



December 23, 2014

Dear Family and Friends,

In just a few days, we will be celebrating the holiday season. May you all have a festive season with a very healthy New Year's. Since my first Confessions in 1995, I feel this was my most **challenging** year but also a **blessed** one. Let me share with you my 2014 Yuletide confessions of an Innkeeper.

### Lets Get Ready for 2014

At the end of last year, I began planning our winter upgrade projects including bathrooms and floor/rug replacements. Craigslist had an ad for a commercial floor & rug warehouse moving SALE offering deep discounts. The majority of their inventory were leftovers from the Casinos renovations and were very high end products. Within the next week, after 5 trips I happily picked up some beautiful rugs and vinyl floors to use in 2014. Little did I know that within 6 weeks my demand for these products would increase threefold.

On January 6th, BathFitters arrived and within 2 days upgraded my **1925 Standard** porcelain 800-pound french bathtub with a new modern shower in the Peppenelli suite. We were unable to save this vintage tub but I was happy to have its' new replacement. Since I was leaving shortly for a winter getaway I guided Jeffrey (helps me during year) to finish up the remaining bathroom work while gone.

### Winter Getaways

By mid January I headed to one of my favorite city of Charleston, South Carolina. The Professional Innkeepers Conference was being held there, and I made plans to stay for the week in a great location in downtown Charleston. I loved being able to come back to my boutique hotel after a full day of training. At the tail end of the week my sister and her husband on their way to Florida enjoyed their first visit to Charleston. Visiting Fort Sumpter on a cold windy day was one of our fun events.

I then headed out west to San Diego, another favorite city for some R&R. Meeting Matthew (my nephew's Jeffrey & Suzanne's new son) was the highlight of the trip. Loved touring this gorgeous city and especially liked staying in the historic district of this town (Gaslamp District) with over 90 Historic Register Places. I made plans for a repeat visit in November since I loved it so much. Weather is great.

### Getting Caught in Mexico

While there, I decided to take a quiet train ride to the Mexican border only 25 miles away from San Diego. As we disembarked the train, we had 15 minutes to wait for the return trip back to San Diego. I noticed the sign that says "***Come See our new Pedestrian walkway to Mexico***". I just followed the signs and eventually came to a revolving door that everyone was going through. So I just followed the crowds, went down the steps to the Mexican border. Once there I saw lots of border patrols, cars and thousands of people. After a few minutes I decided I saw enough and was not impressed.

I headed back up the steps and the guards stopped me with their guns at their sides. I was told I had to go through the immigration line. After 1 ½ hour, I informed them I did not have my passport. “Did I get what I wanted from my trip” he responded. I told him “**I saw Nothing and got Nothing**” but just saw the cars and the people. Well, the good news they let me back into the USA but reminded me next time they would not be as understanding. Oops so much for seeing the new walkway.

### **Whale Watching - the San Diego Way**

While on the train to Mexico I met a woman who owned a charter boat company and we exchanged our business cards. She suggested taking a boat ride and made arrangements with her friend Ceci to join a charter Whale Watch Ride the next day. Sound like fun. When I boarded the boat I found out it handled only 6 people and was a small pontoon boat. How cool!

It was an amazing trip since the boat could maneuver easily in search of Whales. Other boats, similar to our Cape May Whale Watcher boats had lots of people. I met a lovely couple (Sue & Jim) from Phoenix who were glad to share their Whale photos capturing our memories once the trip was over. We did follow several Whales in the high seas. Happily I met Sue in Las Vegas in November. Little did I know that in July, that same boat Captain went out with a photographer and was capsized by a whale. They were safely picked up by another boat but the boat was beached. It made national news! Can't believe I was on the same boat. No more small whale watching boats for me.

### **Polar Vortex Hits Antoinette's**

On January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014 I finally arrived in NJ and stopped in Atlantic City for my last hurrah. The next morning I got a call from Jeff, who was doing interior painting at my house. That morning he found water in my basement due to broken water pipes. Quickly I had the local Cape May firemen inspect the damage and alert me of the seriousness of my problem. They immediately advised turning off all my utilities (Water, Gas and Electric) due to electrical volts in the water. I would not be able to put them back on until the plumbing problems were fixed. After 5 days of fixing several water leaks, it was time to turn on the utilities. On Friday, I headed back home from Atlantic City where I was marooned and found 2 radiators sitting outside my house. Sadly when the heat came back on, 4 of my 19 radiators burst since they were all frozen during the week. What a disaster!

This was my first claim to State Farm since 1991. Within 24 hours an estimator came to assess the damage. After 4 hours measuring room to ceiling sizes, and what areas were affected she headed offsite to her state vehicle on the street. After one hour, she returned and gave me an 8 page detailed report of her preliminary estimate and happily a check to begin my reconstruction work. Thank God!

ServPro (Water Restoration Co.) came in the next day with tons of equipment to fully dry out the affected areas (hallways, bedrooms, living rooms, basement, crawl spaces etc.). They began by tearing out rugs, wood moldings and anything that was affected by the water damage. This would stop any potential sign of mold that could develop. Within the week everything was dry and we could begin restoring the affected areas. It included new electrical wiring in both the basement and first floor, restored old radiators (hard to find and restore), new rugs, new water heaters and furnace damaged by the water just to name a few from a long list of needed repairs. Now all I had to do was to find carpenters, painters, rug installer etc to get the work done quickly - hopefully by May 1<sup>st</sup> - only 12 weeks away.

Remember the warehouse I bought commercial rugs and vinyl just weeks ago - surely it was a great find and very timely. I tracked down their new location and immediately searched for more rugs to replace those removed by ServPro. Their semi-retired rug installer Paul maybe could help me since I had such a short window to get the work done. Paul was a 30 year union worker and foreman at most of the Atlantic City casinos. He also installed rugs in Carnegie Hall in NYC. This guy had tons of experience but would he be willing to work for me, a small town Innkeeper?

With his guidance and the help of his two sons and hired staff we were able to get Antoinette's rugs and vinyl floors redone in 5 weeks. I think the spirit of Antoinette worked her magic wand (if there is such a thing) with this fortunate discovery of supplies and workers. A week following the completion of my work, Paul needed to have a hip replacement.. Whew. Thank you Paul for such a great job!

The most significant change was the electrical upgrade to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and all old wiring was removed. Can you believe this was all done in 12 weeks and we reopened before May 1<sup>st</sup>.

As the season progressed my returning guests were happy with the improvements. So was I. It was brutal working 7 days a week and long hours but the end result was a BLESSING IN DISGUISE . I am thankful to my family, friends and hired contractors who helped me get through this very challenging period of 2014. Bravo to this great team.

We just completed insulating all areas of my basement including 5 crawl spaces to eliminate frozen pipes or minimize this happening again in the future. We also added a radiator and heater in the basement. We are now more prepared!

### **Why Visit a Place with Only Old People**

In March, in the midst of all this construction, I headed down to Branson, Missouri, a place I wanted to go for years. I needed a brake from all the work and had planned this a year ago. Friends were invited but "only old people go there". I arrived at the Branson airport and was surprised that only 3 planes arrive and depart each day and only 1 gate.

Needless to say I had a fun filled week, made new friends and had a long needed rest. Went and saw 7 shows, good dining and great sightseeing. My new friend Pam who lives 5 hours away visits Branson 6 times a year (she is a retired teacher). Many families visit the town and especially enjoy the Dolly Parton's show (about 1500 visitors a show). There is so much good entertainment in that city that you could go to a show every afternoon and evening. Plans for a revisit were already made for 2015.

### **Other Antoinette's 2014 Improvements**

Throughout the year, we resumed our plans to upgrade other areas of the house. We continued adding flat screen TVs. An auxiliary washer and dryer was installed in the garage for my one bedroom suites. Weekly summer guests have been asking for this for years - finally after 20 years! My sofas were upgraded with new inner springs, lights were added in the garage, continued replacing another section of my roof, repaired and painted all high peaks of my house as well as cleaning and repainted my fire escape. No rest for the weary.

### **Getting Ready for the Season**

Spring-cleaning was delayed but it had to be done. I rehired my friend Laura to tackle my garden at

Antoinette's. With last year's experience she knew what worked well. She successfully created a great curb appeal throughout the summer/fall seasons with her green thumb. The guests herb garden in the back was another popular treat especially for my summer guests.

### **Family Additions**

In May 2014 we welcomed Carly to the family when she married my nephew Peter at a destination Wedding in the Grand Cayman Islands. We had a fabulous time and enjoyed all the events planned for this Island Wedding. Foolishly my poor friend had to put up with me for the first few days while I learned how to maneuver the roads driving on the opposite side. Congrats to Mr. & Mrs. Anderson for planning such a fabulous wedding. Happiness for many years ahead.

By mid May, Pete's brother Lee and Kelly welcomed their new baby boy Riley into the family. When they visit Cape May I am now happily available to babysit our latest addition. Congrats!

### **Summertime**

Before you knew it the summertime came and went. Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Maryland accounted for 80% of my guests this year. Other States that visited Antoinette's included California, Connecticut, DC, Delaware, Florida, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, and Vermont. Via my online website and bookings, visitors also came from Canada, Germany, Sweden, England, Argentina just to name a few. Am I now an International Company of sorts?

### **Did the Boys Come Back to Work?**

Last summer I began training Antoinette's 5<sup>th</sup> generation children to the art of Innkeeping. Surprising the boys eagerly came back to work in 2014. We continued to train these 3 boys now ages 10, 12 & 13, to assist me with my guest house chores at Antoinette's and also earn some ready cash. I had to refresh their memories on housekeeping chores but they soon caught on once again. How long this tradition will last - the jury is still out. Their dream is to work at the Fudge Kitchen when they turn 14.

### **Moving Offsite - Should I or Should I Not?**

As I watch my family and friends retire as Baby Boomers, I am frequently asked when are you going to retire? My usual response is "when I am no longer able to work". I have a few obvious options available to me. Option 1: Antoinette's was originally a **year round apartment building**, I could very easily turn it back to that type of rental. If I am unable to climb 3 flights of stairs, just take over one of my first floor apartments and rent the rest of the house out. Option 2: put the house up for sale & retire.

In August, a third option was added to the list. My cousin and I visited the Victorian Towers, a 55 and over 6 story building across from the Washington Street Mall a block away from Antoinette's. It was built in the 70's when the Washington Mall was revitalized. It is run by the Catholic Diocese of Camden. They have 200 units and offer studios and 1 bedrooms for rent. Studios are available within 60 to 90 days but the one bedrooms require a minimum of 9 months to get in.

I decided to submit an application to rent a 1 Bedroom Apartment. I could easily continue to run my business down the street, prepare and rent out my third floor space and ideally find a tenant who could help me run Antoinette's. One big plus for me - it would give me more living space and the ability to

socialize with friends and families. Entertainment has always been out for me on the third floor. All my family and friends overwhelming support this new plan. Well no word yet but I should start the downsizing process and be ready for the move in the spring.

### **School Reunions - Should I Go?**

September in Cape May is my favorite time of the year. The weather is still nice but cooler at night, the water is warm and many of the summer crowds are gone. The town has lots of events held on the weekends. My college in North Jersey (Caldwell College for Women) was having its' 45<sup>th</sup> reunion. I have totally lost touch with all of my classmates and have never gone back to prior reunions. If I wanted to go, I had to make advance plans to hire an Innsitter for the weekend. So I did!

Being very nervous I ventured up to the reunion. The first two women I met were both 75 years old who graduated in 1961. I explained it was my first reunion and was embarrassed that I may not know anyone, "Don't worry, you'll do just fine - you now know us." Of course the college had changed a lot: now coed and named a University. Throughout the event, I began recognizing classmates and learned several of them were frequent visitors to Cape May and had no idea I ran a business there for 23 years.

Remember those first 2 women I met. They were both science and math majors. During their first interview after graduating, the men were happy that they had extra training at a typing school (Katherine Gibbs). Women were mostly secretaries then. Being hired by Bell Laboratories they never worked at a typewriter. Oh, Boy have times changed. The trip was certainly worth it and I look forward to seeing some of my classmates soon maybe in Cape May.

Next year my High School is having its' 50<sup>th</sup> class reunion. I am already planning to join the crowd to reconnect with school classmates. Looking forward to the big event.

### **Recognition Awards in 2014**

In September, Capemay.com , a popular local online website announced their "Best of Cape May 2014" contest results. We were pleased that in " Best Places to Stay - Guest House" category, Antoinette's received the top award of **Best Guest House**. Thank you to all those fans who voted for Antoinette's in this category. Below is link to all the winners for 2014.

<http://www.bestofcapemay.com/winners.html>

In November, the Atlantic City Press did a wonderful article on Antoinette's. Over the last 23 years, we appeared among other businesses in the Press but this time they gave us almost 3/4 of a page writeup in the business section. Here is the link to this article:

<http://www.atlanticcitynews.net/index.php/sid/227595981>

### **Timber and We are not in a Forest!**

On Columbus Day Weekend, I got a call from the Chamber of Commerce for a room for a family of 6. Sure I can help them - send them over. When they arrived at my front door, the grandfather almost looked like Santa Claus. Since they decided to rent the suite, I showed them around Antoinette's and explained how the parking works. The son asked me where should he park his 2<sup>nd</sup> car, a big truck. Well,

Cape May is not big truck friendly but we luckily found a perfect spot out of the way.

Before the weekend was over I conversed with the grandfather and learned he was born and raised in Switzerland and used to be a wall paper hanger but now lives in Canada with his 3 generation family. Six years ago they started a circus show called TIMBER and now travels around the world. The show is a series of acrobatic events performed by all family members including Arthur, his 3 year old grandson. The show includes hatchets, timber and lots of other props. After they departed I did find this show on the Internet. Based on the schedule they came from Philadelphia to Cape May and was heading to New York for their next show. Within the next few weeks they had shows in London, England and Paris, France at \$60 a ticket. We are happy that they took a few days out of their busy schedule to stop and enjoy our beautiful seaside resort of Cape May, truck and all! Gee, would Cape May like Timber too?

### **Fall/Winter Travel**

In November, I headed back to San Diego and invited my friend Pam from Missouri. We both enjoyed the great sites to see. My favorite was a day tour of the retired USS Midway Navy aircraft carrier in the San Diego harbor. The Midway is now considered the top visited Military site in the nation. A must see! My visit brought back great memories in the 90's when I toured the USS Eisenhower when my brother Gregory was Captain, an awesome responsibility. How cool!

I attended opening day at the Del Mar Racetrack (only lost \$11) but had tons of fun. We took a day trip to La Jolla, California to see the beautiful coastline and found a great hidden treasure (a private map collection with works dated from 1500+). Some older US maps shows Cape May prominently listed.

The next week I headed to Las Vegas, and met my friend Sue from Arizona. One of my flights was delayed because Obama was flying in that morning. Guess who got preference on the runway. It's a fun city to visit with lots to do and see (unlike what's happening to Atlantic City). The two highlights of the trip was seeing the Olivia Newton John's show (Let's get Physical) and having lunch at the new Giada DeLaurentiis restaurant that just opened a week before.

The next week I left Vegas and headed to Park City, Utah for my final week of R&R. When I arrived at the airport, picked up the car they suggested an SUV since their first snowfall was coming that night and I was heading to the mountains. Where was my head when I decided to go to the Rocky Mountains in November. Fortunately, a few inches of snow fell and the rest of the week was clear. Park City and Salt Lake City shared the Winter Olympics in 2002. Taking an evening ghost tour of Park City, attending a show at the Theater where the Sundance Movie Festival is held, watching an international bobsled contest at Olympic Park, hearing the Mormon Tabernacle Choir sing in Salt Lake City (happening for 86 years) and swimming in a 90 foot crater with 95 degree water were the highlights.

I drove in mountains before, but the Rocky Mountains is a whole other type of experience. As you climb these mountains there are gates that close when the weather makes these road impassable. I found myself become unnerved and had to head quickly back down the hill. Seeing the Rocky Mountains is off my bucket list.

### **Utah Olympic Park Surprise**

Following the bobsled race on Sunday, I headed back the next day to take a tour of Olympic Park and learn the history of this great ski resort. Being at the top of the slope where the athletes race down was

surely not for me. Following the hour long bus tour we headed back to the information center. As we were all getting ready to leave the bus, the conversation centered around where do people live.

When I mentioned I live in New Jersey, the tour guide immediately piped up “I will only go to one place in New Jersey”. I asked him where and to my surprise he said Cape May. To make a long story short, both his father and grandfather own houses on Lafayette Street only a half mile away from Antoinette’s and he comes back each August for two weeks to enjoy the Jersey Shore. I know his grandfather. He insisted on taking a photo to send it off to his 85 year old grandfather in Cape May. Small world.

### **Social Entertainment**

My friend and I continued with a season pass to Cape May Stage, our local theater group. Now we enjoy a nice dinner before the show. My good friend already signed up for next year.

I took some more Viking Cooking Classes at Harrah’s in Atlantic City. Some of the recipes I hope to make some day is Beef Bourguignonne, crab bisque, and filet mignon (I’ve never cooked one) to name a few more. It’s a great learning environment (first two hours cooking, last hour eating and drinking). Sizes of classes vary up to 16 but have already made new friends. Looking forward to 2015 classes.

### **Legal Challenge in 2014-15**

Late last year I hired a lawyer for legal issues affecting my business and my next door neighbor (local Bank). In June, we submitted an appeal to the Cape May Zoning Board to reevaluate a fence permit issued to the bank next to Antoinette’s which could block off access to my rear parking lot once built. Some of my guests would no longer have access to off street parking in my rear lot. Recently we put the appeal on hold and am trying to come up with an agreed upon agreement. Still no resolution but hopefully we can get this resolved in 2015.

### **I thought Antoinette’s was a Motel?**

For the past couple of years, I have been contemplating upgrading my older appliances at Antoinette’s. In November I decided to go for it and ordered 4 refrigerators, 2 stoves and 1 Dishwasher. They were all still working but it was time to bring in more energy efficient models. My friend Bob, who repairs all my appliances, offered to check out what deals he can get for me from his top 3 dealers directly. He told them I was a good friend of his. Sounds like a great plan!. He got me a great deal and the delivery date was set a few days before Thanksgiving.

When the truck arrived, the guys were shocked that it was not a Motel but a 3 story building. After 4 hours of working on the first and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors, removing old equipment, trim moldings, door jams etc. and climbing the stairs, they informed me there was 1 refrigerator left on the truck? Do I tell them that it has to go on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor? I suggested they contact their boss and consider installation on another day since it was only for me. When the boss said “Just finish the job” that made me happy but very nervous.

Little did we know that we had to remove the door, trim, hand rail up the stairs and the top bannister. Once dismantled, they managed to remove the old refrigerator and carry up 3 flights of stairs the new one. Another hour went by, lot more sweat but the job got done. I happily gave them some extra cash but handled them also a free night at Antoinette’s for all their hard work. I know this installation was not a common practice among this trade. I think the Spirit of Antoinette’s was once again watching out for me.

## **Future Travel Plans**

In January 2015, I will be heading to New Orleans to mix business with pleasure and attend the annual Professional Innkeepers Conference. I'm excited that a friend will be joining midweek. After four jam-packed days of seminars, I expect to walk away with a wealth of knowledge and current trends in the hospitality business. Implementing them will be my next big challenge. In February I will be off to Williamsburg, a city I visited before and go back to some of the historic sites. I hope to visit relatives while there as well as family friends from the Carolina's.

In March, I am heading back to Branson, Missouri. I will reconnect with my friend Pam from Missouri who I met last winter. I also hope to connect with an old High School friend who lives in St Louis only 20 minutes from the airport.

## **Improvements for 2015**

During the winter of 2015, I hope to redo my outside Awnings by sewing up some new ones. I tried my hand several years ago and was successful at making 6 new ones for my sister's house next door. They seem to be holding up. Wish me luck.

## **Give Thanks to All My Guests**

In December, one of my guest (Ms. Arcaro) brought me a Christmas ornament celebrating 20 years of visiting Antoinette's for the annual Christmas Parade Weekend with her family and friends. Wow - 20 years! Thanks to Janice and all my guests for keeping Antoinette's alive all these years.

## **Final Remarks**

During 2014, I feel very blessed to have been able to overcome my flood challenge and find great family and friends to help me restore Antoinette's open for business in just 12 short weeks. It seemed like forever but it was shortly worth the efforts. Antoinette's business continues to grow and many thanks to all my guests for their return visits.

As usual, the clock is ticking and 2014 is just about over. It is time to close another year of my Innkeeper's **confessions**. I would love to hear from you if you enjoy reading my confessions, email me at [deannab@snip.net](mailto:deannab@snip.net). Please lets' remember our **Military** personnel who are serving our country while we are enjoying our holidays. Please keep in touch and Happy Holidays.

Fondly,

*Deanna*

Note: All my Yuletide Confessions since 1995 are now published and available online at my website at:

<http://www.antoinettescapemay.com/confessions-of-an-innkeeper.htm>

Happy Reading!