

## WIP 'Tag'

The process of writing a short story for 'Trust Me Too'  
([www.fordstreetpublishing.com](http://www.fordstreetpublishing.com))

Hazel Edwards  
[www.hazeledwards.com](http://www.hazeledwards.com)

In- flight, I sit beside a tatts shop owner and his girlfriend. He's in his mid-twenties and admits to being unable to spell, but his business has expanded to a second shop and a possible franchise. He gives me his card , flashes a money- thick wallet and his arm is inked in dragon whorls and inspirational phrases. He's passionate about his work. His wiry, fit body is almost totally inked. So is she. His work is a gift to her.

The idea of graffiti and tatts as disfigurement rather than tribal identity is one I've been musing on for ages. Often a short story is woven- ideas from many stimuli.

I want to share the process of creating my short story 'Tag', partly because I'm stuck mid- plot and want to clarify my ideas in order to choreograph the story. And partly because readers find the creative process of interest.

Choosing a Title:

'Tag' relates to tatts, graffiti and also to e-tags and even meta-tags. I wanted to experiment with a new perspective as well as play with the word 'tag' which is a verb as well as a noun. Originally the working title was Tatts, but that can be misinterpreted as being the name of a lottery system. Titles are vital clues.

So 'Tatts' has become 'Tatts: Celeb Graffiti' and Viral Vandal and now 'Tag'. Working titles are just that, they change.

Ideas?

I clip quirky news items. Temporary Lip tattoos. One item was about tattooing a poem on the chest. Who owned the copyright in the words? Could you be sued for what you wear? Is it any different from a slogan on a t-shirt? Wasn't sure how that could be included in my story for adolescents, but the legal theme of who owned which words was relevant. Could also link to brand theft and fake/copy merchandise.

What if? is always the starting point.

How about a hip-hop lyric tattooed on a male chest, and it going viral on a future version of Youtube? One of the devices of satire is to place in a different setting, in order to provide a new perspective on a topical issue or problem. By setting it intergalactically and in the future, the story became a satirical comment on the current graffiti and tattoo trend which I see as disfigurement. However, if I said that, without humour, the story just becomes 'didactic' or a piece of anti-graffiti propaganda and no-one would want to read it. Wit or humour is a vital ingredient to assist change in attitude or even provoke discussion.

Perspectives?

I swim regularly and have noticed the increasing full arm and full body tats on fit, young bodies. Some middle-aged women talk of the 'freedom' of gaining a rose or butterfly tattoo on their shoulder or backside. Why people do this and if they later regret the permanent inking, interests me. Chances are you'll change your mind, philosophy or your romantic interest between 16 and 46. But you may not be able to afford to change the tatt. Graffiti is at some-one else's cost.

Valuing Words?

Graffiti is also increasing, in streets surrounding where I work. Is mindless scribble 'Street art'? If someone is just spraying initials as a way of marking or tagging territory, it is bullying vandalism to me. Why can't they use words effectively in other ways to gain attention? As a writer I value well placed words.

Costs?

I'm also conscious of the cost of re-painting walls and fences as time-wasting. Multiple costs involved.

Online, I'm amazed at the wealth of designs and median costs for tattoos. Obviously I'm in the wrong business channel :my words never sell at that rate.

Satire?

Any anti-graffiti and anti-tatts story has to be witty and turn the idea around in a different context. A reversal of perceptions so readers query their values.

So I considered setting it in an intergalactic court with a jury of Aliens.

I caught the train to the city and inbetween stations, graffiti flourishes, including some beautifully colourful, stylised designs. There are also some repetitive tags. Rarely is a single wall left free.

## Historical?

I found this journey as depressing as the time I crossed the Berlin Wall into grey Eastern Germany and dispirited Poland beyond with grey columns of cheap housing and mass graffiti. The atmosphere of abandonment is echoed in railway track sides.

I also heard positive stories of 'legal graffiti walls' and an exhibition in a prestigious national gallery but only if real names of artists were given alongside their work. Maybe that's the twist for the ending?

In our local paper there has been a complaint about a café allowing pre-schoolers to scribble with provided chalk on the pavement, while the parents drank coffee. I can see both viewpoints. But a compromise could have been a 'legal' blackboard on a café wall?

Historically, the Vandals were the ones who destroyed Rome. The Roman numerals incident for Leb in my story is based on a real person who has Roman numerals above his bathers, but his are accurate birth dates. He still can't see them, which I find absurd. Whereas several footballers appear to have inspirational quotes on their inside arms for frequent reference. In WW11 concentration camps, prisoners were tattooed with numbers. I hadn't realised that this was even worse for Jews because their religious beliefs do not permit tattoos nor disfiguring their bodies. No Jews with tattoos.

Culturally Maoris use tattoos for symbolic significance.

Medically, some people have tattooed eyebrows, after hair loss due to illness.

## Research

I believe in participant-observation research where you 'do' in order to write realistically afterwards. However I did not intend getting a 'tatt' nor did I want to add to graffiti. However I went out for a graffiti walk locally, to check on tags, and got a bit depressed by the repetitions. Also visited a tatts shop and checked designs online.

## Flashbacks?

Timing and flashbacks matter in this short story, as tattooing is not legal for those under 18. Making it an Intergalactic Court from an adult's retrospective viewpoint makes the issue broader, so I invented future viral web-cams etc

## Choreographing

There needs to be contrasting characters and one who offers hope. I see Picasso as the type of teacher who often sees a run-down school as an educative challenge , starts with what interests the students and who makes a difference by opening other worlds.

Word count?

My first draft was 1600 words and I had to get it down to the required 1,000 words. That's a discipline. And it's suggested that I take out my Aliens. I do.

But I leave in the mix up about Roman numerals. I do like the idea of a wrongly spelled tattoo. Or paying copyright for certain combinations of words on a human chest. How would the Copyright Agency check that one?

\*\*\*\*\*

'Tag' is in the [www.fordstreetpublishing.com](http://www.fordstreetpublishing.com) collection 'Trust Me Too'. Free poster available of the over 50 contributors who include major Australian creators.

For Hazel's other articles on the process of writing check [http://www.hazeledwards.com/page/aspiring\\_writers.html](http://www.hazeledwards.com/page/aspiring_writers.html) and subscribe to newsletter. Archived newsletters under Resources. <http://www.hazeledwards.com/page/newsletters.html> and [http://www.hazeledwards.com/page/teacher\\_resources.html](http://www.hazeledwards.com/page/teacher_resources.html)