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Tattoos etc.

By **Claudia Kwan**, Global News 0 0 Plus 1

“So, do you have a tattoo?”

I suppose it’s a natural first question for people to ask when you explain that you’re doing a couple of feature stories on the tattoo industry in BC.

I don’t in fact have a tattoo. I’m too fickle to have a piece of permanent art on my skin, and I’m not sure I could sit still long enough to go under the needle.

I have, however, been intrigued by tattoos since I was a child.

For as long as I can remember, my dad has had this mark on his left forearm, about an inch square. When I was old enough to talk, I asked him about it.

At some point as a young teen, he decided it would be cool to have our last name tattooed on his arm, in English. He started jabbing away at his skin with a fountain pen filled with black ink. He got as far as the ‘K’ in Kwan before he stopped — I’ve never been clear on whether the pain was too much or if he was interrupted.

When my grandfather discovered what my dad had done, he was furious. He threatened to chop his arm off with a meat cleaver, because back then, ‘only the Triads had tattoos.’ Please keep in mind that my grandfather was born at the tail end of the 19th century. He was the very definition of old school.

The mark on my dad's arm has faded and spread over the years, and now looks like a dark blue blobby X. It may not have turned out as intended, but what it has done is inspired my healthy curiosity over the years about distinctive tattoos.

It's that sense of curiosity that prompted me to ask new questions around where social acceptability of tattoos stands now, where does the industry go from here, and what's involved with the removal process if a piece doesn't work out.

Here are some of the interesting facts I've discovered along the way.

A good tattoo artist costs as much as a decent lawyer per hour, which means that a significant piece of work has the same price tag as a car.

The new social divide seems to be less about whether you have a tattoo, and more about where it's placed. Facial and neck tattoos seem to be the most taboo regions.

People with tattoos or those in the industry still face discrimination, from bankers who may be hesitant to give them loans to landlords who don't want to have them as tenants.

Kimberly Law, a certified image consultant, tells her clients with tattoos to conceal them before a job interview. She says it reveals too much about someone's personal identity — much in the way an over the top hairdo or style of clothing would — when the focus should be on someone's job skills and overall employability.

Having a tattoo removed is an expensive and time consuming process. Darker ink is easier to remove than white or yellow, based on how it absorbs the laser. Doctors also have to account for a patient's skin tone when performing treatments — they may need to reduce the intensity of the laser and bump up the number of treatments if someone has darker skin.

Learning about the industry was a journey. I hope you get something out of the stories, whether you already have lots of tattoos, are considering having one taken off, or have never thought for a minute about getting one.