



December 22, 2003

Dear Family and Friends,

Happy Holidays to you and your families for this festive season and the year to come. Let me share some of my Yuletide confessions of an Innkeeper.

My biggest challenge for 2003 was keeping my Inn occupied during the year, holidays, weekends, and summer. With 14 straight weekends of poor weather, visitors were not ready to venture out until Mother Nature would cooperate. The uncertainty of the Iraq war also impacted our tourism business here and elsewhere.

Our first real beach day was July 4th and by mid August the ocean temperature finally reached a warm level. The fall season came and went with less than optimum conditions. And finally December brought hazardous travel conditions, thus delaying holiday shopping and our local Christmas parade by three weeks. Local businesses were down up to 50%. These unusual conditions made me realize how fortunate we were to have many good seasons before we hit 2003. Antoinette's continued to welcome guests from all over the world and survived this challenging year. Thank you all for your wonderful visits.

This January I spent 24 days on the road and traveled 4000+ miles from Cape May to Key West, Florida. It was my first big trip away from Cape May since I came here in 1993. I had a friend who could join me for part of the trip. After dropping off my companion at the Orlando airport, I quickly found out how to travel alone. The next day I headed to AAA and made a road plan with the help of Phyllis, my AAA agent. Was my heavenly mom, Phyllis, watching out for her single, independent daughter would be safe?

Some of the highlights of the trip were visiting relatives and friends and touring several cities along the way. Major stopovers included Norfolk, Savannah, Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Coco Beach, Daytona Beach, Key West, Naples, Sarasota, Asheville NC, Winston Salem, High Point NC, Charlottesville and Williamsburg, VA. I especially enjoyed my visit to the Biltmore Estate, Thomas Jefferson's home of Monticello, University of Virginia, and Colonial Williamsburg.

We managed to do a surprise visit to a dear friend of my mom. She now lives in a retirement village in Florida. With over 3000 seniors, the complex offers a wealth of activities for seniors of all ages.

During my January trip, my Dad reluctantly traveled to North Jersey to enjoy a relaxing stay with my sister and husband in his old remodeled family homestead. Once home I resumed my life as an Innkeeper with winter projects to be ready for the busy summer season. During the remainder of the year I found if I visited the local spas at the Atlantic City Casinos for a day, I could get revitalized. I just had to avoid the slots.

This year I continued to take classes at our local technical school, Advanced Upholstering and Furniture Restoration. I especially enjoyed the restoration class with Wally, our 82-year teacher, sharing his knowledge and skills with the students. I signed up for the January 2004 class since it was so great.

My home maintenance skills continue to improve. After three tries, I finally stopped the leak in a running toilet and bravely changed a couple of electrical switches and timers.

This summer, I decided to start unloading some of my junk and sell it at a local antique store. Fifteen pieces of furniture is not a bad start. I attempted with a friend to sell items at antique/craft shows but got rained out on our first show in June. Our next attempt was a shutout at our annual Christmas sale. In July, Fred moved from Cape May to North Jersey. He needed more supervision and help for his failing health. My family made him very comfortable in his new home surrounded by more family care.

Recently his health problems brought him to the Hospital and now recovering in a local rehabilitation center. He's trying hard to become stronger to come home but needs your prayers for a speedy recovery. He had seven wonderful years here in Cape May and especially enjoyed motoring to the beach and mall on his scooter. We all hope he can come back soon.

I experimented throughout 2003 with digital photography for family weddings, birthdays and tourist attractions. While at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville during a quiet snowy day, I decided to take a few candid shots. I thought no one was looking but those security cameras found me out. After three warnings, a big burly security guard came to escort me out of the building but then forgave me since I was on the final stretch of the tour. What great photos I have of the largest private estate in the U.S.. I don't plan to publish my photos.

In October, a famous painter visited Cape May and had an art exhibit/sale across the street from Antoinette's. For \$65, you could eat and drink, see his new artwork and buy a \$5600 painting. One of his earlier works just sold for \$900,000. I strolled over after the event started and tried to mingle with the art enthusiasts. After the sale began, the artist left the show to avoid the swarming crowd with his three body guards. I followed him to a black limo at the bank next door but to my surprise he circled back and plopped himself down on my rocking chairs at Antoinette's. Being my quiet and meek self, I introduced myself as the innkeeper. We had a pleasant chat before his white limo picked him up. As my friends tell me, I missed a golden opportunity to have him sign my guest book. Thomas Kinkadee was the famous painter who sat on my front porch. Should I get a plaque made for the rocker he sat on?

Antonio, my non English speaking Mexican, continues to work for me one day a week and we manage to understand each other. I thought I would lose him recently. His wife tried to leave town with his 4-year-old daughter and a boyfriend. After several frantic attempts he finally saw his daughter this week. Fortunately, for the well being of the child, the judge awarded him temporary custody for three days each week this matter is settled.

Before 2003 ended, I promised to put time aside to clean my room and set up a new computer. Finally I assembled it and sat it next to my old computer to begin the arduous task of transferring old information including my Christmas card list. Well, the old computer wouldn't start up. After several attempts and two days of work, Gateway staff determined I needed an internal part. With a quick trip to Staples and a lot of long hours I was able to solve the problem. Both are working just fine now.

Over the last two years several Cape May inns have sold due to the increase in Real Estate values. Should I throw my hat in the ring too? Is it time to sell Antoinette's and move onto a new career or retire? Well, after much soul searching I have decided that the time is not right yet. I still enjoy my job and the rewards of meeting interesting people from all over the world outweighs the drawbacks. An incident this week convinced me of this. Let me share it with you.

On December 18, a young couple from St. Augustine, Florida, visited Antoinette's for a one night midweek stay. The following day, the young lady called to check out and exclaimed that "she got a ring last night in my Hotel". Her boyfriend bought the engagement ring eight months ago and wanted to find a special place to give it to her. Well, Antoinette's was that place. Moments like this make Innkeeping all worthwhile.

One last thought for the holiday period. Please let's remember our Military personnel who are serving our country while we are enjoying our holidays. Thank you for everything.

There's a lot more stories to tell as an Innkeeper but the post office doors are closing. I love to hear from old friends and family. Cape May is a great place to live but is not next door to the ones I love. Please go to my website at www.antoinettescapemay.com and email me. Happy Holidays. Fondly, Deanna