

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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ON SKINS AND NEEDLES

With ancient origins, tattoos and piercings get updated for the millennium generation

By Amy Malone
THE BATTALION

Kris Bradley's tribal tattoo is all that remains of his fixation with body art. His forays into the tattoo parlor resulted in a tattoo, tongue and ear piercing. By the time he lost his earring on a Spring break trip, he had already taken his tongue ring out and his journey into alternative art had ended.

With such large number of undergraduates involved in campus organizations, Texas A&M encompasses students who wish to make a difference in one way or another. Whether shown on a fraternity T-shirt, a pink breast cancer ribbon, or a crucifix necklace, it is apparent that each student is marked by his beliefs. Looking closely, it is evident some students have a different sort of mark.

The first identified tattoo dates back to the body of a man found preserved in a glacier. According to www.tattoos.com, testing suggested that he was 5,300 years old, meaning he lived in 4000 B.C. The man wore a cross behind his knee and a series of lines above his kidneys. Found on Egyptian and Nubian mummies, it is apparent that tattooing was performed and expanded around 2000 B.C.

Various cultures used the tattoo in different ways to signify importance, heritage and background. While the ancient Greeks used tattoos to communicate among spies, the Romans used them to brand criminals and slaves.

The Web site also said the Japanese marked lawbreakers with lines and arches so that by the third offense the Japanese character for "dog" had been carved on the offender's forehead. Around 1700 the Japanese middle class began to cover themselves with full body tattoos to rebel against the law stating only royalty could wear ornate clothing.

According to www.cool-tattoo.com, Pope Hadrian banned tattooing in the eighth century as a barbaric custom.

Captain Cook brought word back to Europe, having seen the practice in Tahiti in 1771, and tattooing spread across Europe.

For some people, the tattoo may take the appearance of what they value most in life or what defines them, such as an eagle, a cross or even a swastika. In this way, tattoos are similar to a permanent bumper sticker.

According to Bobby "Joker" Warden, an artist at Aggeland Tattoo, these practices may become addictive. The likelihood of a student getting another tattoo or piercing after his first experience is extremely high. Tattoos are also a way to say "I love you." For some people, nothing says commitment like a tattoo. Another motivation for a tattoo or piercing is following a trend.

Adam Brown, a sophomore architecture major, got a piercing to be individual.

"I got my piercing first because I wanted to be different and to be different than other people. I got my tattoo because I love art, and I wanted to put some of it on my body," he said.

Terri Warden of Aggeland Tattoo said 70 percent of the shop's clientele is female, an indication that tattoo parlors are becoming the next estrogen-related stop.

Warden said piercings are often spontaneous. She ranks the most common piercings as navel, tongue and cartilage.

Some students may take their piercings out because it is a stigma for job-hunting.

Nic Noble, a junior communications major, had his piercing removed because he was required to for his job. Others, though, say they simply outgrow their piercings.

"I took my tongue ring out because I grew tired of it, as well as the earring I lost over spring break. I just didn't feel like putting it back in. They both lost their appeal," Bradley said.

Viral infections such as hepatitis, HIV and bacterial and fungal infection may occur when poor quality dye or metal is used in the tattooing or piercing process.

There may also be allergic reactions such as skin irritation, melanoma or leprosy. Toxic Shock Syndrome, tetanus, venereal ulcers and tuberculosis are also associated with piercings or tattoos. According to CNN's Web site, up to half of all body piercings needed medical treatment and two deaths were related this year alone in Europe.

Brown said he checked about sterilization procedures because his friends had gotten diseases because they had had work done at bad piercing places.

Ann, a 25-year-old who asked that her last name not be used, had both nipples pierced with extreme care. She received a staph infection in her right breast and had to have a partial mastectomy; her kidneys were damaged as well.

According to the American Society of Dermatological Surgery, 50 percent of those receiving a tattoo want it removed later on in life, summing their experiences up to the folly and ignorance of youth.

One out of 100 people receiving body art asks about the sanitation methods involved.

"We would encourage people to ask about the sterilization method of any place they'd go. It's

always a shock how many people don't ask," Terri Warden said.

An important consideration to make before taking the plunge into body art is that blood cannot be donated for one year after a person has obtained a new tattoo or piercing. Caution should be taken when caring for the area and the artist's specific instructions should be followed. If the area becomes infected or any emergency occurs, contact the shop.

"Joker" Warden said parlors are required to keep a copy of identification on file for two years in case anyone has a reaction to the ink.

For those who wish to remove their tattoos, laser surgery may be too expensive. An affordable alternative to surgery is Tat B Gone, which allows the ink to fade without scabbing or scarring. According to www.tatbgone.com, this method is priced around the same range of getting a tattoo and must be performed several times.

Though surgery and Tat B Gone may reduce the visibility of unwanted body art, removing an entire tattoo can still be difficult, no matter how many attempts.

A volunteer program named D-TAG in Houston and other cities in Texas offers assistance to teenage gang members trying to get out of gang life by sponsoring their tattoo removal. Started by a school nurse, this program uses family and community support to redirect the child's lifestyle from gang behaviors and funds the removal of the tattoo.

From solidifying religious beliefs, to simply adorning a toned bicep, tattoos have become a widely accepted form of self-expression for youth culture in America.

JOSHUA HOBSON • THE BATTALION

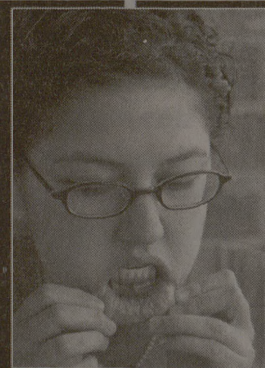


BODY ART

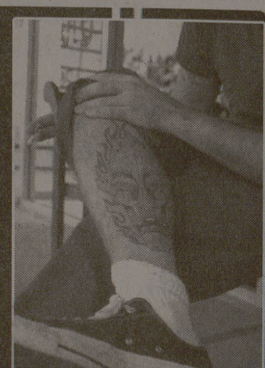
Junior zoology major Jenifer Stephenson's tribal tattoo with a Pisces sign in the middle is located on the middle of her lower back.



Senior psychology major Debbie Ridgeway shows off her "Music" tattoo located inside her lip just after having it done.



Left: Tattoo artist Adam Hays displays the tattoo on his back of an elephant from the painting "The Elephants" by Salvador Dali.



Right: Hays created the tattoo on his calf.

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