



## Pen & Ink: Tattoos and the Stories Behind Them

*Isaac Fitzgerald , Wendy MacNaughton (Illustrator) , Cheryl Strayed (Contributor)*

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*Why did you get that tattoo?*

Every tattoo tells a story, whether the ink is meaningful or the result of a misguided decision made at the age of fourteen, representative of the wearer's true self or the accidental consequence of a bender. These most permanent and intimate of body adornments are hidden by pants legs and shirttails, emblazoned on knuckles, or tucked inside mouths. They are battle scars and beauty marks, totems and mementos.

*Pen & Ink* grants us access to the tattoos—and the stories behind them—of writers Cheryl Strayed and Roxane Gay; rockers in the bands Korn, Otep, and Five Finger Death Punch; and even a porn star. But it also illuminates the tattoos of the ordinary people living in our midst—from professors to thrift store salespeople, cafe owners to librarians, union organizers to administrators—and their extraordinary lives.

Curated and edited by Isaac Fitzgerald, who sports twelve tattoos himself, each story “is like being let in on . . . secrets by . . . strangers who passed you on the street or sat across from you on the train” (Strayed) and features Wendy MacNaughton's gorgeously rendered full-color illustrations of the tattoos on black-and-white drawings of the bearer's body. At its heart, beneath its colorful skin, *Pen & Ink* is an exploration of the decision to scar one's self with a symbol and a story.

## Pen & Ink: Tattoos and the Stories Behind Them Details

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## From Reader Review Pen & Ink: Tattoos and the Stories Behind Them for online ebook

### Carol says

**The Hook** - I don't have any tattoos of my own but often wonder, "What were they thinking?" when I see them on others. I ask this question in the nicest sense, as I am certain many trips to the tattoo parlor have stories behind them. Pen & Ink Tattoos & The Stories Behind Them gives answers to some people's motivation.

**The Line** – The one tattoo that spoke to me was Kriste York's 40th Birthday Tattoo.  
*"I MARKED MY 40TH BIRTHDAY WITH THIS TATTOO, THUS BECOMING A HUMAN RV. "*

If you've ever seen a map of places visited on an RV, you might get the picture.

Kriste concludes her essay explaining that the motto appearing on the banner above her tattoo is from her own state of Oregon:

*SHE FLIES WITH HER OWN WINGS."*

Though I could post the image of Kriste's tattoo, I'm hoping you'll seek the book out and view it yourself.

**The Sinker** – The graphic format seems perfect for exploring the world of tattoos which are graphic in their own right. Not photos, but drawings in pen and ink make the tattoos somehow more personal. You could flip through this quickly or spend many hours exploring the details of the blend of image and words.

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### Elizabeth A says

I'm the only one of my siblings without a tattoo, and I'm supposedly the most unconventional one of the lot. Go figure. It's not that I have anything against tats in particular, it's just that I cannot imagine what I'd ink on my body that I would still love a decade from now. I see many people with tats, and I'm always curious as to the story of how they picked that particular design. There are tats I find attractive, and ones I'm horrified by, and when everyone and their mother seems to have one, the notion of tats do not seem that radical, or anti-establishment to me. But, that is just my opinion.

This little book is a collection of artist sketches/paintings of tattoos that people (some famous, some not) have inked on their bodies, and the stories behind them. I liked the art, and it did help me understand and appreciate the reasoning behind the urge to get one. However, this is a collection of images/stories that was compiled from a blog, and I found myself wanting more. Still, it is a fun, quick read for anyone who has a tattoo or two, or anyone interested in reading about the stories behind some of them.

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### Margie says

I was sitting at the library today looking through books and found this ... the illustrations are fun as well as

the stories behind the tattoos. I've toyed with the idea to have my kids names tattooed somewhere but my husband would NOT like that. He's not a fan of tattoos; he says he likes art on paper or canvas. To each his own.

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### **Adrienne Michetti says**

Ohhhhhhh so gorgeous: the stories, the illustrations, the people, the concept, the diversity, the experiences. This is a tremendous tribute to how people's ink defines them. I am so glad I purchased it; I will read it over and over again. I feel like this is a reference book, one that will stay on my coffee table for a good long while.

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### **Amy says**

Pretty and lovely. Saw this in a bookstore in London last year and was crushed I couldn't take it with me, because it was too bulky to transport back home. Found it last weekend in a remainder bookstore for \$10. Love you, universe.

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### **Caitlin says**

This book is a fun and sometimes heartbreaking exploration of people's decisions to get a tattoo. The illustrations are great, relatively simplistic with the only color being devoted to the depiction of the tattoo itself. Having the tattoos illustrated rather than just being photographs gives more of a feel of artwork, which is very fitting since I've always thought of tattoos as permanent art. Each tattoo has a short story behind why the person chose to get them and they verge from the silly "I just love pizza" to the heartbreaking "my dad fell into a coma and never woke up". If you like tattoos or are just curious about what makes people get them, I'd highly recommend it!

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### **Trina says**

Although I don't have any tattoos yet, I am fascinated by tattoos that people select and what they mean to them. However, the heart of this book is the stories of people and how they are depicted through gorgeous illustrations.

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### **Paula Guinto says**

Because I love ink and stories and people's decisions to tell their stories through their bodies. Permanently. There's something poetic and romantic and bold about that. Anyway, this book is not a novel but it's one of those texts I wish I had conceptualized myself. Maybe someday.

I got this book for my birthday and I love birthdays too.

### **Christopher Shawn says**

A charmingly unique tattoo gift book. This is such a breath of fresh air from all the typical books full of page after page of poorly lit photographs of the same type of tattoo over and over. Pen & Ink features fun line drawings of people's most personal tattoos, with short essays on their meanings that range from laugh-out-loud funny to deeply personal. If you put this on your coffee table, Pen & Ink is guaranteed to spark up a conversation.

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### **Olive (abookolive) says**

A short collection of illustrations of real-life people's tattoos accompanied by the stories behind them.

While the choice to get a tattoo can sit anywhere on the scale of "bursting with meaning" to "a symptom of being young," every tattoo has a story. I loved seeing the illustrations of the tattoos next to the story of how & why that tattoo came to be on that person's body. I had to pick this book up at the library since I got my first (very meaningful & literary) tattoo a couple months ago. :)

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### **Sarah says**

Such a wonderful, short read to break up the heaviness of the past few weeks. It's been difficult for me to hold attention on books with substance lately, but I've been yearning for some stories in an easier to digest format. It caught my attention a couple years back when it was published but I never got around to reading it-seeing it as a Scribd unlimited pick for July gave me the motivation. I'm glad I finally did!

This book is less about the tattoos and more about stories. For each person, there is a beautiful drawing of his/her ink, then an anecdote about the story behind their tattoo. The art is beautiful & colorful, and the stories, like people, vary from moving, to silly, to sentimental. It's a great balance & no story is longer than a page, so it's easy to pick up and leave off where necessary. Most importantly, this book is a great reminder of the diversity of humanity. We all have a story to share.

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### **Sandra says**

I have this fascination with tattoos. Having none myself, I either can't make up my mind about the imagery/design, but rather being simply scared for the pain. And the regret that might come of having a permanent mark on my body. Which doesn't mean I can't still admire them on someone else.

This book has illustrated images of the wearer with the tattoo(s) instead of photographs, which enhances the art of drawing and designing tattoos. Each one has a story and meaning. Some deep, a few emotional, others just plain funny.

## Eric says

I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

I worried about reading this book when I first received it. Thumbing through the pages, with the close-up line drawings of tattoos on bodies, the funky font that mixes cursive and capital letters, and the highly-personal stories. I assumed that this would be a collection of personal stories about why someone got a generic tattoo for some self-important reason.

But in reality, this is a collection of emotional stories, with a few comic items thrown in. It feels less impersonal than I originally assumed, and more like listening to a friend's story while sharing a beer. Some of the stories are a little too literary in their aspirations, and some are throwaways (like the one with the tattoo of "Pizza Party" on her toes - "I really f\*\*\*ing love pizza"), but most are surprisingly heartfelt and real. Perhaps it is the nature of tattoos, but there is often something emotionally impactful or strange in the reason for the tattoo.

Take for example, the "Daddy" tattoo on a woman's forearm. She tells us:

I don't know how to tell this story. One day my dad was alive and we were on vacation and swimming in the ocean and making mermaids in the sand. And then we got back and I was at work and I got a call from my mom saying that there was an ambulance on the way to take my dad to the hospital. The last thing I ever heard him say was "who's that?" Mom said, "it's Ali." Dad said, "I love you, Ali. Don't worry. I'm ok."

And then I drove from San Francisco to Sacramento and he never woke up and I rubbed his feet while he died. I wanted to always have him with me so I mixed his ashes in with the ink."

It isn't a long read history of tattoos and it isn't a compendium of tattoo designs, but this is a rewarding book nonetheless. It provides you with an insight into a person's emotional reasons for their tattoo, giving you the back story of an image you might glance at and wonder about.

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## Jessica-Robyn says

I love the idea of a book all about the artistic representations of tattoos, which is why I was so instantly drawn to Pen & Ink. This book is very minimalist and allows each tattoo and the accompanying story to really shine on its own. Unfortunately, I was expecting a little bit more. The book was rather sparse for my liking and this fact is only emphasized by all that white space. Part of me thinks this would work better as a tumblr blog than a book because there just wasn't enough there.

If you're looking to check this out then I would highly recommend this. It is so quick and easy to consume that there isn't a bad side to taking a moment to flip through and really soak in each story. Just count on the read being very, very quick.

(On another note though, this might be a good gift idea for that friend who is thinking of getting a new

tattoo.)

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### **Brittany Hayes says**

Sometimes you pick a book because it's short and has pictures, although Pen & Ink: Tattoos and the Stories Behind Them is much more than just a quick read. It reminds me of "Humans of New York" with its brief but often intimate glances into a stranger's life.

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