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Your body is a canvas readily available to be designed with your deepest expressions at your own consent, expense, and of course risk.

I became heavily involved in the body modification community, both as a firm supporter and an active participant, at a fairly young age. Growing up in a middle class conservative household, this type of appearance and lifestyle was often frowned upon to say the least. So I did what every other rebellious teenager who felt they know what was best for themselves would do; I went behind my parents back and did it anyways. By the time I was sixteen years old I had over ten piercings and tattoos completely concealed from my parents viewing, with every intention to one day be covered from neck to toe. As I crept into adulthood, I began to have slight regrets from my previous decisions and slowed down my progress of inking my whole body. Upon my incarceration I was reintroduced into this lifestyle.

If you've ever met someone who has just come home from prison, it's not surprising to see their arms designed with various tribal symbols, representation of their neighborhood, and the infamous spider webs. Prison is probably the cheapest place one could get tattooed. At a tattoo shop, one may pay \$100 for a piece measuring four inches and of a pretty basic design, while \$100 in prison may qualify you for an entire sleeve of extravagant quality. But there are several risks to consider when getting a tattoo in prison.

First and foremost, tattooing is NOT authorized and those found giving, receiving, or with fresh ink are subject to disciplinary action. Some correctional officers may turn a blind eye to the activity, while others, this happens to be their biggest pet peeve and look to nail any culprit involved. Often times the recipient will ask a buddy to keep watch and give a warning of any wandering staff and administration just to cover themselves and stay in the clear.

Another thing to consider is to make sure you know your artist's work. While there are some absolutely phenomenal artists behind bars, who I truly hope will one day have their time to shine their gift to the rest of the world, there are others you shouldn't trust for something so permanent. These individuals will often boast of their abilities, with no real proof, just to make a quick buck. Be sure to see any previous work done before you try it out yourself. Just because someone owns a tattoo gun, does not make them a tattoo artist. I owned a basketball as a child, and trust me, I'm no Michael Jordan.

The most important thing to keep in mind, is the safety and cleanliness behind the entire ordeal. Tattoo guns, ink, and needles are completely homemade and come from any source currently available. Prisons aren't necessarily notorious for their high upkeep in detail or squeaky clean. In fact, MRSA is very common here. I have personally been a witness to men here contracting Hepatitis C due to reusing needles or other unsafe measures performed. Most of the time you're best off making your own needle and ink, just so you know the entire life of the materials.

Personally, I've been quite fortunate on my new tattooing endeavor. I've paired up with a good, clean artist a few years back and received a few pieces that I'm not ashamed to show off. Luckily, I didn't face any of the consequences others have faced. I also chose not to go overboard with the entire thing, and stopped years ago.

Tattooing is not the only body modification ritual adopted in the prison atmosphere, just the most common. Some people do still receive piercings, as well as splitting their tongues to mimic that of a snake. Even a strange trend has developed here where individuals shave down Dominoes pieces into desired shapes; hearts, ovals, stars, etc. and then insert them into their unspeakable areas. Trust me I don't ask and I don't understand either.

Upon release I intend to put my foot back into the body modification community and perform piercings and tattoos on individuals once again. It's a practice that is slowly becoming more acceptable in all walks of life. I think everyone should have the chance to express how they really feel through body modification.