

## The Rice Tree Chronicles

### The Bee's Knees

Tracy's Place on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Pittsburgh was not a chance encounter. I was searching for wool newsboy caps and only those whose characteristics matched what was popularly worn in the 1880's England was going to fit the bill. What can I say? Vintage to many today seems to refer to the 70's, but I like to go back even further...something from the 1800's England would be my idea of vintage. It was a time when men wore  $\frac{3}{4}$  length topcoats with matching silk top hats for formal wear or a dark suit with matching bowler hat for everyday wear. It seemed that dressing up implied even an upright posture and a proud gate. When men dressed with style, life seemed more elegant and interesting.

Casual is fine at home, but why limited fashion only to the streets of the city? Fashion begins in the home where one can try a combinations of outfits to start the day. Dress smart casual can be the everyday norm, why not? But where to find the fashion statements representing vintage clothing not from the 70's or 80's, but from the 1880's England. A little known secret is to be found at Tracy's Place.

"When I saw you wearing that newsboy hat, I knew that I had something for you and here it is. Tracy handed me a wool/polyester newsboy cap from Dobb's Fifth Avenue. I felt an instant connection to the fashion scene from another era as I looked into an ornately framed mirror. Tilting the cap to the right was considered fashionable. A tilted hat, typically to the right side, had a historical connection to etiquette and fashion, with high profile royalty setting the standard. It's said that men traditionally escorted women on their left, leading to the hat being tilted in the opposite direction. Somehow, I can't quite picture that scenario, however, today caps can be tilted left, right or even backwards depending on the style or simply because the wearer preferred it that way.

"Yes, I like it. How much for it?"

"Oh no, it's a gift. All first timers get a free gift. I'll take no money from you, said with a smile revealing instant warmth and welcome. I've got everything. I go to estate and garage sales regularly. It's my passion. I have 8-10 hats that you would like, but because they are wool, I put them away during Spring, but don't worry. There's always something in the back room. The further you go, the more interesting it gets. The deeper the walk, the older the vintage...1980's? Sure we got it. 1970's? That too. But I can see that you are a 1880's kind of guy...well then the back room is for you. We are like a Time Machine and you will be able to find something for sure, maybe not a silk top hat, but surely a derby or newsboy. Yes, I think you are going to like it here."

An hour then two passed by quickly and in my bag were two hats and a Calvin Klein waitcoat, a modern vest. The vest is a necessary part of today's look toward vintage, but it's not complete unless one wore a smart looking pocket watch with a Hudson case and a rose gold chain tucked into a button hole.

Upon returning to Tracy's counter, she took a quick look and blurted out, "the hats are free, my gift to you and the vest (still new as the waist pockets were still stitched), \$5.

Unable to change a large bill, Tracy said, " don't worry about it. You can pay me next time. You know everybody's in such a rush...take your time."

"No, I'll be back in 30 minutes with some change."

"You dance Papi? Let me see some of your moves. Oh baby, you still got it for 81...you can move. You gotta come to my son's birthday party tonight. We're having it upstairs."

Quickly running out of the store and to the nearest minimart, I buy a bunch of goodies for the party...paper towels, plastic forks and knives and a gallon of juice.

Returning to Tracy's Place, I draw her close to me and whisper in her ear, "this is how you can remember me and hand over a gallon of Surfing Strawberry Hawaiian punch...I'm the Hawaiian Punch" and we give each other a hug and bid Aloha.

"It's fate that we have met" said Tracy before we parted. I'm a good person and so are you. Things don't happen by accident or by chance. It was meant to be."

I do believe that that. Meeting someone like Tracy who embraces you like an old friend, who welcomes you into her shop reminds me very much of the early shop owners on Market Street in Wailuku, Maui in the early 1950's where you were made to feel like family. It's that old time hospitality and Aloha not so common today.

Tracy's Place really is the Bee's knees and Tracy is, without a doubt, the Queen Bee.

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