



December 29, 2016

Dear Family and Friends,

Soon the 2016 holidays will be over. This year was filled with a new chapter in my life and lots of happenings. Surely I was blessed. May you all have a festive season with a very healthy New Year's. Let me share my 2016 Yuletide confessions of an Innkeeper with you.

Big Question

The big question on all the holiday cards I received this year was "did you move into Victorian Towers"? "Yes I moved in but it took longer to move out". Lets begin with Antoinette's then VT.

Getting Help

In January, I decided to let my helper go. After 5 years and now 24, I knew I could not offer him a future. By April, I began the arduous task of spring cleaning. After struggling for awhile, my sister suggested a reasonable cleaning service that helped her friend. Sounded great! The lady arrived that afternoon but much to my surprise her bid was \$2200 to spring clean my 4 apartments. Seeing my business sign outside and my location of downtown Cape May was good enough for the higher bid. Wow! I decided to decline her offer. If I would reconsider, just give her a call. No way!

By May, things were still not done. My friend, running a business on the beach, offered to let me borrow her maids over the next few weeks till her business was in full swing. Happily after 65 hours, all my suites were cleaned from top to bottom and ready for the summer. With free time should we work on my third floor in the attic where I've been living for 23 years? Realizing I have not dusted or cleaned much since I moved in, I knew it had to be tackled. Well 25 hours later, all the dust was gone and I can now begin downsizing in a dust free environment. Well, that where it ended for the summer.

25 Years and Counting

Antoinette's business continues to grow and many thanks to all my guests for their return visits. On May 22nd, 2016, Antoinette's began it's 25th year. To celebrate the event we prepared a press release and distributed it to our local papers. To our surprise the Atlantic City Press contacted us and did a wonderful job in sharing our story in their paper:

http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/business/in-cape-may-victorian-accommodations-with-a-modern-marketing-strategy/article_945c90ea-47d7-11e6-9005-ab68a2135e77.html

http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/business/cape-may-inn-breaks-the-couples-only-mold-with-family/article_d6c09be0-6adc-11e4-8413-9b86aebd2ba3.html?mode=image

In June, the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce presented us an award for 25 years of being in business in the County. In October, our local Chamber of Commerce presented us with "25th Milestone Award". Staying in business in a resort town for 25 years is very rare. We are very proud to have achieved this. We also received the Tripadvisor Certificate of Excellence award for 2016.

Summertime is Here Again

We had a very business summer and happy to welcome back repeat guests and welcome new ones. Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Maryland accounted for 81% of my guests this year. Other States that visited Antoinette's included Washington, D.C., Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin. Via my online website and bookings, visitors also came from Canada, France, Norway & Sweden just to name a few.

Lot of Windows to Replace

After 4 years and completing my asbestos roof replacement, decided on my next big project - Windows replacements (have only 70). After research, I settled on our local lumber Company. I was very impressed with "Renewal by Anderson" but since my house is in a historic town, wood was the only choice.

To get a sense of conditions of existing windows, I began tackling window washing. After washing 44 windows, it became clear which windows must go first! My estimate from a "window genie" was out of reach for \$1500. Just apply it on buying the actual windows instead.

By September the first 4 windows arrived. Cousin Don and his friend Roy replaced them in a day with only minor issues. I attribute it to two factors: the local lumber guy did a great job at measuring and Don and Roy are very skilled workers and willing to tackle this challenge. Thank Guys! We are now ready for more in the spring of 2017. Followed up by painting them by a friend who enjoyed doing it. Don made it clear - No Painting! Next time, windows will be painted first. Happy to have this project start.

Finding a Watercolor among the Masses



As I was searching the Web, I stumbled upon a post of an artist who loves to do watercolors of Cape May sceneries. As I scanned all the artwork, I came across a lovely watercolor of Antoinette's among the midst of the other pictures. The artist explained that one day she was coming out of the Cape May Post Office and saw the sun light hit my house in an interesting way. Thus began her latest watercolor of what she witnessed. Since there are over 600 Victorian homes in our city, having your house picked among them is such a treat. Thank you for choosing us among many.

Customers Withdrawal Pains

One of my customers have been traveling to Antoinette's each summer with their family since their two children were babies. Now that they are both involved in sports there was no time for their August vacation in Cape May. Well a few weeks before Labor Day I got a frantic call saying that the children were having withdrawal pains and needed to get back to Cape May before the summer was over. Well, on Labor Day weekend, the family arrived back with big smiles on their faces. Before they left, they already booked for 2017 Labor Day. Real happy that the family could find an alternate solution.

Antoinette's Opens for a Christmas Tour

In the 1990's when Antoinette's was open, we joined other local businesses and became part of the December Candlelight House tours. It allows the public to learn a bit about the business and view the inside of the property. Stopped after a few years since our repeat customers were inconvenienced to

clean and leave their suite for 3 hours while showing the house to the tour goers. Now twenty years later decided to reopen Antoinette's for the Candlelight tours. The 3rd weekend was best in December since it's always slower. Happily, we rented 3 of the 4 suites for the event and offered complimentary tickets to our guests while on tour. Suggestions to keep our flow through house fast and insure they have something to see of importance was implemented.

The rain stopped, the evening arrived and the weather shot up to the 50's. By 5pm we began prepping the house. 800 tickets were sold so far. At 5:30pm we opened the doors and the tour goers began to arrive. We had a steady flow of people, and was able to do a quick overview of the Inn. The highlight of the evening was sharing Antoinette's Lord Prayer Masterpiece that she finished at 94 and was proudly displayed in the lobby. By the end of the night we estimated close to 400 visitors had walked through our front doors. On Facebook the next day a tour goer posted all the trees seen that night. Ours was the second picture in the collection. With the proper help will consider 2017 for sure.

Dollhouse Elf

In preparation for the holidays, my friend and her grand daughter arrived in Cape May to help me with decorations. Olivia was turning 7 and was treated to seeing the annual Christmas parade. She kept on starrng at the doll houses on the front porch. On a prior trip, she spotted my Dad's very first dollhouse in the garage and asked her grandma to get it for her. It was so badly deteriorated. Miraculously, I sold it to a lady fan at a yard sale (see story in 2015 edition).

I decided to give Olivia a dollhouse kit bought for my Dad years ago before she headed back home. She told her grandma that they must save some glue. "For what" asked her grandmother. She replied "all the dollhouses at Antoinette's need to be repaired" and she wanted to do that once she came back. Well it looks like Santa Claus is sending Antoinette's a Dollhouse Elf for 2017. Thank You.

Downsizing is a Real Challenge

After 25 years of living in an attic can surely store a lot of stuff. So brought 30 bags of clothes downstairs, sorted them by Keep, Donate and Trash piles. Moved all Keep clothes to my apartment and once draws filled stopped at that. Next was 35 boxes of paperwork. Shocked how much of papers had social security number printed on them. Got as far as sorting and disposing. Once again the summer came and all work stopped.

2016 Traveling

My 2016 traveling took me 11 weeks away from the Inn and my new Apartment. In January spent 3 weeks out west to San Francisco, Napa Valley, Newport Coast and seeing my family in San Diego. Drove to Las Vegas with my friend Evelyn, who got stranded by a snowstorm on the east coast. I introduced her to casino gambling and she became my wonderful travel photographer on Facebook.

In February headed to Jacksonville, FL to join the wedding festivities for Jamie & Jenn's Bassett with my nephew Max and his family. Congrats! In March spent another 3 weeks in Washington DC, Williamsburg, Boston and NYC. In April, I visited Nashville for the first time and attended an Innkeeper's conference. Absolutely loved the city and must go back. By Mid April, had to go back to work and get the Inn ready for the summer.



On Halloween headed to visit family and then attended another Innkeepers conference (PAInns) in State College. On way back east hooked up with former Cape May business friends who moved out of Cape May. We reminisced about the past and enjoyed bonding together. Headed to NYC again and was at Times Square for Election Night. Headed back to Boston for another week and was happy to have my niece Renee & Frechette girls join me for their first field trip to this



great city. Ellie & Sariah loved the Boston Tea Party museum and practiced throwing over the tea before the tour. Finally visited 2 High School friends in Boston and Cambridge.

It's a Small World

As mentioned, in November I headed to State College to attend a Pennsylvania Innkeepers Conference. During one of evening socials I met a woman who owned a Bed and Breakfast in Benton, PA. It's a very small town and maybe has a 3 block main street. I mentioned that my parents retired there a few miles from the center of town. I never noticed a B&B on Main Street. After some conversation I found out that she knew and had work done by Peter Langenbach, a local artist. Pete and his family were best of friends with my family since birth. Gee, it's a small world after all.

Let's Get Physical

After a very busy summer and fall, I decided it was time to seek physical therapy for an old ailing ankle which has been around for 10 years but never treated. Foot ailments get in the way while traveling. Physical therapy started with lots of heat and exercise. Beginning my 4th week hoping that it will help.

Becoming a Renter



Now lets talk about my move. On March 1st, I was accepted at Victorian Towers (VT) and became a renter at this senior center in downtown Cape May. It took me 18 months to get accepted. There are currently 204 apartments with 125 1 bedroom units & 89 studios. My unit is on the 5th floor and has a view of the Washington St Mall. We began by painting the apartment with the help of a friend. Switching from white to colored walls was exciting since I was used to mostly white wall at Antoinette's. Spent the rest of March traveling.

Let's Add the Furniture

After 25 years of furnishing 5 apartments, it should be a snap. One bedroom apartment has limited space as I found out. Knowing that newer furniture is poorly made, I decided to look for used but well made furniture. Since I was traveling south to Williamsburg why not start there. I'll look for a 4 poster bed. They have some great old furniture but have to consider transporting it back home. I found one you could dismantle and put in to your car. Happily it arrived home safely. My next items was 2 matching dressers which I found some on Craiglist 90 miles away. The seller also offered me solid matching queen sofa bed and reclining chair hidden in the storage unit. The sofa bed was only used once. With the help from my cousin Don from Virginia, he claims he traveled 400 miles to get this furniture into Victorian Towers. Not quite the colors I wanted but knew it was solid used furniture. If I choose in the future I can recover them both with more up to date fabric. Thankfully, my sister Judi set up my kitchen.

Gee I need a New Mattress

Each year a group of local Innkeepers order new mattresses for their Inns. This year I decided to buy 1 for my new apartment. If I find it comfortable would plan on buying more for the Inn. Price is excellent but the downside is there is no mattress setup/removal service. Without advance warning, the mattress arrives at Antoinette's but the guys did not know it was going to the apartment. Only choice was to put it in my garage. My carpet guy offered to deliver it to the apartment a few weeks later. Great! When the mattress and box spring was placed on the poster bed it was too high. Forgot the frame was 14" off the floor unlike a standard frame. I would need a stool to get into bed. Oops. I spoke to both the delivery sales person and a local mattress store. The message was the same - to order a low profile box spring it would be a special order (\$300+). So much for savings.



I looked on Craigslist again and found a California student at Princeton University going for her doctorate who was moving back home. Her low profile mattress was used only for 6 months and she wanted \$50. What could I lose if it doesn't work out. Sunday I traveled the 100 miles and arrived at the place. She helped me put it on my roof but realized no side handles to tie it down and the wind that day was 60 MPH. Used lots of rope through my car door windows. Avoided all highways if it blew off the roof. After 3 slow hours I returned safely to Cape May. Well, the good news, it fit the bed and it's comfortable. Step stool is optional.

How About Some Lighting



Years ago, when my parents decided to retire in Pennsylvania, my mom asked if there was anything we wanted before they moved. I asked for an old mission style lamp (maybe early 1900's). She informed me it would cost me \$150. Huh? She explained that the lamp came from the Jersey shore and all the stain glass was covered with paint. After days of stripping the paint, the beauty of the glass came through. So I paid up. I enjoyed the lamp for six years and then moved to Cape May where it got buried. Like lots of my possessions, the lamp sat for 18 years.

Since my nephew Peter was the only family member that had an appreciation (as far as I know) for antiques, I asked if he would become my official curator of my possessions. My sisters would just throw out everything. I shared the story of my Mom's lamp and Pete said he would gladly pay the \$150 once he has a place for it. Well happily when I moved, I decided to dust off the cobwebs and have it overlook my view of the Washington Mall. So happy that a little history of my mom is with me now. Peter, sorry, you will now have to wait.

Digital HD TV Service

When I first moved into Victorian Towers, I was excited to get two new Smart HD TVs. Much to my surprise when we hooked them up it displayed "No Digital Channels available". Huh, what does this mean. I found out that our specific service from "Senior TV" does not give us HD service unless they upgrade the wiring. Our cables were installed years ago. At a cost of \$100,000 it wasn't a priority on their list. Senior TV is geared towards hospitals and assisted living place with a low service price. I followed up with the Property Manager and top management and heard the same thing -No. Also heard that 20+ of the 204 apartments do have Comcast since they lived here before Senior TV was installed. All new tenants have to get Senior TV. After much discussion, the property manager said to talk to Comcast, I could give it a try. Well that's a 2017 project for sure.

Let's Get WIFI Service

For years, I've been very familiar with speed or lack of speed with WIFI service at the Inn. My customers periodically complained about my service. In April I finally switched from DSL to Xfinity with better WIFI service from Comcast. They showed me a handy tool (Speedtest) which gives actual upload and download speeds. Senior TV provides the WIFI service to Victorian Towers. I was able to demonstrate to the Property Manager that in my apartment the speed was only 20% as fast as my business down the street. This limits me on what type of work I can do at the apartment versus at the Inn. In a few cases I had to return back to the Inn to get better service to handle critical computer functions. Will need to find another option in 2017.

Well The Ring is Back

My new apartment does not come with a dishwasher and they are not allowed. Years ago when I lived at the Inn on the third floor, my Dad did the dishes. However since he could hardly see, the dishes were still dirty. Installed a dishwasher. Resolved at VT to just wash the dishes after each meal and let them dry naturally. My coffee cups now have the inside ring back. Another concession.

Getting to Know My Neighbors

It's been years since I was new to a neighborhood. In the Towers there are 250+ people who live there. Since most of my time is spent at Antoinette's, I've met only a few of my neighbors.

This year, we had a "hot" election in Cape May (like our Presidential), with mayoral and councilperson open seats. Over the past several years, I helped other candidates run for city office and became very familiar with the Voter Registration list. Decided to help the candidates and joined their committee.

Main objective was to encourage local residents to become registered voters. I offered to concentrate on Victorian Towers residents. I met with the President of the Tenants Association and suggested that the six floor captains be our key contacts. Rather than accepting this idea, he told me to take over the project. I explained I hardly knew anyone. He quickly suggested I work with Judi, the VP, as my assistant. She was a retired banker and knew about 200 of the 250 people. With the list provided by Tenants President and the County voter registration list we were able to determine that 54 people were unregistered in the Towers. By the election deadline to vote we were able to get 20% to sign up.

We arranged a well organized candidates night with several prepared questions. Using my learned skills in Toastmasters, I served as a timer to keep the candidates in line. The local paper had our candidates night as front page news. The tenants were happy with the event. The biggest advantage was learning who was now living in the building and their names with my handy list.

Let My Children Go

After obtaining handy tools at my Inn (i.e. cameras, heat sensors etc.), with a click of a button on my phone, key information was at my fingertips if offsite. I was going back and forth to VT but did not stay overnight while there were guests at the Inn. I was puzzled to why I was procrastinating moving in permanently. I finally concluded that it was like my guests were my children and I didn't want to let them go. I wanted to feel confident that all will work out for them. Finally, decided this was silly and I forced myself to just DO IT. By turning off my heater on the third floor it would just be too cold to

sleep. Being less than a block away was an easy commute if issues arrived. I am happy to report that I have now been here for a full month at night even when I had a full house. I have let my children go.

I'm Locked out and have Guests arriving on Christmas Eve

After arriving home on December 23rd from a great 70th birthday party, I had to clean out the car and put half of it in Antoinette's and half in my apartment down the street. When I came back to Antoinette's I realized I locked myself out and all the keys were now inside. It was late and my guests are coming in tomorrow. Getting a locksmith at the 11th hour before the holiday may not happen. Do I break a window. Do I call my family?

Ah hah, my new windows in the back are not locked but realized they do not go into the main part of the house. After about 30 minutes of thinking, I realized behind the dollhouses on front porch one window was accessible. I broke the screen and was able to wedge the window open and climbed in. Should have taken a selfie! Promptly, I hid a set of keys. Glad I didn't have to call a locksmith and turn away my guests for the holidays.

Difficult Decisions During the Holidays

A few days before Christmas, I received an online reservation from a prior guest who's been at Antoinette's over the past several summers. I watched their children grow up. On Christmas Eve, the Dad arrived by himself. He decided to no longer pretend that everything was ok during the holidays and he just passed his 25th wedding anniversary. Sadly his wife has been an alcoholic for years and his children have been affected by her disease. Now that they are older, he decided to begin the separation process and not be home for the holidays. Cape May and Antoinette's was his choice.

After a long conversation, he checked in and began to settle in for the holidays. When he was ready to check out he explained that after he made this giant step the holiday was not so bad. Cape May is a beautiful city to visit at the Christmas time. He thanked me for my therapy session with him and was ready to move on with his life. I said a little prayer for him at Christmas Mass hoping that he would work out his problems in 2017. The first step is the biggest step to take.

2017 Traveling



By mid January I head to Las Vegas for 4 nights followed by San Diego for 2 weeks. Hope again to spend time with my nephew, Jeff and family. I top it off by attending a 3 day Innkeepers Conference on the Queen Mary Ship in Long Beach, California. Should be so cool!

In March head back to Washington DC, Williamsburg and Boston. Maybe the Frechette girls will join me for another field trip in Boston. In April have tentative plans to join a friend in Key West. It feels like I am semi-retired as you can tell by my 2016 & 2017 travel plans.

Let me end my confessions with a few heartwarming true stories.

Rules of a Six Year Old

In November, I decided to stay overnight at my niece's house in Connecticut. Since their older brother just hurt his knee, his bed was no longer available. Their mom talked the two young girls into giving up their room for the night. The younger six year old decided to give me Rules if I slept in her room!

1. Do not touch anything on dresser. 2. Stay out of closet. 3. Ring bell for service (I added that), 4. Do not touch table, 5. Do not go under curtain.

After she explained them, I asked her several questions, one specifically about how she would know if I followed the rules. When she innocently declared "that I would be honest with her"! Her brother next door was totally amused by all her responses. Well, we explained to her mom that Aunt Deanna has rules to follow in order to sleep in her bed. My niece was applauded that her daughter gave me rules. That night when I went to bedroom I found a note on my pillow with a Dove chocolate heart. The note read "We love you. From Ellie and Sariah" and of course some hand drawn hearts and kisses. It made me smile as I laid my head down on the pillow. Love the innocent mind of a child.

Littlest Christmas Tree



In 1993, at a local Christmas sale, I bought a handmade 22 inch tree for my dear neighbor & friend Mary Crilly who was turning 90. When I gave it to her she cried and loved it. Mary had it next to her bed in her very large house. After the holidays I asked Mary if she wanted me to turn off the lights and put it away. "No, Dear, its' so pretty and it helps me sleep at Night".

Sadly she was moved into a nursing home and her house was sold (now Southern Mansion). When the new owners held their first yard sale, I found Mary's little tree and bought it. For 23 years it sat on my 3rd floor and was never lite again. When I was packing up my stuff to move down to Victorian Towers and Christmas was upon us, I decided that Mary's little tree would go perfect in my new apartment. It needs a lot of work (tree lights out, glued packages off etc). For now I have it on my table and overlooks the Mall on Washington Street. When time permits I'll be happy to make this tree come to life again for sure. Merry Christmas to one of my special Angels.

As usual, the clock is ticking and 2016 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. Please lets' remember our **Police, Fire and 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>