



December 31, 2017

Dear Family and Friends,

Well in just a few hours the 2017 holidays will be over. This year was filled with good health and lots of adventures. Surely I was blessed. May you all have a festive season with a very healthy New Year. Let me share my 2017 Yuletide confessions of an Innkeeper with you.

Shortly after the 2017 New Years, I closed Antoinette's and headed out west to visit family in San Diego, entertainment in Las Vegas and education on the Queen Mary in Long Beach. I'll begin with activities at Antoinette's followed by some personal experiences.

Opened Antoinette's for 26th Year

In April began my 26th year at Antoinette's. 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., California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, Washington State and Wisconsin. Via my online website and bookings, visitors also came from Canada, Czech Republic, Germany and South Wales just to name a few.

House Improvements at Antoinette's

In April I began getting ready for the summer season and my annual spring cleaning. My cousin and friends continued the installation of my replacement windows (now completed 13 and only 47 to go). We upgraded my final bathroom with a new Bathfitters shower in the Filomena suite. We added a new heating zone to the Maria suite to eliminate space heaters and bring added warmth in the winter months. Now after four years all my roofs have been upgraded from asbestos to shingles. Some of the furniture was upgraded in the house (always ongoing). In November we had our 5-year house inspection and just completed last week installation of several exit signs and upgrade of smoke detectors to bring us into current day compliance. My dollhouse Elf, Olivia, now seven, began glueing all the missing parts to the dollhouses on the front porch. Gee they'll last another year.

Gardening

With the help of my friend, my garden continues to improve each year at Antoinette's. For the last several years, I have been searching for an artificial grass to grow in the garden to honor my sister Dolores who lost her battle to breast cancer in 2009. To my delight we found one that has

really spruced up the corner of the property. It brings a smile to my face as I see this grass prosper. Miss you Dolores.

Loyalty of my Guests

In December I welcomed back to Antoinette's the Arcaro family, who have been enjoying the annual Christmas parade for their 22nd year. As Antoinette's enters into another year in 2018, I know how important my return customers play in our success. Thank you for your return visits.

Another House Tour at Antoinette's

Well, decided to try again a Candlelight Christmas House Tour of Antoinette's in December. There is a lot of prep work ahead of the event. With the help of a friend and 22 hours each of holiday decorating, the house was ready for the crowd. This year during the three hours we guessed we had 700+ visitors. Not a moment to spare. Thanks to a volunteer and my sister and husband, we greeted all the guests gleefully. My favorite comment was "I know your mother now lives at Victorian Towers down the street." Little did she know that's I. It makes up for the comment I received years ago when "they thought my 80-year-old Aunt Mary was my sister."

Business Travel

This year I attended two business conferences to stay current with hospitality trends. The first one was on the Queen Mary in Long Beach, California. Quite an experience living on a 1936 ocean liner-turned a hotel. In 1945 the ship carried close to 16,000 troops and crew home from Europe. The biggest challenge was taking a shower when the base of the bathtub was curved up. Learned that while ship was out to sea and if people were showering, water would stay in the tub. Had to put my feet across the tub to stand up properly. Imagine that!

The second conference was in Harrisburg PA in November. I met another Innkeeper who during her younger years would travel with her mother and sister to Antoinette's each year. Sadly they lost her sister at age 25 and haven't been back since 2013. Sent an invite to her mom to possibly make a return future visit. The highlight of the trip was enjoying an evening with a lovely couple that live in the area and frequent Antoinette's each year. Thanks for the great hospitality.

Biggest Challenge of Hospitality Business Today

Who would guess that today the biggest challenge that faces the hospitality business is the takeover by the OTA's (online travel agents). This includes companies like Booking.com, Priceline, Expedia, Homeaway, Vacation Rental by Owner (VRBO), AIRBNB, Tripadvisor just to name a few. If you make a reservation at a direct website like www.antoinettescapemay.com, the business eliminates all processing fees. Some of my guests who find me think they are booking direct but are fooled by these business sites. The name and the phone number is the only information you receive from these OTAs. They clearly want to control interaction with your

guests. Forget about getting an email to communicate. I found using phone texting helps with gathering key information. Most respond quickly.

However, since they spend billions of dollars to market their sites, our small businesses are forced to advertise on their sites, offer inventory and accept their fees from 15% - 20% overhead. Also sites like AIRBNB, Homeaway and VRBO will collect all monies and give your share only after the guests arrive. Certainly a big challenge in the winter months, when sales are slow. I've learned to only give them my inventory close to the arrival date. I recently updated my website to say "Official" similar to the big companies like Marriott and Hilton. Stay tune for progress in 2018. Keep this in mind when you make your travel plans and help us small business owners.

Personal Travel

This year I was fortunate to take several trips to my favorite cities, Las Vegas, San Diego, Williamsburg, Key West, Boston and Washington, D.C. Before traveling to Key West headed to visit my sister's new home in Florida where they plan to spend half their year in a warmer climate.

After several experiences, I realized my favorites are big cities where metropolitan transit systems exist and you can get around easily and save with a senior pass. Renting cars is now a thing of the past for me. I was able to spend some quality time with my nephew Jeffrey and his family in San Diego.

This year in Boston, my niece and her two girls joined me and were able to start the freedom trail and receive merit badges from the National Park Service.

Loved being in Key West for a week and enjoyed several of the sites especially the Ernest Hemingway home. Thanks to my friend who put me up for the week. The highlight of the week was a fabulous meal at Louie's Backyard, an oceanfront restaurant. Definitely a must!

In November took a quick trip to NYC and enjoyed "Waitress" a Sunday matinee followed by joining friends at an NYC Marathon party. I loved the free Louis Vuitton Exhibition in downtown NYC. The exhibit retraces the adventures of the House of Louis Vuitton from 1854 to present.

Now let me share some of the more interesting personal experiences during the 2017 year.

Oh No I lost my Phone at Planet Hollywood

It's amazing how your cell phone becomes a necessity in today's society. Somehow, I left my cell phone at Planet Hollywood in Las Vegas. When describing it to the security guard all I could say it's an IPHONE and it's pink. When all your business is on this little phone, you find out really quick about data backup and who are your key contacts. Well, finally after five days, a

replacement arrived in San Diego and I was so happy to be reconnecting to the world again. I just upgraded to a new model and clearly added a few stickers from my family's children collection as distinguishing marks.

All Day Bingo

On the way to Las Vegas, I met a fellow business owner and his wife that to were heading there. They invited me to join them at Bingo if I had some free time. Little did I know they loved bingo and could sit from one to 10pm to enjoy the sport. It brought back memories of my Mom and how she too enjoyed bingo.

Donut Bar Extraordinaire

Why does a local donut bar in San Diego has a line at 7am in the morning? To my surprise the fans line up daily vending a constantly changing selection of playfully decorated over the top confections with award winning donuts. By noon they close down when they run out of donuts, a daily ritual.

After passing it for five days, I finally saw a break in the line and decided to check it out. The counter lady announced that they were closing soon and that all donuts in a box would sell for \$10. Great bargains and lots of choices. 10 donuts later I found out my box was worth \$35. The Marriott front desk staffs were in awe and enjoyed munching down these fine donuts. By weekend, I decided to try another box of donuts for my family. We noticed the white Lamborghini sitting outside the shop with **Donut 1** on the licence plate. Wow. Donuts can surely be a great business. Looking forward to more samples on my return trip 2018.

Women March

While in San Diego, I was walking the streets on January 21st when a Women march was happening with 50,000 plus people. It was a sight to behold and when we arrived at the San Diego pier even the three cruise ships had hundred of people cheering from their balconies. Being in Cape May and away from the big cities you don't realize when the issue of freedom is challenged and how groups of people will march for a cause in the local cities.

Visiting Washington, D.C.

One of my favorite cities to visit is Washington, D.C. Fortunately, I was able to visit this historic city twice this year, March and November. I love their metro system and with a senior pass it is really easy to travel around the city cheaply and quickly. Out of town Metro stations that offer overnight parking, are free to park if you leave the lot on the weekend. All the entry and exit gates are up. After six days in D.C., my parking was free.

White House Visit

After three tries to my Congressman, I finally got a confirmation to visit the White House. That morning I arrived on time at the gate but was informed that only one government id, a wallet and phone were permitted. No purses allowed - wow, what a shock. My pass was good for two hours to return to reenter the gates. I heading back to catch a train to my hotel but decided to try dropping it off at a local Marriott bell captain service desk. Within a few blocks I found one and the bell captain was very accommodating. Quickly headed back and got in successfully. Enjoyed the self-guided visit at this historic building (approximately 45 minutes). Loved the original portraits and great color scheme in the rooms you could visit. Must plan in advance to get in.

History in the Making

When I picked up my ticket for the White House tour at my Congressman's office, I asked the staff if they had any suggestions on what day I should visit the Capital and galleries. He suggested I'd come back by 1pm on Thursday. Sounds good to me. Around 11:30am I headed to the Capital. All the capital tours were canceled for at least two hours since President Trump was in the house. I waiting in line and finally was escorted to the House of Representatives gallery.

Within the next 90 minutes I was able to watch history being made. It was the final vote for the new Tax bill. Just like watching from TV, all the key Republican politicians spoke about why they should pass this bill. Finally the time came to vote by dropping it off at the front desk (Yes or No). It appeared on the gallery wall in living color by representative alphabetically with a green or red mark next to their name. As history reflects itself, this sweeping Tax Bill passed with 217 votes. On December 22, it was finally signed by President Trump. Whether I was for or against the bill, it was exciting to see our government in action and history being made.

The theater at the Kennedy Performing Arts Center

While heading into D.C. I decided to call the Arts Center to see what was playing during the week. Every night they have a free concert in the main hallway with aspiring artists from around the world. However, a few tickets were remaining for a limited engagement of "Book of Mormons" for the week. The SRO (standing room only) ticket attracted me for that night at \$25 but you had to be pick it up at the box office. No phone orders. It was now 3pm and the show starts at 7:30 P.M. I checked into my hotel, took a quick shower and grabbed the metro to the Arts Center. Happily there was one ticket left for the show. Hooray.

I have used SRO tickets in NYC in the past but to my surprise, the theater is so big that the space you stand and watch the show is behind the Orchestra seating and lots of standing room. What a treat after all these years trying to see it in NYC. Loved the show.

Living Offsite

It's been over a year since I officially moved into Victorian Towers, a short block to Antoinette's. I do like it and am enjoying living in my own space with my own privacy. I especially enjoy having other people around me year round. Rolling out of bed and only being a block away is a great asset. I actually try to get over to work daily, and then come home for lunch and dinner.

Birthday Milestone

This year I reached another birthday milestone. I tried to let it slide but my family needed an excuse to get together. I am thankful for still being able to work. I'm now in my 26th year running Antoinette's and still enjoy it. But time is marching on and I need to start planning my exit plan. So stay tune for what the future holds for me.

Adding an Art Collection

Over the past year I came across, on Facebook, a local watercolor artist posted an original of the exterior of Antoinette's and other Cape May sites. Unlike many famous Inns in Cape May, unless you commission it, my house is hardly sketched since it is a rather typical Victorian House. In October the artist was having a Watercolor Art Show and I decided to go find my painting and buy the original. Sadly when I arrived, I learned that the painting was sold. She's been coming to Cape May from Mississippi all her life.

However I was so impressed with her work and decided to add some original art to my living surroundings. Three of the paintings were unframed so I thought I could do it myself. After several attempts and six weeks later I decided to have our local art store finish up my work a week before Christmas. I returned all my "handy" framing tools to the stores and now can enjoy my fine art.

During the second week of her art show, she asked if I was interested in helping her. After a fun evening of meeting visitors and other well known local artists, I made a new friend. She called me her "fairy godmother." Well, I look forward to her future shows and maybe help again.

Thanksgiving Came a Day Early

In November, after being away for more than two weeks and traveling to Harrisburg, New York City and Washington, D.C. I was happy to get home. Of course, lots of stuff to catch up on, like begin to winterize for 2018. On Thanksgiving morning, I woke up, took a shower, made my assigned cooking chore for the day, headed over to pick up my car and go north to my cousin's. Well, I noticed the Post Office door was open. I said to myself, "gee that's nice that the post office is open today." My next clue was the bank next door was also open. Wow. Thanksgiving came a day early. Since I was all dressed up decided to just take another vacation day. Lessons learned, when traveling remember to reset your body clock when you return home.

Netflix

What's all the fuss with Netflix. This year I found watching TV is such a chore. I used to enjoy the news each day but with all the terror news and politics it's becoming so disruptive to my everyday life. My sister introduced me to Netflix. Wow, start and stop when you want, no advertisements and lots of choices. I was enjoying several popular series. I probably enjoyed 20+ holiday shows. I need to admit that my yuletide confessions are late since I was engrossed in these wonderful shows. To keep up with the times, I need to integrate this feature into amenities at Antoinette's in 2018.

More Cooking Lessons

It took me almost a year before I returned to my favorite cooking class at the Viking Cooking School at Harrah's in Atlantic City. This was my 13th class in the last four years and it was probably the best. This "Steak, Roast and Chop Workshop" showed us how to cook a steak, make a stuffed porkchop and how to make a Prime Rib. Unlike all the other classes, we were able to bring home the leftovers. Yummy. Maybe in 2018 I should try a dinner party.

On a local level, one of my friends in the Towers, offered to help me learn some basic cooking skills. Apparently making a quiche is really simple. Since my sister and I just completed making 18 loaves of sausage bread for the holidays, we had some leftover ingredients. Found out sausage, pepperoni, mozzarella and locatella cheese makes a tasty quiche. The next week we made ham, bacon and cheese quiche. My friend started giving out pieces to her neighbors. When some of these folks only get **meals on wheels**, a homemade quiche taste really good. Look forward to continuing this in the new year.

Who's a Legend?

One morning I was scanning through Facebook and found a lovely post from a New York fellow Toastmaster from our 1987-88 experiences. He posted a photo of me with other Toastmasters and called me a "Legend." "Yes, indeed, Deanna, I joined in the final stretch of your legendary 1987-1988 term as a member of . . . Was also so impressed with all the members of your District team, including 1987-1988 Division Directors . . . -- all future District Directors . . . FUN TIMES, Deanna . . . thanks to you and your leadership!" Well, that was 30 years ago. Thank you Mark for those kind words. Toastmasters International is definitely a great organization. If you are looking to improve your communication skills and learn leadership techniques it's a great place to start. I also made great friendships as a side benefit.

Let's Spruce up my Little Christmas Tree

Last year I decided to display in my new home, my old neighbor's (Mary Crilly's) tiny Christmas tree. Every time I look at it I think of this wonderful lady on Washington Street. When I displayed it on my table, I realized that it needed some tender loving care (25+years' old). At the

end of the holiday season Christmas sales, I decided it needed a make over. Well, with all the new supplies, I look forward to sprucing this up for my display in 2018. I could probably replace the entire tree but it has lots of sentimental value.

Making New Friends From My Confessions

Let me close my annual confessions with a true story. A day after I published my 2016 confessions, I received an email from a prior guest named Mary. My confessions shared my upcoming trip to San Diego. Since she lives there, she invited me to hook up with her during my travels. She met me on a trip to Cape May when she visited Antoinette's for a Christmas stay during difficult family times and had fond memories of her holiday visit.

Well to my surprise, we actually became good travel companions. Since Mary had a car she loved to travel around and we saw lots of great sites. Mary loves' Rand McNally maps and traveled the old fashion way with a good sense of direction. Soon I needed to head to the Queen Mary in Long Beach to attend an innkeeper's conference. With no hesitation, she drove me north to my conference and decided to join me there. Her last stop was to drop me off at the airport to head home. Well, Mary thank you for all your help. May our paths meet again.

2018 Travel

In a few days, I will be closing up Antoinette's and head to warmer weather. My first stop is in San Diego for two weeks to visit with my nephew Jeffrey and his family to meet their new addition Luke. I then join my friend in San Francisco and Napa Valley, followed by a stop over in Las Vegas and then head home. Reopen during the Valentine's and Presidents Weekends and then head south to Norfolk for an Innkeeper's conference. Following the conference my next stop is Williamsburg for some r and R. In late March I head to Boston for two weeks and hopefully enjoy sometime with my family members to experience the history of this great city. In April return and begin the annual spring cleaning. Another year begins.

As usual, the clock has ticked past the 2017 and we are now in 2018. 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 are now published and available online at my website at:
<https://www.antoINETTEScapemay.com/confessions-of-an-innkeeper.htm>