



## State College tattoo artist has seen it all

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Two years ago, State College tattoo artist Tony Campbell found himself in an unusual predicament.

“This one girl asked me to cover up her ex-boyfriend’s name. I said, ‘Sure, that shouldn’t be too hard.’ I asked her where it was and she said, ‘It’s on my you-know-what.’”

Before Campbell knew what happened, the customer had dropped her pants and showed him a tattoo in large lettering that read “JIM” across her “you-know-what.” So what did Campbell do?

“I covered it up with a tattoo of a big lotus flower, and she absolutely loved it. Now she’ll drop her pants for anybody who wants to see.”

Situations like those are what Campbell said have made a career of 10 years as a tattoo artist so interesting. The owner of Good and Evil Tattoos in downtown State College said his favorite part of his job is meeting different people.

On a warm Spring afternoon, he sat in the pale blue leather chair where his customers lay when he is at work, his feet propped up, donning a grey t-shirt that read “Built Upon Frustration.” The tips of black and grey tattoos peaked out of the collar of his t-shirt, bouncing with his Adam’s apple as he spoke.

“The only thing I don’t have tattooed is my butt cheeks,” he joked, his light blue eyes sparkling. “I thought I’d look kind of silly in a g-string on the beach.”

Campbell’s favorite kind of tattoo art is what he calls “dark art,” specifically demons and skulls, which seems contradictory to his humorous personality. Yet these skulls and demons are what are mostly featured all over his body, which he estimates is over \$10,000 worth of tattoo art.

The 44-year-old artist had always liked tattoo art and opened Good and Evil after completing a year-long apprenticeship with a friend who owned a shop in Shamokin, Pa. He then opened his own shop in State College in 1998, which he named to go along with the theme of his favorite tattoos.

Visitors are greeted in the spacious shop by a large foosball table in a front room with black canvas chairs. The walls are covered in colorful tattoo designs with everything from Chinese characters and butterflies to skulls and bald eagles. In the tattoo room, a banner is airbrushed on the wall that reads “Good and Evil,” bordered by a blue topless angel with a halo on the left and a red topless angel with devil horns on the right.

When a mother and daughter, Erica and Trish Hummer, showed up for their appointment to get matching tattoos, Campbell jumped up from his tattoo chair to greet them. He talked to both for a few minutes, discussed their ideas of what they want while carefully giving suggestions. He then lead the pair to the tattoo room and turned on the radio. He sat Trish down in a small silver desk chair on wheels and asked her to pull her hair up and sit up straight.

“I’m getting ‘te quiero,’ in really pretty writing, which, in Spanish, means ‘I love you,’” Trish explained and she leaned on the camouflage patterned pillow that Campbell handed her. “My mom and I are getting tattoos to commemorate the death of her sister, my aunt. She used to say ‘te quiero’ to us all the time, and my mom is getting a yellow rose because those were her favorite.”

Campbell smiled as he wiped with a white cloth across the top of Trish’s back, where she was getting the tattoo.

“You know, I tattooed this same type of yellow rose on my sister’s back about a year ago,” Campbell said, his bald head shining in the light. “She got it in honor of our father. He loved yellow roses too.”

Campbell spoke fondly of his father, who died 10 years ago. He was in the army, which meant Campbell and his four sisters were “military brats.” Campbell was born in Lewisburg, Pa., but after Campbell’s parents divorced, and his mother remarried several times, the family moved repeatedly.

“I always knew not to make too many friends because I knew in a few months my mom would get married to some new guy again,” he said.

As he talked about his family, his eyes stayed focused on Trish’s back as he began to fill in the stencil he carefully placed between her shoulder blades. He joked that it’s a wonder he’s not gay growing up with four sisters and his mom.

As the glittery red tattoo needle began its electric buzz, Campbell asked Trish if she was OK. His forehead wrinkled in concentration as he worked, his hands in black rubber gloves, the left one maneuvering the needle slowly across her back.

“I’d be really good at this if I could only stay inside the lines,” Campbell deadpanned. Trish looked at her mother and laughed nervously. Campbell reassured her that he was only joking.

But Campbell hasn't always relied on his people skills as a tattoo artist. He started out working in another area: music. Campbell spent 10 years in an indie rock band. A photo from his band years shows a young Campbell with dark eye makeup and long unruly blond hair pulled back with a headband.

"Men hated me because I looked like a woman," Campbell said. "And women didn't like me because I looked too much like them."

Not all women disliked Campbell, because it was during his rock band days when he met his first wife and the mother of his 19-year-old daughter who, ironically, thinks tattoos are overrated.

When asked if he has a wife or a girlfriend currently, he replies, "I have both, actually." His current wife of 10 years is a bank executive who is "real proper, and prim and prissy." But is she a tattoo lover?

"I drew this up for her," Campbell said, displaying a pink sacred heart tattoo on his left hand. "And I liked it so much that I got my buddy to tattoo it on me, and then I did it on hers. It's the only tattoo she has."

Less than 15 minutes after Campbell began the "te quiero" tattoo, he sat back and observed his work.

"Is that it?" Trish asked, and when Campbell hands her two hand mirrors to view the art on her back, she immediately grinned. "Oh, my God! It's awesome!"

Campbell then took out a large piece of gauze and a bottle of antiseptic spray and announced that he had to sneeze.

"Achoo!" he yelled, spraying the antiseptic spray on Trish's back. She and her mother Erica laughed along. "You know, I made the mistake of doing that to a germophobe once," Campbell said.

After cleaning up Trish's tattoo, he started working on Erica, who was getting her yellow rose on the same spot as her daughter. Campbell asked if she would rather the outline be in orange or red, and she shrugged her shoulders.

"Your work is really beautiful. I trust whatever you do," she said. Campbell remarked that she is surprisingly calm, and she replied, "I've had two C-sections and gall bladder surgery. Needles don't scare me."

Although at 45 Erica is a bit older than Campbell's usual college-aged clientele, Campbell said he once tattooed a 72-year-old woman who was married to a man for 52 years that hated tattoos. Two months after his death, she came into Campbell's shop and got a butterfly tattooed on her back. She liked Campbell's work so much that she came in two weeks later for a second one.

“I’ve never tattooed somebody and had them go somewhere else for their second one. I think I’m pretty good at what I do.”

Campbell said a lot of people have come in to his shop with tattoo ideas because of shows like A&E’s Miami Ink.

“I was hoping that show would promote good tattooing with clean shops. But it actually hurts because a lot of people see the show and get bright ideas and come in and want to get bad tattoos.”

How bad can it get? Campbell said sometimes customer’s requests are so outrageous he has to draw the line. He remembered a customer who wanted a pile of “dog poop” with flies flying all around it.

“I was like, ‘Come on, why would you want that tattooed on you?’ And he said, ‘Because my wife always calls me a pile of dog shit.’ It was kind of funny, but I was like, no way.”

Kim Timinski, a Penn State art student who is a shop apprentice, said she is amazed at the number of interesting requests Campbell has gotten.

“We get a lot of people on football weekends and people that want silly things, like Penn State paw prints,” she said. “One guy wanted to get ‘thank you,’ written in fancy writing on his stomach. It was ridiculous. I don’t even have to explain why he wanted there.”

Campbell said he always turns away any offensive requests such as swastikas, and although he hates to do them, his most common request is the Nittany Lion head logo.

About 45 minutes after Trish and Erica Hummer arrived, they both stood in front of the big mirror, holding up hand mirrors to see the Campbell’s work.

Both women were pleased and complimented him repeatedly. He stood back and smiled. When Trish asked about what the two should do to care for their new tattoos in the coming weeks, Campbell looked at her with a serious look on his face.

“Go skinny dipping twice a week,” he said.

After a moment of silence, he threw his head back in laughter, and the skull on his neck seemed to laugh with him.