

## TO TATTOO OR NOT TATTOO

*By Fred Hobbs*

Little kids love to decorate their faces and arms. Face painting is a popular feature at carnivals, civic celebrations and kiddie birthday parties. Some cereal boxes used to contain “transfers.” They were imprinted tissues that could be moistened, leaving temporary washable images of cartoon heroes or animals. For the youngsters, transfers were lots of fun but also quick to fade and easily washed off.

But, why would presumably intelligent adults want to permanently disfigure their bodies with depictions such as a snake, a dragon or a heart with “I Love Lulu” printed on it? Even a praiseworthy and patriotic image such as an American flag doesn’t belong on the human body, which as we all know, is a well-designed and functional creation that needs only minimal cosmetic touches, especially as it ages.

Now, in some male-centric circles, real men are expected not only to avoid eating quiche, but also to embrace notions such as getting a tattoo. It’s a manly thing to do. It’s also a risky thing to do. The famed Mayo Clinic cautions would-be tattoo recipients that because tattoos breach the skin, the potential exists for significant pain. Allergic reactions, infections, even blood-borne diseases from contaminated tattooing instruments can result.

Traditions abound of rough-hewn sailors (like Popeye) getting tattooed in a Singapore back alley or other masculine-dominated settings. But lately, even cute college girls and attractive suburban housewives are known to sport the image of a small rose or other adornment generally discreetly placed where they can be seen publicly only on “bikini beaches.”

Not all women are that discreet. Actually sighted this summer at a local supermarket: An upper middle-aged woman approximately 5 feet 4 inches tall, who must have weighed at least 250 pounds. She was wearing a too-small halter-top and shorts. Every inch of her visible body was covered with large tattoos including the aforementioned snakes and various weird looking designs along with messages that were hard to decipher from a respectable distance.

One can decide whether to agree or disagree with the general notion of the public display of tattoos. Surely, the right to get and display a tattoo is covered by the First Amendment to the Constitution. Whether the images rise to the level of real art, however, is left to the possessor and the beholder.

The man with “I Love Lulu” on his chest better marry the girl or he’ll have lots of explaining to do to Flossie or Poopsie or whoever becomes his life-long love. The woman in the supermarket will have to live with her “body art” into an advanced age and who knows or wants to know what she will look like then?

Tattoos can be reversed, but the process is reportedly quite painful. Often parts of the marks remain even after the procedure and, of course, nature’s wrinkles can change the appearance.

Finally, advice to those thinking of getting a tattoo or who know somebody who is considering the idea: Take note of some comments you don’t want to hear from the tattoo artist: “Eagle? I thought you said beagle!” or “ We’re all out of red, so I used pink.” And the worst word of all: “Oops!”