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## Michael Malone

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Renowned tattoo artist Michael Malone was found dead Wednesday at his home in Chicago, an apparent victim of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Recognized as one of the world's boldest tattoo visionaries in the 34 years since he bought Sailor Jerry's shop in Honolulu, Malone lived the life of an artistic rogue until he was slowed by ill health in recent years. "Time to check out" began a note police found at Malone's home. He was 64.

Although he was revered in Honolulu, where he hosted weeks-long visits from the biggest names in tattooing, including Don Ed Hardy, Bob Roberts, Miss Roxy and Paul Jefferies, Malone became bored with island life and relocated to Austin on a whim in 1984. He established a second China Sea Tattoo Co. at 2712 B Guadalupe St., just a block away from the former location of the Austin Chronicle.

Known by his nom de plume "Rollo Banks," Malone immediately fell in with the Chronicle crew, creating the Chinese New Year and Year of the Dead cover designs and also serving as a sort of spiritual advisor. In his role as Chronicle cover Svengali, Malone discovered up-and-coming artists such as Frank Kozik and Keith Graves.

Even with only three tattoo shops in town, there wasn't much ink business in Austin in the '80s, so Malone moved back to Honolulu around 1989 with his then-wife, Austin writer Margaret Moser. He had been living in Chicago, based at Taylor Street Tattoo, for about four years.

Malone was handpicked by Sailor Jerry Collins to take over the legendary tattoo shop at 1033 Smith St. in Honolulu's red light district after Collins' death, which came in 1973. Malone paid about \$35,000 for the business, which proved to be an



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incredible bargain because the shop came with hundreds of sheets of Collins' tattoo designs, as well as his tattoo machines. The sheets, called "flash," sold for upwards of \$2,000 each and the tattoo "guns" much more than that, as Sailor Jerry has become regarded as the Babe Ruth of American tattooing.

Covered in permanent ink designs at a time when few were, and possessing a cold steel glare, Malone could come off as a gruff, unapproachable figure. But those who were able to penetrate the exterior came to know a kind soul, a brilliant wordsmith (and dreadful speller), who could hold court like none other.

And he possessed a hair-trigger wit. Once, noted Los Angeles tattoo artist Jack Rudy complained that he'd written Malone two or three letters, yet didn't receive any in return. "What are we, pirates or pen pals?" Malone shot back.

Plans for a memorial service are pending.

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*"Love you Nd miss u still u r with me as the snake u..."*

**-Liz Chapman**

*"You'd be 75 today, Rollo and we laughed with joy at your..."*

**-Margaret Moser**

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