

## Tattoo. You, too?

Mark Twain said, “The radical of one century is the conservative of the next.”<sup>1</sup> In today’s fast paced world, the changes described by Mr. Twain often take place more rapidly than a span of centuries. The changes often happen instantaneously. If not instantaneously, for this discussion, a few years.

For example, tattoos. It was not long ago, two or three decades, that anyone sporting a tattoo was considered a *rebel*. Maybe not a Mark Twain radical, but an unorthodox, rebellious sort. Thus, in those days, a few guys, but not many, had tattoos. And a gal with a tattoo *was* considered radical, far-out.

The famous rebels starring in movies just a few years ago never showed any tattoos on their bodies. James Dean? Marlon Brando? Rebels with no tattoos. And that nonconformist, Groucho Marx? As Groucho would say, “No cigar,” and no tattoos. For the topper: Ever see a tattoo on a cowboy? No way, not even on his horse.

For many years, I can think of only one profession where tattoos were conventional, never raising an eyebrow: the sailors in a navy. But not naval officers, only enlisted men. I served on five ships while an officer in the U.S. Navy. I played in sports where enlisted men and officers shared showers after a contest.

Mind you, I did not go snooping around the showers looking for tattoos on men’s bodies. In a public shower, real men don’t look at anything but the shower nozzle. Of course, it would have been a different matter if the showerers were women, but then, I would have not been in the shower in the first place.

My point in this saga about tattoos is that I never saw a naval officer sporting a tattoo, but untold numbers of enlisted men had one to many tattoos decorating just about any part of their body. I would love to recount to you some of the more outrageously funny examples of these tattoos. But this essay is intended for bed-time reading for children, so I must pass.

Okay, just one...and one of that drew stares and comments from the man’s shipmates and shower mates. A sailor had the tattoo of a hand on each of his buttocks. The two hands had their wrists taper down toward the crevice---the parting part of the buttocks, so to speak. One of the shower mates asked him where on earth he came up with such an idea. Quick as a wink, he replied, “Just wanted something besides a heart with ‘Dear Mother’ on it.”

There you go, kiddies. That wasn’t so bad, was it? Now, let’s return to our investigatory epic.

Last week, I watched a lot of the U.S. Tennis Open tournament. Professional tennis, especially the Wimbledon matches in England, are noted for clean-cut players. Both men and women are crisp looking. Beards, if on the men, are very short in length. Of course, the women are clean-shaven from face to toe. In the Wimbledon tournament, all players must wear white clothes and socks; top to bottom: white.

In the past, just a decade or so ago, professional tennis players...male or female...did not display tattoos on any visible part of their bodies. For the recently concluded U.S. Open, about half the players sported tattoos; some covering an entire arm, some more modestly placed on a wrist or biceps. Not so long ago, I venture to say that if a player showed up at Wimbledon with a tattoo, the player would have been required to re-ink the rendering to be white before entering the court. For sure, times have changed.

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Bigelow, ed., *Mark Twain’s Notebook* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1935), 344.

I do not have a tattoo, but I have nothing against them. I find them interesting to view, even though a lot of people who have festooned themselves with scores of tattoos all over themselves, seem to take offence when they detect me in the process of detecting their decorations. I am tempted to ask them about their tattoos, but I value their tattoos' privacy. On the other hand, I suspect most of these folks would be happy to talk to me about the meaning of life in relation to the meaning of their tattoos. If not, why bother with the bodily inking in the first place?

Also, I have spoken with enough people who have had tattoos placed on themselves to have formulated three truisms associated with tattoos:<sup>2</sup>

- **The Tattoo Excitement Effect:** The sensation of glancing at one's forearm and viewing a new tattoo for the first time: a picture of one's spouse.
- **The Tattoo Remorse Effect:** The sensation of glancing at one's forearm and viewing an old tattoo for the thousandth time: a picture of one's ex-spouse.
- **The Tattoo Reverse Engineering Syndrome:** Realizing the rendering of the ex-spouse on one's forearm might not be easily irradiated.

Here is a downer for some. If you are a religious type, remember this passage from Leviticus 19:28, "Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord." So, sinners, repent! Shed those Sodom and Gomorrah markings.

Before signing off on this penetrating analysis, let's revisit the earlier quote from Mark Twain: "The radical of one century is the conservative of the next." It used to be that wearing a tattoo was considered unconventional, even radical; a fine way to demonstrate one's Maverickness. Today, wearing a tattoo is so conventional that not wearing one could be considered the mark of a rebel.

That profile fits yours truly. Without lifting a finger, I have morphed from a conventional tattooless person to an unconventional tattooless Maverick.

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<sup>2</sup> Plagiarized from my *The Cepee Dialogues*, page 284. Available on Amazon.com.