

Tattoo chutzpah indelibly increasing

diane wanek out of my head

It was a wonderful likeness, right down to the long ears and oversized front teeth.

"But why would you ever put Bugs Bunny on your stomach?" I queried.

"Because there wasn't room for him any place else," he replied.

A second hard look told me he was right. He looked as much like Ray Bradbury's Illustrated Man as anyone I've seen. Besides having Bugs Bunny tattooed on his stomach, his arms were covered with such sentimental things as roses, women's names and, incredibly, that old standby, "Mother," printed in a scroll below a large heart. This man had naked women on his thighs, and his *coup de grace* was the tattoo he had above each nipple. One was labeled "hot" and the other "cold".

His tattos came from all over the world. The best were done in Hong Kong, he said, because they use the best inks. He was an old hand in the tattoo department, an old salt with one tattoo for every port.

Until recently, it seems that only the hard core sailors were the ones with enough chutzpah to have their bodies indelibly adorned with such things. Then *Vogue* and a few other magazines decreed them "in" and the tattooing business suddenly took a turn.

Maybe people are using them as talismen. Maybe, like a businessman wearing a somber grey suit with shocking pink paisley lining, people have them as an element of surprise, noticeably only to those who look long enough. Maybe people have them just to have them. The reasons for having tattoos are probably as varied as the tattoos themselves. But the fact remains that more and more people are doing it.

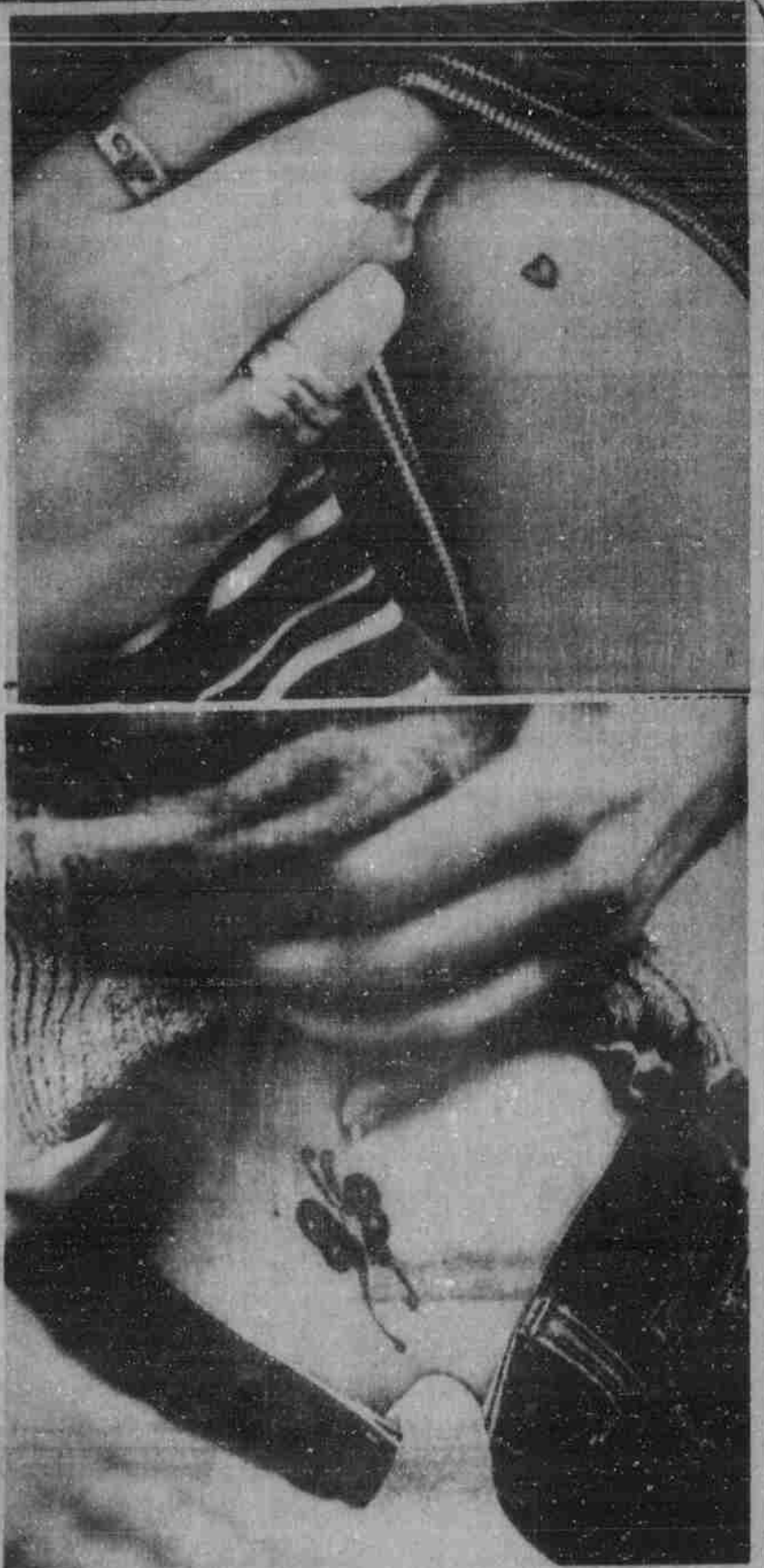
Stewart Nelsen, whose lovely New Orleans butterfly is pictured here, said he was with a group of people shortly after he'd had his put on. His comments about it provoked at least six other people into revealing theirs.

Gail Folda's small heart on her shoulder seems somewhat characteristic of some of the tattoos women are having. One of the two known tattooists in Nebraska, Fred Luellman, said that lately more and more women are having small tattoos put on. He also said the women were generally braver than the men, and that they asked for more unusual tattoos.

Most of the tattoos he puts on women are small and artistic, unlike the daggers and nudes and women's names men usually ask for.

Luellman says that 99% of the pain is psychological, but having watched the process, I'm not sure if I believe him. Tattoos are put under the skin by using a small hand drill with a needle rather than a drill bit. The needle pierces the skin and ink is injected.

If all that sounds bad, you should witness one being removed. In that case, acid is injected under the skin, which is supposed to eat away the ink. But it's not always successful, and more than one treatment may be needed. The moral seems to be, if you decide to have a tattoo, you'd better make darned sure you're going to want it around for a long time.



A heart and a butterfly are just two of the thousands of possible tattoo designs.

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