



December 24, 2019

Dear Family and Friends,

In just a few days the 2019 holidays will be over. This year was filled with great guests, 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 2019 Yuletide confessions of an Innkeeper with you.

Shortly after the start of 2019, 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.

Opened Antoinette's for 28th Year

In May I began my 28th year at Antoinette's. The summer started slow and June was quieter than past years. Business picked up in July and August and was happy to welcome back repeat guests and welcome new ones. New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Virginia and Maryland accounted for 87% of my guests this year. Other States that visited Antoinette's included: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, Washington State and West Virginia. Via my online website and bookings, visitors also came from Canada, and our first visitor came from Russia.

House Improvements at Antoinette's

April began our annual spring cleaning and getting ready for the summer season. We have now completed the remainder of the large old windows (27 in total). Our new front porch awnings were installed in the spring. The house passed its five year fire inspection by the State and local fire inspectors. Sinks, faucets, dishwashers and fireplaces were upgraded where needed. Once the Inn was ready for summer customers, we began renovations of the 3rd floor which I vacated as my home for 25 years in 2016. The first challenge was to get rid of all my Stuff! Luckily I had help removing 35 containers of personal stuff that was removed off the third floor. Thank you Jonathan for climbing all those stairs 35 times.

By July, as the season got in full swing, we began painting the 3rd floor. My friend could only paint the lower levels of the ceiling due to a shoulder condition. She left me with the upper part. Wow, I'm not a painter and haven't a clue how to best handle this challenging task. Thanks to YouTube and Google I got the basic of Painting 101. Of course painting on the 3rd floor is brutal in the summer. Well, I was able to complete two of the three rooms. It really wasn't too bad except for the heat and paint smells.

In August, from a recommendation by my guest, I decided to take a class in chalk painting. Why not reuse old solid furniture and breathe new life into it? My 1930's old porcelain table

came back to life with a fresh coat of paint. Chalk paint is a little more costly but prep work is non-existent. You can paint anything. I learned about it from owners of the Carroll Villa Hotel in Cape May, who took all their old furniture in their 31 rooms and upgraded them to a new look.

Decided to upgrade both the kitchen and bathroom floors although they were small areas. After an over-inflated estimate from my local flooring contractor, I figured how hard that could be. It actually was a very simple task. My next challenge was replacing my bathroom sink. That was a lot more challenging since my plumbing skills were limited, after several trips to Ace hardware and the plumbing store, got most of it done. I had to call in the troops to fix my leak under the sink and secure the sink. Thanks John.

By October we were putting the finishing touches on the suite. We are now investigating adding heat pumps to provide heating and cooling to this area before we begin renting it out.

Let's Paint My Kitchen Cabinets

After my experience with Chalk Painting, I met with my Property Manager at my apartment to seek approval to paint my kitchen cabinets. The kitchen was installed in the 70's and was really ugly. As tenants leave they have been installing new kitchens. I asked when mine would be done. She responded "it will take 6 to 8 years". After much discussion, she agreed to allow me to paint my kitchen cabinets. After 20 hours of hard labor, my kitchen has been rejuvenated. Hooray.

Oh No Where did that Water go

In January, I got a call from the City of Cape May Water Department. I was in San Diego at the time and they asked me if I had a broken pipe, since my water was running. After a quick visit by my plumber, they found a pipe in my crawl space that was leaking. Each year we have to plug in our heater pipe wrap to keep it warm. Well, I forgot. In just 6 short weeks, with this small leak it caused 48,000 gallons of water loss. Sadly my water loss was one of those unplanned expenses. Ouch.

With this experience, I decided to make sure that all my tiny water leaks were corrected in 2019 and replace some of my leaky faucets. After 10 days out of town, I found one of my toilets running. Since I knew the procedure, I headed back to City Hall and alerted the Water Department about this water loss. Well, this time in 10 days I lost 36,000 gallons. Lesson learned, watch out for water drips and running water. It may cost you a bundle and certainly not good for the environment.

Loyalty of my Guests

Over the last twelve months, I've had the pleasure of welcoming close to 175 families and guests to visit Antoinette's. Some of these guests were returning for another visit and some were new to visiting Antoinette's. Russia was the furthest they traveled to Cape May.

Business Travel

This year I attended two business conferences to stay current with hospitality trends. The first one was in Cincinnati, Ohio in March. The second conference was in State College PA in November. Two of the latest trends are to work on book direct campaigns. Companies like Booking.com and Expedia have big marketing budgets and take 15-18% of your bottom line to use their services. This year Google is joining in renting rooms too. Hint: Please contact the property directly on their website or a simple call to get the best guaranteed rate once you find openings on the Online Travel Agents (OTA's). Businesses must advertise here to stay in the business. Antoinette's now offers a \$25 gift certificate to our local Mad Batter Restaurant for a direct booking.

Second trend is creating videos and posting them on your social media and websites. I guess in the winter months I'll have to practice this. To hire a professional, it is still cost prohibited.

Lending a Hand to Friends

After 28 years of searching and renovating an old house, I have lots of experience with setting up house with recycled furniture. One of my friends was struggling with Diabetes. She was in and out of the hospital and rehab places. Big Lot was the only place that our fare free buses would take her to find some new furniture. She put a down payment on this new furniture but it sat there for several weeks since she was recovering. I offered to pick up the furniture and bring it home if she liked. I realized that her apartment needed some TLC. Her couch was covered with paperwork. With the help of my cousin, we were able to totally transform her apartment into a lovely home. We organized all her paperwork and eliminated the clutter. I would bring videos of her transformation to her hospital bed and she was so excited. In the midst of all this, I located 4 of her lost furry friends ashes in a drawer, and put them in a very visual spot on the top shelf of her kitchen. Sadly, she never made it home and we lost her in April to this deadly disease. The family was very appreciative of all this work and especially her critical file box I created. Yes, the family did send her off to a heavenly place with her furry friends.

Furniture Shopping

My second helping hand was a longtime friend who needed to start planning for her retirement at age 71. Happily, she just got her apartment in Victorian Towers and is in the process of moving in. Happy there will be three of us here (myself, cousin, friend) to grow old together in downtown Cape May.

In October, my friend asked me to keep an eye out for some furniture (i.e. corner cabinet) for her new apartment in Cape May. One of the local recycle stores had an almost new one. Of course I was fortunate to store it for her in my almost full garage but it did fit. During one of her trips, she picked up a bedroom set which only needed a new coat of paint. Well, more stuff in the garage. In November I found an almost matching bed frame that would blend nicely with her

furniture. Sold! I checked the manufacturer label on the headboard and found it online for only \$1599. Poplar, hand painted and imported. Wow what a steal. Since the bed did not fit in my car, I had to transport it to Cape May on my roof without a roof rack. After 2.5 hours on the back roads the bed finally made it my garage.

I noticed while at the store, there was a matching dresser for \$125. I found the exact same one (a smaller one) for \$999 online. I suggested she'd consider getting it to match the bed. After 7 weeks of sitting in the store, it was still there when she decided to buy it. Remember, we had already purchased the bed and it was now a lonely dresser in the store.

Now the challenge was how to get this tall headboard to her new apartment a block from the Inn. Do I put it back on the car roof or just walk it down the street. So we put it on a hand truck and my friend and cousin walked it down the street. As they got close to reaching the apartment building, a young and strong coast guard female offered to help. They were so happy to get help for this challenging task. It made it successfully and it looks great in her new apartment.

Becoming a Military Volunteer

Thinking ahead when I plan to sell Antoinette's, what will I do when I retire. There will be a big energy gap and lots of free time. In May, when attending the annual Coast Guard community festival, I took a tour of the Cape May Coast Guard base. I was surprised that I had no clue of the many buildings housed on this base and I only lived one mile from the base. The tour guide suggested that I consider looking into becoming a volunteer in the Coast Guard Auxiliary with many opportunities available.

I began attending the Flotilla meetings and decided by late July that I could learn a lot and make new friends. Three areas of interest were: give tours of the base, work in the kitchen on Friday morning when the recruits graduate and maybe offer some computer skills. I found the tours mostly happen on Saturdays and interferes with my Inn job. To work in the kitchen I need to take some training in food services. I guess that will have to wait till 2020.

One project I did work on with a new friend was to organize their uniform inventory. With the help of a clothing tag gun and an Excel spreadsheet, we were able to tag and log 140 items for distribution to the volunteer membership. Recruits get their uniforms covered by the government but auxiliary members have to buy their own. They are strict about wearing the correct attire. My formal hat (combo cover) was \$88. Ouch. Happy to report that our inventory is in full swing and that new and seasoned members can find recycled uniforms. I look forward to my new found activities in this worthwhile organization.

I attended my first change of watch event when new officers are installed in December. I decided it may be helpful to consider a short term rental from a member of the coast guard who was relocating to Cape May. So I introduced myself to the Captain of the base and asked for a lead of who I should contact to offer them a short term rental in my loft at Antoinette's. I have other options (i.e. Airbnb). I look forward to making this arrangement work and a win win for both of us.

Recently, I connected with the Flotilla Commander in San Diego and was invited to attend their meeting while visiting. Making new friends.

Oops, here comes Two Deer

In mid-December while traveling home at exit 5, I was confronted by 2 deer crossing the Garden State Parkway. Sadly, the 2nd deer hit the front end of my car. Fortunately I was unharmed but the damage to my car requires 10 days to correct the damage. The insurance company has gotten lots of claims at this time of year and was not surprised. Getting the car covered and fixed seems like a pretty painless process. Will put car in for repair when I head out west in January.

Holiday Baking

This year my family decided once again, to cook our holiday sausage bread. A few more were added to our count of 18. How about 28 loaves. Since we all like the taste of our Italian ingredients from Hammonton, NJ, I picked up 14 pounds of sausage, 12 lbs. of mozzarella. 7.5 pounds of pepperoni etc. as the main ingredients. With five people we were able to prepare these holiday treats and ready to give out and eat during the holidays.

Personal Travel

Once again, I was fortunate to spend several weeks away from the Inn and take trips to my favorite big cities, Las Vegas, San Diego, Jacksonville, Venice near Sarasota, Chicago, Boston, Washington D.C. and Charleston in that order. Let me share a few of my experiences from this year's travel.

San Diego

In January, once again, I was able to spend some quality time with my nephew Jeff and his family in San Diego. I keep on offering to babysit the 2 boys but they are still too young to trust them with an inexperienced Aunt of 12. But I'll keep making my offer. Cooking seems to be our favorite pastime. Maybe Jeff and Suzanne can plan a date night in 2020 when I arrive soon.

I was able to spend time with my friend Mary, a San Diego resident who was a prior guest at Antoinette's years ago. She's great on the road and still loves using Rand McNally maps. During one of our travels in La Jolla, we were stopped by a beauty expert. After much discussion, Mary decided to buy a Hermetise wrinkle eraser as a skin rejuvenation and anti-aging product. She used to sell Mary Kay and was impressed with what she saw. Since it was buy one get one free, we both got the product. Mariah Carey is one of their users. True???

When we came back the next day for our facial, Simon tried to sell us more products. He had a great Deal for us. The product was only \$1500. If I bought it on eBay it was only \$4800. My nephew said I should have got it and resell it for a big profit. No thanks. I finished with this product this month and can't see the difference.

Since 2016, I have enjoyed going to the Marriott Pulse property in San Diego. Since its opening they have been expanding their activities for their guests. One thing that caught my attention was an overview of San Diego by Ben. He was a walking book but asked me for some feedback on his presentation. Little did he know in my earlier life I was a member of Toastmasters, a public speaking organization. By the time I attended his 4th presentation, he was well on his way to an excellent overview. It was nice making a new friend in San Diego and I was happy to help.

Visiting with Family

I headed to Jacksonville, Florida to spend some quality time with my nephew Max and his family. It seemed like a longtime that I've seen them but it was great fun. Its especially fun to meet and experience their expansion to their family with more grandchildren.

How to Travel from East to West

My big challenge was how to travel from Jacksonville to the Sarasota area to visit my sisters. Airplane, Automobile or train. For \$45 you can get there by train. It would take 7 hours but I was not in a hurry. The Amtrak train picks you up in Jacksonville and takes you to Orlando. You then switch over to an Amtrak Bus (gee didn't know that) and head to Sarasota. This mode of transportation was a surprise to all. Now I know how to get from the east to west coast of Florida as an option.

Let's Have a Reunion

When I got to my sister's house, little did I know what awaited me. They were planning a "Lincoln Park Second Generation Family Reunion" in Florida. Fourteen women, in our old hometown while we were growing up, met each Friday to talk about family, children plus eating and drinking. This lasted for many years until they began retiring and moving away. With 180 slide show of pictures, many charts and attendance by 7 of these 14 families, this reunion was a great success. We had 25 people attending. The downside is my sisters put me to work for 10 days and it didn't feel like a vacation. But it was worth the effort to reconnect with old friends and appreciated by all.

Chicago the Windy City

In March I left my conference in Cincinnati and headed to Chicago for some little vacationing. Our bus was stuck in traffic for 2 hours on opening day of baseball but what's the rush. Once you leave the city it's mostly vast and rural lands to see. I arrived in Chicago 8 hours later. I was probably in my 20's when I last visited the city. Who visits Chicago in late March? To my surprise I found the city to be very charming, historical and entertaining. After 9 hours and 3 tour buses I became quite knowledgeable about Chicago. On my last day I braved the cold weather at 35 degrees and took the Chicago River Boat architectural tour on the Chicago River. It's a city of 100 year old art deco, neo classical and gothic towers and modern day skyscrapers, It's a sight to behold. I loved staying in the Drake Hotel, built in 1920 at the top of Chicago's magnificent mile.

Oops, Where Did I go wrong?

Becoming a travel expert around Chicago in 5 nights was no small feat. I was advised to take the L train from downtown to the airport for only \$5 rather than an expensive taxi. Look for the stops that have elevators since most of the platform entries require climbing 2 flights of stairs with your luggage. I was so proud of myself and caught a bus to the train stop, got on the elevator and waited for the train to arrive. Within 50 minutes I was at the Chicago O'Hare Airport. They had 5 terminals and thousands of flights. My terminal had several flights to Philadelphia but I couldn't find Southwest Airlines. Moments later I was informed that my airlines takes off from Midway airport in downtown Chicago.OMG!

What do I do now? I hopped on the train for another \$5 and headed back to the smaller airport. Halfway there I realized that the plane would be leaving when my train arrives. Impossible to make for sure. I hopped off the train and decided to try an Uber. Within 2 minutes the driver arrived and I explained my dire situation of my flight leaving 1:20pm. He said he should get me there by 1pm. After a heavy foot and lots of traffic weaving, I arrived at the airport at 12:50. I attempted to give the bell captain staff my luggage at the entrance but was informed I missed the half hour window. Is there anything in your luggage that would not pass security? I reluctantly opened up the luggage and gave him my new bottle of Limoncello for him to enjoy. I safely got on the flight with 10 minutes to spare but will always remember there are two airports in Chicago.

Visiting Washington, D.C.

In November headed back to Washington, D.C.. The big highlight of my visit was attending the Washington National Baseball team victory parade who just won their first World Series. I had a front eye view at the beginning of the parade and stood for three hours taking in the sights. By the time I left the event, I got to know a few of the players by the cheers of the crowd. Had a blast. The whole town was festive and I even bought t-shirts to celebrate the event.

Headed over to the JFK Performing Arts Center to see the new art exhibit of George W. Bush "Portraits of Courage" of some of the wounded warriors. These painting honored the men and women who served out country and to show respect for their sacrifice and courage.

One of my favorite things to do is take a tour of Congress and visit our House of Representative and Senate galleries. See our government in action. You need gallery passes by visiting your state representatives. This year our NJ representative was now Jeff Van Drew. I decided to visit his new office and found him back home in NJ. His staff was very helpful and gave me a tour of his office and passes. Little did I know that Van Drew would be front and center on this Impeachment procedure by switching from Democrat to Republican at the eleventh hour. I guess all those friendly staff that I met now left his office.

I ended my short stay by seeing a Disney musical called "Newsies" about a true story of young newsboys fighting big publishing tycoons from the turn of the century in New York City. A must see.

Can't Be Fifty Years

In September I headed up to North Jersey, to join in on the fun of my 50th College Reunion. When I joined the college 50 years ago, it was a small all girls college run by the Sisters of St. Dominic and was close to my home. Now it has expanded to become a University and is coed. It was fun to reconnect with many of the students and I've already made plans for future gatherings and stopovers during my travels.

Revisiting Charleston

I finished my 2019 travels by returning to the city of Charleston after several years. I was quite surprised that they have several shuttles that tour the city and are free to the public. If you had to use a public bus, it was only \$1 for seniors. Taking the City tour is always a great way to acquaint yourself with a city you once visited. At the Magnolia Plantation they just opened their first lantern festival which had custom design of three dimensional sculptors that are illuminated at night at the plantation. A must see!

I tried a foodie tour of several key spots in Charleston and loved the tour guide. My final day was a horse and buggy ride around this historic city. They are limited to 20 buggies at a time and take great care of their animals. They are mostly mules that have the ability to carry more weight. Thoroughly enjoyed it.

2020 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 to Savannah Georgia followed by a visit to my nephew in Jacksonville. I hope to visit my sisters at Singer Island to finally have a three night girl's getaway and then spent time in their new winter home on the gulf. Head back home for the Washington Birthday rush in Cape May. By March I will be heading to Albuquerque for an Innkeepers Conference with a side trip to Santa Fe (both new cities for me). In April I plan another trip to Boston and some family time with my family in Connecticut before Easter.

As usual, the clock is rapidly approaching 2020. 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 at deannab@snip.net. Please let's 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: cgchttps://www.antoinettescapemay.com/confessions-of-an-innkeeper.htm