. Both have had a small electronic chip embedded under their skin that grants access to each other's front doors and home computers.

The system works like a key-card. A simple swipe of the wrist across an electronic sensor, and they're in.

The couple sees the decision as a modern declaration of love that also happens to be functional.

"It's convenient and all of that. But it's definitely neat to have access to each other's things. nobody else has that, definitely," Tomblin told CTV's Canada AM.

Tomblin, 23, lives in Vancouver, while Graafstra, 29, lives in Washington.

Graafstra got interested in RFID several years ago, and began researching the possibilities. He works in remote server management, so it was a natural step to order his first chip, have it implanted by a cosmetic surgeon, then begin writing software to go along with it.

"I got interested in RFID, essentially, as a way to replace my keys," Graafstra said.

He had a second chip put in later, and after witnessing his successful experiment, Tomblin followed suit and got her own chip about six weeks ago.

"He was writing a book and he was building all these really neat projects, and he'd get into his house and car and computer with it, and I decided if I could do something like that too. it would be really neat," Tomblin said.

The chip itself is just two millimeters by 12 millimetres, and can be inserted under the skin with an injection needle.

Graafstra's interest has continued to grow, and he has now written several pieces of software to go along with the chip. That interest has developed into a book project called RFID Toys, which comes out later this month.

The book will include the RFID programs he has written, and will reveal his self-implanting method.

Graafstra's work has made him somewhat of a pioneer in the field. Though another researcher working on a different project had a chip put in his forearm, Graafstra was the first to implant a chip in his hand, and the first to plan to teach others how to follow suit.

The chip is embedded in a tiny glass tube, and once implanted it is invisible.

The chips are surprisingly inexpensive, not much more than a few U.S. dollars, and can easily be ordered online. The hardware ranges from \$30 up, and software is still difficult to come by -- Graafstra wrote all his own programs.

Graafstra obtained his first RFID tag from www.phidgetusa.com. The site has a variety of inexpensive options for various uses, but the glass tube-style tags on the site come with a warning against doing what Graafstra and Tomblin did.

"We do not advise or encourage users to implant the RFID tags we sell into humans or animals in any way," reads the warning. "These tags are not sold as medical products and are NOT sanitized for medical use. Phidgets USA and Trossen Inc ... strongly advise against any such use of the tags we sell."

However, the trend is likely to gain momentum as Canadians seek new ways to implement technology into their daily lives, and just maybe, to demonstrate their love for each other.

Like a tattoo, Tomblin said, it's a unique way of connecting with her significant other.