



Permanent Ink

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MOTHER

"Mother" has always been a popular theme in the world of tattoos, and the first tattoo a young man gets is often associated with this theme, not least because of the ruckus he will avoid when returning home with it. At first most mothers become angry at such an impulsive deed, but once she realizes that this is an indelible display of unconditional love for her and that it will be visible to all for all time, all her heart can do is melt. Nowadays, a truly "modern" mother sometimes accompanies her son to the tattoo parlour and witnesses how the representation of her son's love for her takes shape. Sometimes this doesn't happen, because she has already passed away. A tattoo with the word "Mother", occasionally even coloured with her ashes, can make such a great loss more bearable. The tattoo is part of the mourning process, it provides comfort and nurtures acceptance. The pain is boldly endured, a tear or two might roll down his cheeks, but bargaining about the price is considered bad form.

One of the most beautiful "Mother" tattoos I have seen – probably tattooed in prison on the upper arm of a man – begins the word "Mother", with an M the size of a matchbox, with each letter becoming smaller, resembling the iconic line-up of the Von Trapp family in the film *The Sound of Music*. The final R was barely a centimetre tall. Was this gradual reduction in letter size the result of an aesthetic choice, or had his love for his mother been conquered by pain?

The word "Mother" is often placed on a scrolling band and is accompanied by such motherly symbols as a heart, a flower, her favourite pet... a combination with a black panther's head or pin-up would doubtlessly be regarded as unfortunate. But the frequently occurring text in the old school English tattoo world – *The Sweetest Girl I Ever Kissed Was Another Man's Wife... My Mother* – seems to once again be in vogue. It should be stated, however, that the words "Stepmother" or "Mother-in-law" are rarely applied as tattoos. *Mi suegra*, a Mexican motif portraying a skull with a headscarf and hair curlers, is the only one I know.



TATTOO FETISH



TRUE LOVE

"Tattoos last longer than romances" is a common tattoo shop sign. The "True Love" design is, of course, a fool's tattoo. Many a wearer of a romantic tattoo will eventually hear the representative words: "I told you, you shouldn't have done it, you're gonna regret it," and so on.

A tattoo is a sign of adventure and in our Western society there are hardly any good reasons to get one. We don't need to show the hostile native tribe next door who we are. We don't need a painful initiation ritual to step into the adult world. We don't need it in our afterlife or to ward off bad spirits. The only thing we need a tattoo for is to communicate: to tell the world what we think, to give a clear message of love or hate, lust or fear.

True love is for the romantics among us, and testifies to dedication, loyalty and love for someone. Sometimes people are adorned with a romantic tattoo to prove to themselves that these feelings are actually real. Strangely enough they are often seen on the skin of those who are sworn to fun and loyalty to none. For them, true love is often a momentary experience, not necessarily a lifelong dedication, meant well and never regretted. Cheers to those who had and have the guts to wear them and celebrate the love of their life, even if there is more than one. Love is a big thing. You can't see it or hold it in your hands but yes, you can wear it on your skin!



TATTOO FETISH



GOOD LUCK

Sonny Tufts was a man who definitely burned the candle at both ends. Besides being a highly inspiring and loyal friend, Sonny was a fellow gladiator in the arena of tattooing. An artist known for what we call assemblages – one-of-a-kind pieces, assembled on a bright lacquered background: dices, eight balls, clover leaves, playing cards, horse shoes and lucky numbers.

Wherever Sonny showed up all the lucky paraphernalia would rapidly and mysteriously disappear. Always armed with a screwdriver or a Leatherman, he would cruise the neighbourhoods he visited and unscrew the numbers 7, 11 and 13 from doors, gateposts, whatever... eight-balls disappeared from pool halls, dices and cards from casinos, horses lost their shoes, chickens their wishbones and rabbits their foot. Lucky symbols such as these are used by our industry to assemble good or bad luck tattoos, born to win or lose tattoos, or representations of Lady Luck.

These types of tattoos are frequently worn by people who really need them; people you wouldn't always call winners. Now, I wouldn't call Sonny or any of them a loser, but born to win he was not. He was certainly born to love, though.





ANCHOR

The anchor is the second symbol in the trinity "Faith-Hope-Love", and stands for perseverance and loyalty. In Christian faith it means salvation; the anchor resembling the cross stability is formed on faith.

The anchor stems from the Latin word *Ancore* and the Greek *Agkura*, meaning "bending", and is related to the ankle – the Achilles Heel – mankind's weak spot. In the nautical world it symbolizes a completed journey across the Atlantic Ocean. It is by far the most tattooed symbol in the world of seafaring men, also due to its simplicity of form and the respect the object receives as the saviour of the vessel, preventing it from hitting reefs, from going adrift, providing some time to each one's breath, a well deserved break during a difficult trip. In Dutch we say "better to lose an anchor than the whole ship", meaning better to experience a small loss than everlasting sorrow.

In September 2012 I tattooed a tiny anchor on rock legend Lady Gaga. That very same night 200,000 people "liked" this activity on social media: an absolute record. I dedicate this text to her and to another person of fame who we know also had an anchor tattoo: Sir Winston Churchill, especially because he showed himself worthy of wearing this symbol as proves his steadfastness in his resistance to the Nazis. To Winston and Gaga, and may the anchor enjoy an increased interest in the world of tattoos.