

RiverBender Blog: In Defense of the Bad Tattoo I Got Last Week

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
January 15 2024 9:36 AM



I recently got a \$20 tattoo. Some people might argue that this was a mistake.

I am one of those people.

Don't get a \$20 tattoo. No matter how good of a deal, no matter how exciting and spontaneous and fun, don't do it.

I'm simply giving you the advice I wish I had followed on that fateful weeknight. I had stumbled on a Facebook post where a Shop That Shall Remain Nameless was advertising an impromptu flash sale. For the tattoo novices, a flash sale is when you choose from a sheet of small designs and get the tattoo for a cheap price. It's usually a fun day for the artists or a chance for apprentices to practice their skills by tattooing the same designs over and over.

There were several nice designs available, and I figured, "Hey, why not?" A tiny cute tattoo for just a few dollars! What could go wrong?

With a 40-minute drive ahead of me, I had plenty of time to think through this decision. But why do that? I cranked the music and hummed along, satisfied with how cool and interesting I was being. Only cool, interesting people get spontaneous tattoos like this.

Things started off strong. I sat down and showed the apprentice the design I wanted — a tiny lava lamp — and he pressed the stencil to my arm with expert skill. He started tattooing.

For those who have never gotten a tattoo before, I will be honest with you: It hurts. Anyone who says it doesn't hurt is lying to you. It hurts, but it's usually worth it to have the art on your body forever, especially when it's a design you love. I loved this tiny lava lamp. I was certain about this decision.

And then the artist stood up.

I watched out of the corner of my eye as he stood, leaned over the table, and began tattooing from a new angle. Now, I want to clarify that I am not an artist. I'm not artistically inclined. I couldn't give a good tattoo even with ten years of training. I absolutely believed this guy knew what he was doing.

But I had never had an artist stand up mid-tattoo or switch the angle so dramatically. The table shook a little beneath his weight. He kept going, unbothered. Precision is the name of the game here. I was suddenly concerned.

We continued like this for a few minutes, with the artist alternating between sitting and standing, bumping the table every so often. It was one of the more — shall I say — dynamic experiences I had ever had while getting a tattoo. I tried to sit still as he moved around in a flurry.

One other thing about getting a tattoo is that you should pretty much know exactly what the tattoo will look like as soon as the artist presses the stencil to your skin. The design and placement shouldn't change after the tattooing begins.

"I added a few extra lines," he told me, excited by his ingenuity.

"Oh, cool!" I said. "Oh, God," I thought.

The tattoo gun buzzed on.

All in all, this experience took maybe 15 minutes at the most but felt like an hour. I glanced at the tattoo as he finished — yup, that's a lava lamp — and shelled out my \$20 plus tip, then shuffled out to my car to take a real, honest look at what I had just tattooed onto my body forever.

The end result was...not perfect, to say the least. A tiny, crooked little lava lamp with a few extra lines. At least, I consoled myself, it was *my* tiny crooked little lava lamp. And still kind of cute, if you squint. I showed my friends a few days later and they very kindly did not laugh at me for my dumb decisions.

Dear reader, heed my advice. I should clarify that I know many people who have walked away from flash sales with beautiful, perfect tattoos that they love, tattoos that were worth way more than the low price they paid. It's truly a great skill, and flash tattoos are their own art form. So I really shouldn't say not to get a \$20 tattoo. Would I do it again? Yeah, probably.

But my real advice is, when you're paying for something that is going to be permanently on your body forever, it's okay to speak up if something seems wrong. The moment the artist stood up, I should've asked about switching the angle or stopped the tattoo altogether. The moral of the story is about sticking up for yourself.

But it's also about having fun. Because yes, the tattoo wasn't perfect, but it was also a lot of fun. I'll always think about that experience and laugh when I look down at my tiny crooked lava lamp. Plus, it sure makes a good story.