

Tattoo

by Harry Zirkelbach

TATTOO...TO PUNCTURE THE SKIN WITH A NEEDLE AND INSERT INDELIBLE COLOR SO AS TO LEAVE PERMANENT MARKS OR DESIGNS.

In American cities not located on the Coasts in the early part of the 20th Century, it was unusual for men or women of any age to have been tattooed, much less show that distinctive mark in public. Having been raised in western Pennsylvania, I have no recollection of knowing anyone who had been tattooed. This was true of relatives and friends of my parents, many of whom had served in WWI. The topic was seldom mentioned, except in adventure novels and trade publications that celebrated men who sailed the seven seas.

Later at the onset of the 1930s when our family moved to Erie, a port city on Lake Erie, sailors might be seen wearing signs of their seafaring life. Still, in the families who made up the body of our world, there were no male or females wearing skin markings, other than scars.

It wasn't until joining the Navy in 1944 that I began to be aware of tattoos. The young Navy tattooed personnel who became acquaintances often had the same experience. They had not been tattooed when enlisting. That distinctive identity was usually the result of a boisterous evening with crew members, heavy drinking, the upshot of which was that first tattoo. This was often an ANCHOR, or a symbolic rolled parchment containing the word MOM. Even then this veteran recruit, part of the team, was still reluctant to wear any clothing that would make the tattoo visible. The move to bravado with the guys, required many nights of bar parading.

In the Metro Denver 1950 Telephone Book, the Yellow pages, Page 448, contained one listing under Tattooing ... FRENCHIE'S NOLA-TONE STUDIO 1720 Curtis Street. Young Denverites then would not likely come home to surprise family and friends with a tattoo.

Life has changed. Today's DEX, page 938, has three columns of tattoo purveyors. Frenchie's is replaced alphabetically by FREAKIE'S TATTOO AND BODY PIERCING, 5701 E Colfax. Equally useful in DEX, seven listings of TATTOOS - REMOVED.

Still in our extended family of 37, only one has a tattoo, the matriarch. These are never covered, always visible, yet unseen by most, for these were done to enhance the visibility of eyebrows.

And one other view.

TATTOO...A SIGNAL ON A DRUM OR BUGLE, SUMMONING MILITARY PERSONNEL TO THEIR QUARTERS.

An exception here too, not a feature of Navy life. I doubt Navy personnel serving on ships ever were reminded of this tattoo, for life on ship depended on Watch and Duty standing, a continuous 4 hours on, 4 hours off rotations. Navy announcements are preceded by the Boatswain's pipe, no drum, alerting the crew of events of interest to the All Hands.

Not much tattooing in this sheltered life, how about yours?