

## Episode 34: Aluminum Foil

### TRANSCRIPT

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Note: *Things People Do* was created for the airwaves and by no means do we encourage you to read this transcript if you lack imagination. Transcripts often include errors because our team loathes the laborious task and we make our children type the broadcasts.

### Prologue.

**Ellison Cole** Long before social entertainment sites were teaching us how to make our lives easier with seventeen ways to do this and that, my mother, Alice, was hacking life with that shiny, crackling, reflective material we call aluminum foil. She used it to sharpen the knives, polish the silver, remove sticky residue from the iron, and could even transform AAA batteries into AA. My brothers and I were never without tinfoil hats, and our family cat, Squiggles, learned how to fetch better than any Retriever thanks to an unlimited supply of foil balls.

About two weeks ago I traveled back to my hometown in Western Pennsylvania for a weeklong family reunion. During a day excursion, my cousins and I traveled to Saxonburg. A quaint borough about thirty miles north of Pittsburgh that is most notably known as the home of John Roebing, the engineer who designed the Brooklyn Bridge. In the twenty years since I last visited, the town has undergone a hipster facelift. A vegan cafe greets visitors and as you travel the red brick sidewalk you pass an artist's cooperative, a historic hotel serving the best lobster bisque ever made in a landlocked state, an indie coffee shop, a creative eatery using locally sourced food, along with many consignment stores promising antiques and wares. One particular store caught my eye. Aluminum Foil. A vintage clothing store with a twist. And that's where today's story, told in one act, takes place.

From WZEB Metropolis, it's *Things People Do*, distributed by Rural Community Radio. Stay with us.

### ACT ONE. The Idea

**Ellison Cole** It's sometimes difficult to decipher between a unique idea and a gimmick. There's a sandwich shop in New York City that sells only peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. This simple concept attracts thousands of locals and tourists daily and probably will continue to do so for decades to come. The shop doesn't just sell PB&Js, it sells nostalgia. A unique idea that fosters retention.

Aluminum Foil, a two month old consignment shop owned by Ana Lawrence, a Master's prepared millennial plagued by overwhelming debt and the insatiable desire to move out of her parents' basement, appears to walk the line between idea and gimmick. A note to listeners: Ana obsessively Instagrams our interview. Within an hour of leaving her store, I was trending #EllisonColeheartsAluminumFoil #saltnepajournalist #listenrualshoplocal.

So Ana, tell our listeners about how Aluminum Foil came to be?

**Ana Lawrence** I was studying Aristotle's *Rhetoric* on Wikipedia and was struck by the thought that one could persuade an audience with a logical idea. I always wanted to be a business owner and my parents said they'd cover start-up costs and rent for a year. All I had to do was brainstorm. What does foil do? It preserves. And what does vintage clothing need? Proper preservation. The light bulb just went off.

**Ellison Cole** Ana gives me a tour of the shop. A single-storey bungalow nestled between Grinder Beans and Tree Leaf Antiques with decadent wooden floors and muted walls plastered with her favorite quotes hand scrawled in black Sharpie. And here's where the possible gimmick comes in. There are no shelves, no racks, no spinners of clothes. Instead, there are piles of clothes, wrapped in foil on the floor. Six piles to be exact, all labeled by a tented piece of cardboard (recycled from the coffee shop, she tells me.) Dresses, ladies' formal wear, ugly sweaters, men's pants, unisex tees, and mystery. The customers are not allowed to peek inside the wrapping prior to purchase.

What is the mystery pile comprised of? Don't you think all of the piles would constitute as mystery?

**Ana Lawrence** The pile is a smorgasbord. Maybe you'll find a hat in there, or overalls, or get lucky and find your daughter's future prom dress.

**Ellison Cole** It seems to me that you're putting a lot of faith into your customers' willingness to accept blind faith.

**Ana Lawrence** I haven't had any blind customers yet, but if I did, that's kind of the point. My audience is everyone and my business is designed to spread diversity.

**Ellison Cole** My phone dings. While I check my notification, I watch Ana walk over to the ugly sweaters and methodically re-arrange the pile. I've been tagged. #blindfaith #EllisonCole captions a sepia filtered image of me looking perplexed. Perhaps she's pulling my leg, she does hold a Master's after all. And then she speaks.

**Ana Lawrence** I'm constantly shifting the piles. You always want your business to stay fresh. It keeps your customers interested. They don't want to see the same product in the same place each visit.

**Ellison Cole** What do you love most about being a business owner?

**Ana Lawrence** Definitely the look on the customers' faces when the exchange of money is over and they can finally open their purchase. In one regard, my business model is a "fuck you to capitalism."

**Ellison Cole** We're interrupted by a customer. A woman, mid-seventies, clad in a pair of army

green workingman's trousers and an embroidered peasant blouse, walks through the door and goes straight to the mystery pile.

**Ana Lawrence** That's Lydia, my best customer.

**Ellison Cole** Lydia has a distinct shopping style. She picks up two packages and weighs them with each hand, does this a few times, and takes the three heaviest packages to the register. I ask why she shops at Aluminum Foil. She's deadpan.

**Lydia** The box of chocolates metaphor.

**Ellison Cole** And finally, I get it. The idea is not just logical, it's brilliant. One day Ana will get it too. I'm Ellison Cole, back next week with more stories of *Things People Do*.

**Announcer** RCR, Rural Community Radio.