

We The People
Program 112
The Lost Tribe



I have called today's narrative The Lost Tribe and I think you will find it interesting at least as a point of view. For centuries people have been tattooing themselves or others and as you would appreciate, this involves forcing inks and dyes into the skin to create pictures, patterns and words. After initial injection, pigment is dispersed throughout a damaged dermal layer through the epidermis where the presence of foreign material activates the immune system to engulf the pigment particles. As healing proceeds the pigment remains trapped within fibroblasts. Its presence there is stable, but in the long term the pigment tends to migrate deeper into the dermis, accounting for the degraded detail of old tattoos.

Tattooing has been practiced by many cultures including the Romans, Chinese, Japanese, Polynesians, Maoris and so on. The purpose for the tattoo has varied widely and includes rite of passage, tribal, decoration, slavery, religion, luck and magic, cosmetic, symbolism and family. People have been forcibly tattooed as the Nazis did with the Jews to identify them in concentration camps and after death. Personally I associate tattoos with navy personnel as a mark of the naval tribe. I also associate tattoos with bikies and inmates so as a symbol it's a mixed bag of various meaning and connotation. The tattoo is generally acquired for public display and is meant to tell another person something about the other. The key question is what does the message say and how do others react especially in today's society.

Generation X and Y are not afraid to express themselves and many in the demographic have a tattoo. Today a whole arm or leg may be covered and indeed facial and neck placement is relatively common. In the USA about \$1.65 billion a year is spent on tattoos which means 45 million Americans have one and of these 29% say it makes them feel rebellious and 31% say it makes them feel sexy. An astonishing 43% of people believe a tattoo with a personal meaning is the most important factor while 40% of people aged 25 to 40 bear one. The rapid growth in the tattoo industry sector is now tattoo removal and not without financial and significant physical pain. Indeed the tattoo has become a fashion statement in the eyes of some and therefore will have a life of a few years only to fade away leaving many disfigured and marked for life. Personally I think it's insulting for a person with good skin to deliberately disfigure themselves when so many others have skin problems they would love to see the end of and rightly value their skin's health. Indeed the act of receiving a tattoo is fraught with the danger of infection and the acquiring of nasty sometimes deadly disease so why would you bother. Current research is now questioning the carcinogenic materials in the inks used and the long term may well prove disastrous for the tattooed.

There is another hypothesis behind the tattoo as well. In today's world people struggle for a feeling of self worth, belonging and purpose. It seems to me that the less sense of spirit there is the more a person seeks futile meaning and in the end symbolism takes precedence over the vital sense of self and spiritual humility. The tattoo is a symbol of tribe, it's a cry for recognition and belonging. Its membership to the club of no consequence and literally marks the recipient for life. This modern statement of disfiguring is not art and is not an indication of anything more than a lost generation or a lost tribe. It's the tribe of no tribe and time will prove the notion of a tattoo to be primitive, shallow and selfish and is nothing to do with real expression or personal vitality and meaning. Deep down it's no wonder today at least 1 in 4 tattoo parlours are bikie affiliated. There is also discrimination being practiced in the work place against those with many tattoos on the face or arms. I think the employer has every right not to want someone serving in their bread shop, bank or elsewhere who has disfigured themselves and who looks like a walking billboard for a travelling circus. To this add some metal piercings and you have someone who is largely unemployable and if so they should not get unemployment benefits in my view. When people sabotage themselves against employment the public purse should not support them. This is a reality I think most thinking Australians would agree with. Those with heavy tattoos are members of the lost tribe by choice and for life and for what.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley