



December 24, 2018

Dear Family and Friends,

In just a few days the 2018 holidays will be over. This year was filled with great customers, 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 2018 Yuletide confessions of an Innkeeper with you.

Shortly after the start of 2018, I closed Antoinette's and headed out west to visit family in San Diego, education and entertainment in Las Vegas. I'll begin with activities at Antoinette's followed by several personal experiences.

A. Opened Antoinette's for 27th Year

In May I began my 27th year at Antoinette's. We had a very business summer and happy to welcome back repeat guests and welcome new ones. New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York and Virginia accounted for 86% of my guests this year. Other States that visited Antoinette's included: Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Rhode Island, Utah, Washington D.C., Washington State and West Virginia. Via my online website and bookings, visitors also came from Canada, Denmark, England and Spain just to name a few.

B. House Improvements at Antoinette's

April began our annual spring cleaning and getting ready for the summer season. The major work for the year was to continue replacing 11 old windows (up to 24 now of 53 windows). Five are prepped to be installed in 2019. All our queen size mattress sets were upgraded. Our website was expanded to offer tour and theater tickets to local attractions. We upgraded our WIFI system to improve performance for our guests usage. We replaced all our VHS/DVD equipment with Blueraay DVD players and the capability to access Netflix user accounts. Work is underway to begin replacing all our window awnings by starting with the front porch. We're now advertising openings on Booking.com, Expedia, Homeaway, VRBO and Airbnb to keep up with the times.

C. Gardening

With the help of my friend, my garden continues to improve each year at Antoinette's. Sadly my artificial grass we planted in the front on the bank property (oops) to honor my sister Dolores (who lost her battle to breast cancer in 2009) was inadvertently removed. So we decided to plant it near my St. Francis statue on the side of the house and the new plants are thriving. In June one of our guest (Judy) left me a lovely watercolor (an artistic interpretation) of our garden in blooms. Loved it.

D. Loyalty of my Guests

Over the last twelve months, I've had the pleasure of welcoming close to 200 families and guests to visit

Antoinette's. Some of these guests were returning for another visit and some were new to visiting Antoinette's. This year we happily greeted diplomats from Spain and Ireland. Let me share a few of my memorable experiences.

Visit from 3 Lovely Ladies

In early August, we hosted three Sisters of Saint Joseph's from Pittsburgh who needed a few days of R&R in Cape May. They just finished their annual retreat at St. Mary's by the Sea in Cape May Point. Among these three women they have given 189 years of dedicated service to help children and families in many communities. I was very touched by her kind words she left behind. "From my call until our arrival I felt a warm welcome from you. Your care and hospitality is extraordinary. Our accommodations were comfortable and spotless. Our time with you from the beginning to our departure was something we will always remember." - Sr. Norma. I thank these lovely Sisters and all those that serve to make the world a better place.

A Dream Comes True

In September, we welcomed Susie from Jasper, Alabama who had a life long dream to visit Cape May with her husband but sadly he died before this trip. Susie cried when she told me her story. She found me through Gloria, a childhood friend of mine, who now is her neighbor. Strangely I felt reconnected to Gloria by meeting Susie. It's probably been 50 years since I've seen Gloria. Alabama and New Jersey is far away (970 miles) but the internet has it's benefits. Gloria thanks for sending us Susie to Antoinette's.

Karma in Cape May

In late September, I had a visitor from Bethesda, MD just passing through. She was dining with the Director of our local theater group. During our little chat I learned that she was a former journalist for the NY Times and the Washington Post. She now is a playwright and has published several plays. I shared with her that in March while visiting Richmond, VA for an overnight stay, I actually saw a play called "Erma Bombeck: at Wits End" at the local theater. That play had also played in Cape May during our 2018 summer season. Wow, she was the playwright. "Such karma that you saw the play in Richmond. I feel honored!"

I decided to share my yuletide confessions and asked her for her advise. After reading three years she responded "I wonder if you could synthesize some of your best thoughts about innkeeping into an op-ed for the NYTimes travel section." Still in my to do list for a 2019 story.

Wedding Bells Renewed

In October we welcomed Patty & Charlie who spend a week with us celebrating fifty years together. I felt very honored that they decided to stay at Antoinette's for this special event. Congratulations and many more years of good health and happiness. Oh by the way they are parents of 11 children. We were able to capture on video of their 50th Anniversary Cape May horse and buggy ride. How to share these moments? Mom and Dad are not Facebook fans. So with my help we posted pictures on Facebook. Well the children were thrilled with the FB post.

Wow 25 Years

In December, we welcomed back for their 25th year Janice, Cher and their ladies friends. I offered them an extra night so we could enjoy some special time together. They're certainly part of my adopted family. We shared a wonderful dinner and followed it by giving the ladies a tour of sites along the Delaware Bay and the holiday decorations in downtown Cape May. I was shocked to find out they've never explored these areas in all their years traveling here. We look forward to their 2019 return and maybe another specialized tour.

E. House Tour at Antoinette's

We continued with our annual Candlelight Christmas House Tour of Antoinette's in December. After 8 days of preparation and decorating, we were once again ready for the tour. To our surprise we estimated close to 550+ people. In the kitchen, my sister Judi offered them a apple cider/wassail treat to warm them up before they reentered the cold. For all the young guests who braved the rainy weather my cousin Carole gave them our little yellow Antoinette's ducks. One little boy's mom asked him what do you say to the lady (meaning thank you) and he gleefully said "quack". Kids say the funniest thing.

F. Business Travel

This year I attended two business conferences to stay current with hospitality trends. The first one was in Norfolk, Virginia, a short drive from Cape May via the ferry.

Following the conference we were privileged to spend time with Rob, CEO of Association of Independent Hospitality Professionals (AIHP), while visiting our town in late April. Rob made the trip to meet the members of Cape May Historic Accommodations (CMHA). Our local group of innkeepers were presented with AIHP's first ever Founders Award during their annual Summit in Norfolk. As a Board Director, I was fortunate to be in Norfolk with our President, to receive the award. Rob visited Cape May to present the award to the full group.

The second conference was in Lancaster PA in November. The highlight of the trip was attending "Dining at the White House", a seminar given by John Moeller who was a master chef serving three Presidents. Couldn't pass up a signed copy of his book and might enjoy making some of his recipes for my friends and family. Stay tune.

G. Let's Get Educated

This year our local community college in Cape May and Atlantic County offered complimentary classes for business owners and their employees in many areas. Since it's been years since I attended classes, I decided it was time to upgrade my knowledge of the Microsoft products and took 8 full day classes in Word, Excel, Quickbook, Powerpoint, Google and Customer Service. The workbooks themselves are a great resource of information. Hope to continue in 2019.

Lets Get Some Desserts

Little did I know there was a side benefit to attending school again. One of our teachers at the college dismissed us early for a break. She introduced us to their local bakery run by the culinary students to offer the public their creations for the day. Over my eight classes I was able to amass a great selection of goodies stored in the freezer to share with my family when they arrived in the summer. Since there was so much to eat, I turned them into single servings. Treats included: homemade crumb cake, danish, apple pie, carrot cake, peanut butter cake, cupcakes, eclairs, apple turnovers, pecan pie and cinnamon buns. Well the grandchildren had a blast picking out their treat each day before bed. Can't wait to go back for my next class to learn or to eat? Yummy. By the way, my first treat was a luscious coconut cream pie which never made it to the family single serving (oops ate it myself).

H. Biggest Challenge of Hospitality Business Today

As mentioned in 2017, my biggest challenge that faces Antoinette's and 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. Google too has entered the travel business. If you make a reservation at a direct website like www.antoinettescapemay.com, the business eliminates all processing fees.

However, since the OTAs 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. Some sites 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. Having my website to say "Official" similar to the big companies like Marriott and Hilton has helped somewhat. Please keep this in mind when making your next reservation.

I. Personal Travel

This year I was fortunate to spend several weeks away from the Inn and take trips to my favorite big cities, San Diego, San Francisco, Las Vegas, Norfolk, Richmond, Williamsburg, Boston, Philadelphia, Lancaster and Washington, D.C. in that order. Over the years I've been to most of them but Philadelphia and Richmond very new to the list.

San Diego

Unlike the snow birders I travel west to visit San Diego in January looking for warmer climate and especially spending some time with my nephew Jeff and his family. Shortly before I arrived they gave birth to their second son who was only weeks old. I gladly took the San Diego "rapid transit" to visit them only 30 minutes away with a short trip from the bus station. We tried this year putting together some meat dinners of pork chops and chicken for Jeff and Salmon and fruit salad for his wife Suzanne. Little Matthew loved Aunt Judi's Fettucine recipe which I tried for the first time. Since I'm returning again this January I hope we can do some more happy meals and offer the parents one or more date nights. Can't wait.

By chance, I was able to see "Hamilton" at the San Diego Civic Theater a few short blocks from my Hotel. An orchestra center seat - same day ticket became available 10 minutes prior to show time at 75% off the going rate. It was a two week sold out show. No refunds. You bet, I took the seat and loved the play. Can't wait to try again for another show in 2019 visit.

San Francisco

Following my San Diego trip, I headed to San Francisco to meet my friend Jane to explore the sites and sounds of this famous city. Of course a city tour, a cable car ride, visit to Alcatraz and view of the Golden Gate bridge were highlights of our trip. Jane and I tried again getting last minute tickets to “Beauty and the Beast” ballet. We managed to get orchestra tickets from another patron lingering in the lobby. I guess that’s how you do it. The only downside was the show lasted 3 hours of beautiful ballet of which 1 hour was too long for me.

Presidio of San Francisco

My favorite adventure was a visit to the Presidio. From downtown San Francisco, they ran a free Presidio Express bus to the park. I had seen the park briefly on my last trip but decided to spend the day exploring the various museums. It once was our nation’s premier U.S. Army military fort on the northern tip of the Peninsula in San Francisco, California. It was built in 1776. The 1,500-acre Presidio is San Francisco's unique national park at the Golden Gate.

During World War II, the Presidio of San Francisco – the Army's Western Defense Command – played a pivotal role in the unjust incarceration of 120,000 Japanese Americans, purportedly in the name of national security. Thier special exhibition invited visitors to investigate the choices – both personal and political – that led to this dark chapter in American history, and to reflect on what we have learned that helps us to address present-day issues of mass incarceration, immigration reform, and racial profiling. Don’t miss touring this great National Park if in San Francisco.

For those who like Walk Disney, they had a great museum of many of his awards, a minature setup of his apartment in California and lots of great photos from his vast photo collection.

Visiting Washington, D.C.

In November spent another six nights in Washington, D.C..My friend Jean joined me for part of my stay and we were able to tour the Capital and White House. By using our senior passes we were able to get around the city easily. By visiting our local congressman (Frank Lobiondo) office, who was moving out that week after 24 years of service, we picked up our gallery passes. It was fun to have other friends join us for the Capital tour which are easily attainable.

369th U.S. Infantry Regiment - Harlem Hell fighters

On our first night together, we headed over to the Kennedy Performing Arts Center to see what was playing during the week and maybe even get a free tour. Great, a new tour was just starting. Since it was Veterans Day, they had a special band being featured on the daily free concert on the Millenium stage. The 369th Experience is a band of musicians from a collection of paying tribute to the contributions of African Americans and Puerto Ricans in World War I through the eyes of the 369th U.S. Infantry Regiment, also known as James Reese Europe’s Harlem Hell fighters. They assembled a reenactment band consisting of African American and Puerto Rican male students from 13 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) across the United States. It took them 2 years to gather and train the band members to perform on a stage. That was the first time that the band proudly wore their official

band uniforms. It was very exhilarating concert. Duke Ellington's granddaughter appeared. Lots of great memories.

White House Visit

Decided to try again to get passes for the White House and a few days before our visit our request was approved. This time I knew not to bring my pocketbook and only a wallet of our identification. Entry went smoothly. The 45 minute self guided tour seems to come to a standstill about 30 minutes in and I asked one of the guards what was going on. He replied "you'll see". Fifteen minutes later the first lady, Melania Trump appeared and took special interest with the children. It was a lovely moment to witness. I guess they had to take extra precautions when the dignitaries appear.

Folger Shakespeare Library

Our Virginia friends invited us to attend a Shakespearian play at the Folger Shakespeare Library. It is home for the world's largest Shakespeare collection. The main building, only a block from the US Capitol, is also a landmark in its own right, featuring gardens, unique works of art, and beautiful indoor spaces. The stage is magnificent as well as the acting. I loved the show but found it difficult to follow the acting since this was my first play of its' kind. I hear it takes awhile to acclimate yourself to Shakespeare. Thanks for the experience. Till next time.

Let's See Philadelphia

Over the years I have met hundreds of guests from Philadelphia who made Cape May their favorite destination. I decided this year to add Philadelphia to my bucket list and spend some time exploring this great city. So I booked five nights in Center City, Philadelphia in early November prior to heading to Lancaster for my business conference. Parking your car out of the city is the only way. Well, I had a blast and now can appreciate the major attractions in Philadelphia. When I watch the news I can now appreciate where they're filming it from.

Fortunately, the weather for the week hovered around the 50's. I spent my first night on Halloween by taking a "**Night City Tour**" on those big double decker buses. This tour of the city was a great way to start. The next two days explored lots of sites while utilizing the "on and off pass" on these buses. Of course my first off stop was to see the Rocky statue at the Art Museum. After climbing 72 steps I found out they moved the statue to the ground floor adjacent to the museum. Oops.

My second main attraction was to see **City Hall** with a 90 minute walking tour. Luckily my hotel was right around the corner and easy to walk to. The tour guide was a retired city planner and was excellent. The building was constructed from 1871 to 1901 within Penn Square, in the middle of Center City. The final construction cost was \$24 million. At 548 ft, including the statue of city founder William Penn atop its tower, City Hall was the tallest habitable building in the world from 1894 to 1908. It was the tallest in Philadelphia until 1986 when the construction of One Liberty Place surpassed it, ending the informal gentlemen's agreement that had limited the height of buildings in the city to no higher than the Penn statue. They tried 2 times to tear it down but realized it would cost more to rebuild. The highlight of the tour was going on a 5 person elevator to the top right below the **William Penn statue**. Magnificent view of the city for sure. Loved the mayor and city council offices as well.

The next day visited the **Kimmel Center** and took their walking tour. I was the only one taking it and had my own private audience with the tour guide. Ten percent of the money had to be invested in art that rotates in and out of the building during the year. Insider tip: my guide suggested the best place to see the Mummers parade is the second floor of the Kimmel Center. You have a birds eye view of the parade route and it's warm inside.

On Sunday decided to take a tour of the **Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul**. This church is the principal church of the catholic diocese. Open since 1864 and located at the East side of Logan Square on 18th Street and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, the cathedral is the mother church of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. It is the largest brownstone structure in Philadelphia and the largest Catholic Church in Pennsylvania. The history of the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul is central to the history of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Many of the churches in the Pennsylvania have closed and they are moving some of the valuable art to other churches. The week before they moved the tomb of Mother Drexel, one of two saints in PA to the back of the Basilica. Of course the church has showed its age but is the hub of the church in this great city.

Other highlights of the trip included a visit to **Christ Church**, where George Washington and 5 signers of the Declaration of Independence worshipped. Christ Church is an Episcopal church in the Old City neighborhood of Philadelphia. Founded in 1695 as a parish of the Church of England, it played an integral role in the founding of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. On All Souls days the choir was practicing. The sound of the organ was magnificent.

Somehow found time for some entertainment including seeing two plays, a concert by "Tony Bennett" (now 93 and still has a great voice) and a short trip to the Sugar House Casino along the Delaware river. On the way to my conference in Lancaster, I happily spent a lovely overnight visit with my nephew Lee and his family who recently moved to King of Prussia. Love the new house. Congrats.

J. Miscellaneous

More Cooking Lessons

This year I found time for one cooking class at the Viking Cooking School at Harrah's in Atlantic City. This was my 14th class in the last five years. The class was "Cajun and Creole Cooking". Much to my surprise it was very good and not too spicy. When is the dinner party?

Let's Make an Art Wall

As my friends and family know, I am always looking for bargains during my travels to embellish my surroundings. This year I actually purchased five pieces of original watercolor art from a local artist to bring some new life into my private living quarters. I found the art when attending a show to pick up an original watercolor of Antoinette's. Sadly the artist sold the piece but in a moment I fell in love with all her other original art. Now my wall has five of her originals.

Now there are Seven

In August the Anderson's welcomed their seventh grandchild, Miles. Look forward to meeting him soon.

Ah Ha Found the Boehm Nativity Set

Over 30 years my mother and I each purchased a hand painted porcelain nativity set from the Boehm factory in Trenton NJ. I think I displayed it once but when I moved to Cape May, it got buried in my garage along the rest of my stuff. This year I was determined to find it and display it over the holidays in my apartment. Ah Ha - found it tucked away safely. While visiting a local shop to pick up some last minute decorations I spotted a vintage manger perfect to house this lovely set. With little work, my manger is finally on display for the Christmas holiday. Today I picked up a star of Bethlehem to make it complete. My sister told me that the wise men are not put out till after the birth of Jesus. Tough!. I quickly replied that they were hidden for 30 years and were happy to be out in the open.

2019 Travel

By mid January, I will be closing up Antoinette's and head to warmer weather. My first stop is in Las Vegas for a conference and San Diego to visit my family. I head east and visit my nephew in Jacksonville and head to the gulf to visit my two sisters. In March I will be heading to Cincinnati for an Innkeepers Conference with a side trip to Chicago. In April I plan another trip to Boston and then a return visit to Charleston in early May. As usual, the clock is rapidly approaching 2019. 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>