



December 23, 2015

Dear Family and Friends,

As I collected my thoughts and began writing my Yuletide Confessions, it was a gorgeous winter 62 degrees day in Cape May. But today the weather is turning cold as it should. May you all have a festive season with a very healthy New Year's. This year was filled with lots of activities and happenings. Surely I was blessed. Let me share with you my 2015 Yuletide confessions of an Innkeeper.

Winter Getaways

This year I decided to close down the Inn for the majority of the winter, almost semi- retired, and do more traveling. So by mixing business (Innkeeping Conferences) and pleasure clearly expanded my travel plans. Many Cape May Inns now close down from January to April.

In January I headed to PAII (Professional Association of Innkeepers) in New Orleans. I was happy when my friend joined me to enjoy time with her cousin from the city while I attended the seminar. By staying right in the heart of the French Quarter we both found wearing earplugs at night to sleep was a necessity. Good food, good music and good friendship made it a worthwhile trip.

In February I headed to Williamsburg, VA, attended a conference and spent a few more days to enjoy the historic sites. I was forced to stay a few more days when they had a snowstorm. This is very rare there unlike the north. Would you believe the hotel staff cleaned off the snow from our cars, what a treat.

In March, I headed back to Missouri, stopped in St. Louis briefly to visit an old High School friend and them traveled to Branson, MO. I reconnected with Pam from south MO who visits Branson 8 times a year. After seven shows and lots of good food, I headed back home to get ready for the summer season.

Let's Replace Antoinette's House Sign

In 1991, we put up our first sign on Washington Street advertising Antoinette's. Over the years it was repainted, repaired, secured but it was on its last leg. After talking to our local sign maker and other Innkeepers, I decided to have a new one made. The sign maker came, discussed colors and design and said it could be done within the next month. Well, the sign was delivered and installed and to my surprise it had great eye appeal. Saving the old sign was not an option.

The next week, while at my sister's house, I learned this Sign Maker was her neighbor for the last several years. I forgot we met before. Small world.



Let's Say Goodbye to My Mom's Whiskey Barrels

My mom was an avid gardener and couldn't understand why I took NO interest in this great hobby. Well after several unsuccessful attempts, I decided to let my friend use her green thumb in adding curb appeal to Antoinette's. This year she advised me that my wooden barrels needed to be replaced. Little did she know that these barrels

were the last birthday gift I received from my Mom before she died in 1994. She got them at an auction in Pennsylvania and cut them in half to use as flower containers.

This fall we actually had a bonfire with my brother and sisters, and did say goodbye to Mom's whiskey barrels. No ghost appeared.

Say Goodbye to Dad's First Cape May Dollhouse

When my Dad lived with me for seven years on the 3rd floor, he made several dollhouses and ship models. Several of them are still throughout the house. There is only one original dollhouse of his that still sits on the front porch. His very first one, my favorite, just was too fragile to stay out another day. It survived the front porch for 15 years. I almost gave it away to my friend's first granddaughter who saw it sitting in my garage. I knew it was beyond hope to fix.

When I was getting ready for my annual yard sale, I decided that day to just add it to the bonfire with my Mom's whiskey barrels. Within an hour, a lady arrived at my yard sale and said to me "Do you know who I am" and I replied "No." She said, I bought one of your Dad's dollhouses a couple of years ago, restored it and my grandchildren absolutely love it! . I shared with her that I was finally giving up my Dad's first dollhouse and that it was being added to the bonfire pile with my Mom's Whiskey Barrels. "No, No" she exclaimed. "You can't burn it." When she offered me \$25 to buy it, I couldn't refuse her offer. Maybe it will appear someday on my front porch again.



If you knew my Mom and Dad, they were always feuding. My theory is that my Dad refused to let his precious dollhouse be burned at the stake with my Mom's whiskey barrels. You be the judge.

Let's Do Some Furniture Restoration

While in Williamsburg I met Debbie, who was just opening up a new upholstery store to the public (these are very hard to find). When she brought me behind the scenes to her upholstery shop in the basement, I had a rude awakening. Parts of the furniture business from the Carolinas are now being outsourced to China. While being there a lady came in and complained about her cushions from her new living room sofa. Debbie explained that the foam from China that is being used begins to deteriorate in six months. Just this past season, she had to redo several customer cushions.

When I arrived back home, I decided that it was better to just restore my furniture and do it myself. Although I did not mind buying new furniture, I knew in the long run that the old furniture was just a lot better. Since I've been sewing from age 10, I knew I could do it but needed to train someone for the labor intensive work (stripping and restoring the furniture). My Dad taught me years ago how to do this lost art. We conducted an inventory of all my fabrics remnants that could be used during the restoration. We counted 70 different samples. Plenty to spare.

After 80+ hours of training the old fashion method (i.e., tying springs eight ways), we began our furniture restoration. We found YouTube to be a fabulous source for free training. Loved Kevin Kennedy's videos from Upholstery on Broadway from Maine!

Since March, we successfully prepped 12 single chairs by restoring the original springs. As of now, we completed 10 of the 12 chairs and are now using them in the house. We completed recovering two sets of dining room chairs and one double bench. Our latest



project is restoring a wing back chair and two ottomans to match our other furniture. After some use of three old platform rockers from the 20's, we learned the need to replace the springs so my guests don't fall over if they rock too far back. Oops.

Ready for New Awnings

We had a late start doing our spring cleaning till early May since the weather did not warm up till then. My friend did all her garden chores to spruce it up for the summer. My biggest challenge was half of my awnings seams split after we washed them. I attribute this to wear and tear over 18 years. Fortunately, I was able to re sew all the seams before we hung them but it meant we had to disassemble them. What a chore. Happily I already purchased 75 yards of awning fabric from Debbie in Williamsburg to begin making 20 replacement awnings in 2016. All I need to do is get my 1929 Singer commercial sewing machine working again and moved to the garage from my 3rd floor.

Summertime

Well, it was a fabulous summer with mostly beautiful weather and very little unpleasant days. July started out slow but ended with a fantastic August for our summer guests. The weather held even through mid December to warm weather. Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Maryland accounted for 82% of my guests this year. Other States that visited Antoinette's included Washington, D.C., Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin. Via my online website and bookings, visitors also came from Brisbane, Brussels, Munich, Canada and England, just to name a few.

Let's Recycle this Rocking Chair

Do you ever garbage pick? Yes, I do "on occasion." While picking up my friend, I noticed his next door neighbor had a rocking chair sitting out on the street. Well I backed up the car to look at it. It was a simple rocking chair but the weight of the chair was heavy (unlike today's stuff). We threw it in the car.

The next day my sister asked me if I had any SPARE rocking chair for her son in NYC who was having a baby and they were on the hunt for a comfortable chair for their new baby and space was limited! I had a few to show her including this old one I picked up from the trash.

On that same day, my friend talked to his neighbor and she was happy to see that someone took her chair. He explained that I was the trash picker and she began to cry. Ellie explained that this rocking chair was handmade by her great-grandfather in Rhode Island more than 100 years ago and she used it for all her five children when they were babies. She had it recovered over the years but not one of her children wanted this old piece of furniture.

Family Addition

In August we welcomed Sydney Jade to my sister's family, now with 6 grandchildren. Congrats' to Peter and Carly from New York City. Well, I am pleased to say that this old rocking chair has made its way to the big city and now been recycled for this new family. Sydney Jade has her own private chair and Mom and Dad can rock her!.

Following Christmas Day all six grandchildren will be spending time at their grandparents in Cape May Court House and it should be fun to watch how all these



cousins get along (we hope). I look forward to joining them all.

Antoinette's Improvements

This year we continued making improvements at Antoinette's. We upgraded two more of our bathrooms with the help of Bathfitters. Sadly, we had to retire my last claw foot bathtub to a modern shower. I know my guests prefer it. Maybe this tub will become another herb garden.

My painter came back and after days of removing old paint from my porch posts they were able to bring them back to life.

In November, I finally had professionals fix the remaining four radiators affected by the 2014 water flood and frozen radiators. We then upgraded my furnace to a larger size to handle properly the large capacity. My new challenge with only one zone (thermostat) in the house is what is correct temp to set to keep my guests happy. By adding 25 gallons of antifreeze, frozen radiators are a thing in the past.

I finished my 2015 improvements by finally, after four years, completing my last two sections of my asbestos roof shingles removed and replaced with modern ones. Happy this is finally completed.

Legal Challenge 2015

After almost two years of legal negotiations with my next door neighbor (local Bank), I agreed to a five-year easement to access the rear parking area of Antoinette's. This agreement expires in 2019 and will lose access to my rear lot and my off-street parking. Was unsuccessful in seeking a renewable lease. In 2019, who knows if Cape May will have a solution to solve the lack of parking problem. Time will tell.

Learning Marketing Skills

In the Fall I enrolled in an online class for 90 days about online marketing. The Teacher was holding this class from Champagne, France. Every week, the students were given exercises to complete prior to our Wednesday live taping. We also had a student Facebook account to share our completed assignments or seek help and suggestions from other students and the Teacher. This was my first exposure to learn how sales folks conduct ongoing sales, something strange to me.

One area that was new to me was making videos. We had to set up our own YouTube channel and begin making videos to introduce products. I really liked her leading edge method of marketing but had difficulty with the software to keep track of the marketing efforts. I did complete the online class but was unable to complete all the assignments. With the help of a friend I hope to experiment with what I learned during 2015.

2015 Fall/Winter Travel

The Fall/Winter period took me to NYC to meet and visit our latest granddaughter Sydney. It was so much fun to stay in the city overnight for three nights. I gave Sydney's mother a break and took two months old Sydney to the United Nations building (they are only two blocks away). It was my first experience going through security screening with a baby carriage. I enjoyed seeing this historic site. Not sure about Sydney.

In November, headed to State College, PA for the PA Inns Conference. More than 125 Inns were in

attendance and learned a lot from the seminar leaders. Happily met some Inns from NY. Could not believe 45,000 students went to Penn State in State College. It's Huge!

I headed east to the Hudson Valley, in NY and experienced dining at the Culinary Institute with friends and family. Over the next few days, we visited great museums (Vanderbilt Mansion, Franklin D Roosevelt Mansion & Museum and the Eleanor Roosevelt House) Eleanor's was my favorite since it was in its original state and you saw how she lived in her small cottage. With pleasant weather we walked across the Hudson River Bridge with a great view of the river.

Going to My 50th High School Reunion

In October, my High School from Wayne, NJ held our 50th reunion. With the help of my cousin, and two good friends, my Inn continued to operate during my absence.

I realized that the factor that made it less awkward was being a member of our High School facebook account. Sounds crazy! I and my other siblings were not active in after school activities since we all had jobs. By reading all about the current activities, family photos and going ons of the class students on social media (Facebook), I felt a lot more comfortable seeing and chatting with the other students. It was a great event and I hope to connect up with some students when visiting Boston and NYC in 2016.

I was inspired with the benefits of social media and offered to help my college class setup our own Facebook account. Should be a great aide to help our classmates reconnect. A 2016 to do list!

Recognition Awards in 2015

In September, Capemay.com, a local online website announced their "Best of Cape May 2015" contest results. We were pleased that in " Best Places to Stay - Guest House" category, Antoinette's received the second place award of **Best Guest House**. Thank you to all those fans who voted for Antoinette's in this category.



In November, I was invited to attend the 60th Anniversary of the District 46 Toastmasters International Organization in New York (LaGuadia). This organization helps people get over the fear of public speaking and offers' great leadership training. As a Past District Governor (PDG) from 1987-88, with 2500 members and 100 clubs, I was invited to join in on the activities. The formation of this District was founded in 1955. Little did I know that I would be the oldest PDG in attendance. It was great fun to be part of this historical event and celebrations. Reconnected with great old friends from the past.

Visiting Our Nation's Capital

From New York, I headed to Washington, D.C. for a week of just fun. Most of the museums are free in D.C. and if you contact your Congressman, advance arrangements can be made. I had tours at the National Archives, U.S. Capital, Library of Congress, Pentagon, Voice of America, JFK Performing Arts Center, Ford's Theater, Phillips Collection Art Museum, Holocaust Museum and the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. The White House requires advance notice to obtain a security clearance. My request was too late. The best way to travel around the city is via the Metro system, very handy and efficient. Parking in D.C. is at a premium. I also connected with old friends from my corporate years in New York City. I ended my trip by trying my skills at Contra Dancing in Virginia. It was a real Hoot! Wear cool clothes since you sweat a lot. Keep an eye on your partner otherwise you will get Dizzy!

In March 2016, we plan to go back for a 3-night stay with my cousin and hope to take a tour of the White House. A great city to visit.

Cathedrals V.S. Basilica



After 16 years of Catholic schools, I found myself forgetting what I learned after all these years. On my trip to Washington, D.C., I found out the Washington National Cathedral was for people of all faiths and not Catholic. I've been telling my guests that the handmade Lord's Prayer made by Antoinette was planned for this Cathedral but never made it and hangs in our lobby.

My friend told me that if I had a chance I should visit the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception next to Catholic University in Washington, D.C. I usually don't make it a habit to visit churches but decided to take the Metro and head to the Basilica. I trucked up the hill and found this beautiful structure. Well, after five hours spent at the Basilica I left there exhilarated. On the tour I learned that Pope Francis visited the Basilica while here on September 23, 2015 where Junipero Serra, OFM was canonized. There have been three Popes that have visited this Basilica since it was built in 1959 including Pope Benedict XVI, Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis. Well worth the visit!



If you know how hard it is to find religious cards they have everything you could wish for. I had to ask the sales clerk which event comes first, communion or confirmation. Oops, another senior moment. I think I am all set for the next seven years but just have to remember where I save these cards.

John F Kennedy Performing Arts Center



Following my tour of the Pentagon, I realized that a couple stops away on the Metro train was the John F Kennedy Performing Arts Center. At the metro there is a bus that runs to the center every 15 minutes and is very convenient. It's another visit that lasted seven hours. Free tours of the Center are always available. I was fortunate that I got a private 1:15 minute tour by one guide that was in training with her guide boss. The view of Washington, D.C. was hidden by fog but its location was fantastic.

I stayed for their DAILY 6:00 P.M. free musical concert held in the lobby of the Center. I heard lots of the local seniors go to this concert almost every night. That night there was a woman who was a concert pianist from London, England. The lady sitting next to me was so excited because it was her friend who was performing. This is a must see if travel to D.C.

Operation Fireside for Coast Guard Recruits

Since I moved to Cape May 22 years ago, I found it not always possible to visit my family on the holidays while waiting to welcome Antoinette's guests. However, I usually see them within the next few days. I would love to find something I could do on the holiday that would help those less fortunate but would keep me close to home.

In April, at a business meeting, I introduced myself to a Red Cross Executive and offered to do volunteer work. She gave me her card and suggested I contact her prior to the Holiday. Since I live in Cape May, she thought helping out at Operation Fireside at the Coast Guard base would be a great fit. A few days before the Thanksgiving holiday I

decided to email her and make my offer again. Sadly, her email was returned saying she was on vacation but to check with her staff. Well, I took the plunge and emailed her staff. Within the next hour, I got an email saying the Red Cross would be happy to have my help.

Operation Fireside was established 35 years ago. It offers the Coast Guard recruits a day off to join a Host family or group (Church, VFW, Elks etc.) and to enjoy home cooked meals and free time to talk to their family and friends.

Well we met at the base gym and began the process of hooking up the families with the recruits. Georgie was concerned about how scared and afraid they looked (not knowing what to expect). My job was to introduce the recruits to their new host families. As I got into the swing of things and my role, one recruit asked me “is it ok to use our first name today.” Well, it turned out a great way to break the ice between the recruit and their new families. We began seeing smiles on both the recruits and the host families.



When all the 340+ recruits were connected to 100 host families, Georgie asked me how did I get them to loosen up. I simply asked them what state they were from and that it was ok to use their first name. This broke the ice. The Red Cross works nine months to coordinate this special event. We thank them.

Georgie thought that I was a natural and asked if I could come back for Christmas Day. I guess being in the hospitality business for 24+ years helps build these skills. Absolutely I will be there!

Any Progress with Moving Offsite?

Sixteen months ago, in August 2014, I submitted an application in Victorian Towers, a 55 and older six stories building across from the Washington Street Mall a block away from Antoinette’s. Since this is a HUD building there was a lot of paperwork to submit. Just last week I finished my last piece of paperwork. The office manager thought I could be in by the end of the first quarter in 2016 if all the paperwork is approved. The apartment that is earmarked for me is on the 5th floor with a view of Washington Street. I hinted about an opening with a view of the ocean during the same time frame.

Just yesterday, while doing holiday shopping, I saw a local woman needing help to transport her bedroom dresser. I offered to help move it since my car had the space. Well, to my surprise, when I followed her we stopped at the Victorian Towers where she moved in two months ago. Another coincidence. It blows my mind. My spirits are working again.

I am certainly excited to begin a new phase of my life but will be really happy to downsize my possessions.

Other Things

In June 2015, I hit the five-year mark as a breast cancer survivor. My doctor said it was ok to stop taking my cancer drug and happily my next visit is in another year.

My friend and I continued with a season pass to our local theater group with a nice dinner beforehand. This year I took another Viking Cooking Classes at Harrah’s in Atlantic City. After 12 classes, I feel comfortable having a dinner party for my friends and family when I move down the street. Only drawback is my new potential apartment does not have a dishwasher and no portables are allowed. Oh

well, back to washing dishes the old fashion way by hand.

Future Travel Plans

In January 2016, I will be heading to California to visit San Francisco, Napa Valley and Newport Coast. While there, I hope to visit with my nephew and his family in San Diego. On the way home I will be stopping by Las Vegas to enjoy the entertainment capital of Nevada and some gambling of course.

In late February, I will be attending a conference in Virginia. I am trying to work out plans to attend my Nephew's son's wedding in Jacksonville, Florida on Valentine/Presidents Weekend. Since that weekend is already busy in Cape May, I would need to make arrangements for an Innsitter at Antoinette's.

March is busy with short return trips to Washington, D.C., Williamsburg, VA (conference) and fun in NYC and Boston.

In early April, I will be attending a conference in Nashville with an extended stay to visit the sites. Never been to the "Country Music Capital City." Visits to the Grand Ole Opry and the "American Pickers" TV show antique stores are in the plans.

Improvements for 2016

Once I am settled in my new home a block from Antoinette's, we should wrap up our furniture restoration project. Replacement Windows is my next big project. How can I make them more energy efficient and which window is best for Antoinette's. With 70 windows I see this as a 3-year project. I already had a great salesman from Renewal by Anderson come and demonstrated their latest Fibrex material windows. Impressed to say the least but it is a major financial investment. If time permits, we will begin sewing my 20 replacement awnings for my windows. .

Antoinette's Will be in Business 25 Years in 2016



Antoinette's business continues to grow and many thanks to all my guests for their return visits. In May 2016, Antoinette's will be celebrating our 25th year. Watch out for events to celebrate this milestone.

Final Remarks

As usual, the clock is ticking and 2015 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 **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!