



December 27, 2020

Dear Family and Friends,

In just a few days the 2020 year will be over and I'll be so happy!!! Clearly, this was my most challenging year since I opened Antoinette's in 1991. Let me share my 2020 Yuletide confessions of an Innkeeper with you.

Winter Travel Plans 2020

In January headed out west for a long-awaited break. It now seems like ages ago. Began in Las Vegas for a week and then headed over to San Diego to visit with my family for 12 days. That's always a lot of fun. This year explored Sur Le Table cooking classes but found them not as good as the ones at the Viking Cooking School at Harrah's in Atlantic City. I visited a Coast Guard Flotilla in San Diego and attended their annual meeting with over 40 members in attendance. The highlight was meeting Marlene, the Flotilla Vice Commander, who received a special award for her 4,000 volunteer hours spent on a Coast Guard Cutter in Alaska. Her role was kitchen staff on her daughter's ship – "a memorable trip to remember with family."

Headed back east and landed in Savannah, one of my favorite cities. Between food tours and walking tours I loved my stay. Enjoyed making a new friend from Stamford, CT who was trying out a city where she could bring her 3 sisters someday. I certainly suggested Cape May as a possible destination. From there I headed south on Amtrak to meet my sisters at Singer Island in Florida for a 3 night sisters' getaway. We returned to their home port near Venice on the gulf. I was happy to visit with my brother who had a rental for a couple months - nice surprise. Well by President's Weekend, I headed back to Antoinette's to welcome my new guests and reopening Antoinette's for the spring and summer. Thing totally changed by March when the Covid19 pandemic began. The whole world exploded.

How Does Antoinette's Prepare for the Pandemic

After attending many virtual seminars and reading recommendations, I began preparing Antoinette's for welcoming back visitors during this pandemic. We removed all the extraneous materials from each suite including: throw pillows and blankets, dust ruffles, bath robes, loose papers and all the extra stuff that adds warmth and charm to our suites. We purchased UV lights to clean the many touch areas (remotes, keys etc.). We asked our guests to bring their own linens to use for health and safety reasons. Most were cooperative with a few disappointed. We extended my arrival and departure times to accommodate the extra cleaning required between guests. By mid-summer, got into full swing on adhering to these new requirements.

This policy lasted through the fall. Once the house had gaps between guests and the temperature dropped, we brought back linen service. My guests were happy once again.

Opened Antoinette's for 29th Year

In May, I began my 29th year at Antoinette's. When reviewing our 2020 guests list I found a big gap in the list. Cape May was closed until June 1st for visitors and then reopened to 25% occupancy and at 100% on

June 22. Naturally, the season started slow but began to pick up by July. Our visitors were mostly local families from the surrounding areas like: New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, Virginia, and a few from Connecticut, Delaware, West Virginia, Florida, Massachusetts, and Washington state, It was clear, out of state, Canada and overseas did not make it this year. However, we were happy to have our return and new visitors back.

Can Antoinette's Survive during the Pandemic?

As a small business owner and sole proprietor, when you lose your source of income, your finances suffer badly. Like many, I began collecting unemployment under the CARES act. It's called PUA or Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. The New Jersey Unemployment Division took 7 weeks to update their antiquated system to provide funds for people like me. The plan was to provide an amount based on 2018 or 2019 adjusted income but finally gave all PUA recipients some monies till late June. I collected it until mid-June when business began to pick up.

For those who take an owners salary and have employees you could apply for another program called PPP (Paycheck Protection Program). I had no employees or received an owners' draw so I was not eligible. These loans are supposedly forgivable but did not apply to me.

However, I did obtain an SBA loan from the Small Business Administration as a cushion since it was not clear on what lied ahead for Antoinette's. This became a life saver for me by late summer (you'll hear more of this later). The SBA loan has a low interest rate, good for 30 years and payback October 2021.

House Changes at Antoinette's

During the first quarter of the year I had a new HVAC system installed on the third floor. Since I lived there for 25 years, I knew the only way I could make it rentable and comfortable was to add heating and cooling. Fortunately, it was completed by the beginning of March.

Since my business was closed for at least 7 weeks, we took advantage of doing some long-awaited renovations. By simply painting the kitchen cabinets, we quickly upgraded our kitchens. Proudly we completed all five kitchen cabinets and 2 bathroom vanities bringing a modern new look to them.

My last project for the spring was to add a fresh look to my main fireplace from a brick to white. Success, it looks great and makes the room look brighter.

Summer Rentals

By June 1st, all the house renovations were completed and we opened Antoinette's and announced the new addition of "Freddie's Loft" named after my father Fred. Our summer visitors began to arrive in Cape May and at Antoinette's. Happily and to my surprise, within a few short days, I was able to rent Freddie's loft for 5 weeks.

New Summer Challenges

Naturally there are always challenges during the summer season.

My first challenge began with a leak from Freddie's Loft to the bedroom directly below (over main bed below). The plumber determined the toilet seal was loose and fixed it. The next guests arrived. The water leak happened again. Sadly, my guests refused to stay for the 4 nights (which I understood). The plumber returned and found a hole below the shower head and sealed it up. Fixed we hope! The 3rd guest arrives and once again within 24 hours the water dripped on my new guest's computer on the bed. Three strikes you're out. The plumber returned and after several tests we determined (we think) that the 3rd floor shower tiles had rotted so bad that when the water was sprayed on it, it leaked to the second floor. My only choice was to close down Freddie's Loft till I could replace the tiles.

Fortunately within 2 weeks I was able to have the bathroom tiles replaced and made a major improvement in the bathroom. However, I needed to find a painter who could fix and paint the ceiling damaged by the three leaks. Decided to hold off till the fall once the summer rush is over. So we reopened Freddie's Loft.

OOPs what's that Leaking in my Yard?

In July, two of my toilets were not draining properly and finally they completely stopped. On Sunday, I brought in Roto Rooter, and the culprit was wipes were being thrown in the toilets and were causing the clogs. After \$1200 and removing and replacing a toilet, we got the all clear. Four days later, the problem reoccurred. Between Roto Rooter, the plumber and the City of Cape May (who checked street drain), they determined that the sewer line had an area that collapsed and was causing the backup. There was evidence in the back yard of an overflow. The short-term remedy was to clear the clog each time till we could replace the sewer line and trap. Once September came, the plumber replaced my sewer line but was forced to open up the cement in the garage to complete the replacement of the line. Within 3 days we once again had a new and improved sewer line.

The cement guy was scheduled the next day to fill in the hole in the garage but never showed up. After several calls and some outrageous estimates, I found a local guy who came back 5 weeks. Bravo, the hole is now filled.

Lightning Strikes Cape May

On August 4th, as the summer was almost over, a tropical storm Isaias came through Cape May that morning. At 8:58 am, lightning hit Washington Street and caused a live wire to dangle from the pole next door to Antoinette's. This downed wire caused all the electricity in the neighborhood to be lost. It included our police and fire departments down the street for 8 hours. They lost the emergency 911 service and had to go back to using walkie-talkies. To give you a perspective of the day's activities, we had a full house and some of the guests were planning to check out but their cars were blocked on the street. First they were told to stay indoors till the emergency crew came. Two hours later, the firemen asked all my guests to leave the premises through the rear exits. The front street area in the neighborhood was electrified and a very dangerous area. I commend the firemen who stood across the street for 8 hours to stop passersby to avoid the area.

At 5 pm Atlantic City Electric arrived at the scene to assess and replace the downed wires. They determined that 3 of the houses had to have their electric service replaced from the street to the main power source including Antoinette's. We had no electricity till the next day when the Electric Company returned. My brave guests decided to stay in my very dark house without Air Conditioning.

Well, little did I know what damage this live wire for 8 hours did to my electric power in my house? After an inspection by my electrician, they determined I needed a new power box to the house and that all circuits and equipment had to be checked. Lights, outlets, appliances were all impacted by this outage.

First the main electric box was replaced to restore electric service. Over the next several days we determined, 6 appliances, 7 TVs and miscellaneous equipment needed to be replaced. The worse damage was my new \$12,000 HVAC system in Freddie's Loft was burnt out from the storm. It took from August 4th till December 15th to replace all my equipment and settle with the insurance company. Thank goodness I followed my neighbor's advice and hired a public adjuster to negotiate and settle my claim. Since the Insurance Company took 18 weeks to settle the majority of the claim, my SBA loan came in handy to use temporarily toward my equipment replacements. Thank you Lord.

Gee who can get me a New Appliance?

Here comes another challenge. During this pandemic, I quickly learned that new appliances were few and far between. It now takes weeks to get a new appliance since there was a big backlog in parts and equipment. I placed several orders and finally found a local Wildwood place that could accommodate me. By late August I had my last appliance arrive and now my guests were once again happy. However, I had a new hiccup. My own new Maytag washing machine in my basement was found defective on delivery. Oh, let's just have a serviceman come and fix it since it's covered under warranty. Well, after 3 tries and 4 weeks later, Whirlpool determined that it had to be completely replaced. In December, after 3 months, a new washing machine arrived. No Maytag for sure and got an LG. So far all seems well.

Let's Search for Furniture

In November, I decided to begin my search for new sofa beds for my suites. I visited a large department store in Flemington, NJ to look at my options. No floor samples were available and the wait was at least 4 months. Locally I found a hardly used sofa bed from a summer rental. Had it delivered by local guys and as a precaution, had it thoroughly cleaned by my carpet guy prior to use by my first guest. I was happy with the end result. Delays, delays, delays are the name of the game.

Coast Guard Auxiliary Activities

I continue to volunteer with our local Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla in Cape May. As mentioned earlier, I did visit a local Flotilla in San Diego. Our Flotilla commander asked if I could do a presentation to our membership about visiting outside your state. I quickly learned how to use a Zoom like system and share my experiences and recommendations. Feedback was very positive.

In February, I was appointed Tour Director of TRACEN (Training Center Cape May). The auxiliary members conduct the tours on the base. The Coast Guard is very strict with the tour guide script as well as uniform protocol. We planned a training session for 18 guides but quickly ceased operations in March when the Pandemic hit. This was fortunate for me since I had extra chores required at Antoinette's which left me with little time for outside activities. However, I do look forward to resuming my role when the Coast Guard reopens the base again.

Our free recycled uniform inventory is doing really well. We now have a closet and a reference manual (computer database) to quickly find what's in stock. At last count, we had over 175 items, which our membership can select from. Several new members were outfitted to fit their needs. Next year we may use some old uniforms and create Christmas stockings for the recruits.

Let's Run a Retail Shop

Hoarding is no longer acceptable behavior on my part. It's a new stage of my life. Yard sales were out. Let's try EBay and Facebook Marketplace. EBay required online shipping so I enlisted my cousin to help with this added chore. Thank you, Carole. It's actually an interesting process and I found price and timing is key! Buying beach chairs on the way to the beach or picking up a pampered chef cookie maker while making cooking are just 2 simple examples of why people buy your stuff! Your trash is their treasure. To date we sold over 110 items with lots and lots more to sell. EBay charges a small fee and as of now Facebook doesn't. This will continue for several months and maybe years if you've ever seen my garage.

Aging is here to Stay

In the fall, I had to seek treatment for knee issues with cortisone and gel treatments. I am blessed that it took so long to be affected since running my 3-story house for 30 years. Like so many seniors, a knee operation may be in the 2021 horizon. You just have to deal with it.

I am happy to report that I got an all clear signal for my 1--year anniversary for Breast Cancer. My doctor in Philadelphia moved me over to a **survivor** group for annual checkup. Wonderful news. Thank you, Lord.

2020 Post Season travels

By October, winter travel plans were on hold but decided if I travel by car and felt uncomfortable I could do a return trip easily. I visited Washington D.C. during the November election week. Sadly, my favorite historic hotel, the Mayflower, was literally deserted and if there were 10 rooms rented of 550 that was a lot. Only one hotel staff at the front desk. The Marriott owns 2 floors and I think timeshare owners like myself were their only guests. The excitement for the week was taking a night tour on the day before election with only me and the tour guide. I thought this tour would be curtailed to 1 hour but the guide was more than willing to spend the 3 hours with me privately. I love riding around Washington D.C. at night and this made it even more enjoyable plus of course SAFE.

Like the hotel, the streets and public transportation were also deserted so it was very easy to keep my social distancing. The weather cooperated too being in the 50s. Washington streets businesses were boarded up as a precaution, but all went well during the week.

After Washington, I headed to Boston for a week with my longtime friend, Jane. We did a quick porch visit with my niece and her family and headed over to Mystic, a really pretty city. I introduced my friend to public transportation around Boston to see the many wonderful sites. Boston too was very quiet but we managed to enjoy ourselves on walking tours, visit to the Fine Arts Museum, stops at the Italian district and tour of the Boston Tea Party museum to name a few. On the way home, we visited Newport, RI overnight and enjoyed a scenic ride around their famous mansions areas.

How Embarrassing - Where is My Phone?

It's mind boggling that your whole life can exist on a little device called your cell phone. When I arrived at my hotel in Washington D.C. I realized that my phone was missing, I checked with the hotel desk clerk but I didn't drop it there in the lobby. He then called my phone in my hotel room but still no sign of it. I returned back to the front desk and learned that a man answered my phone and had picked it up on one of the trains I took to the city. He offered to drop it off the next morning at the hotel. Since I had some free

time, I decided to take a train out to meet him where he lived. I love trains. However, I could not communicate with anyone along the way. Oh, this man worked for Apple and decided to hold it rather than turn in to the transportation staff.

I felt totally helpless because I couldn't google my directions or give a quick call to my family or this totally new stranger. I hopped a train and headed to his neighborhood, hopefully a decent section a half hour from the city. The train staff gave me directions to his home address. It was getting dark and I had no clue where I was going. After 40 minutes of walking I finally came across a gas station. With the help of the staff I contacted this man, and he said I missed my stop on the train and got off at the wrong stop. I alerted him I walked myself to the next train station and somehow missed his house. To my surprise, he gladly said I'll come over to meet you and deliver the phone. Once I got my phone I found myself an Uber and headed quickly back to my safe hotel room.

Lesson learned. Have a clear backup plan if you lose your phone. In retrospect, I should have waited till the next morning for his offer to do hotel delivery. For the record, if I felt the neighborhood was unsafe I would have returned on the train. Another life's lesson learned.

Winter Improvements

Finally, after several follow-ups, I found a lead for a young contractor who was willing to repair my ceiling from the water leaks in the summer. During my out of town visits in November, he spent 2 weeks and painted all my ceilings on the second floor, including the one with the leak. He replaced my two bathroom floors with tiles to make them more up to date and serviceable. Happily, my cousin Carole became my official inspector while I was gone as a precaution to insure the work was getting properly done. His end results were excellent. I learned he was a professional painter (a union member) from Philadelphia who moved down here with his daughter for a better life. I'm planning some more work in the 2021 winter to take advantage of this reliable and honest contractor. They are hard to find.

Christmas in Cape May

Most all plans for the holidays have been canceled. With only a few decorations at Antoinette's, I still have a handful of guests visiting here. I had a single lady who stayed through the holiday who asked me to deliver a turkey in her apartment. She loved the smell of homemade cooking. I too decided to cook a fresh turkey and share it with my neighbors and friends. As a special treat, I ordered the Biltmore Estate Christmas puzzle to begin while cooking on Christmas. Sadly, the puzzle got stuck in this slow mail delivery so I hope it arrives by New Years.

My Neighbor becomes a Good Neighbor

As many of my readers are aware, I've had a law suit with my next-door bank, who were planning to eliminate my easement in 2020 from their property to my back yard. This agreement was established in 1994 when the bank was built. All prior negotiations failed and years have passed since this agreement was made for access to my backyard. In March, a week before Covid19 hit, my lawyer received a letter from the bank informing her of their willingness to offer me a permeant easement for access to the property. My lawyer said I must have an angel watching over me. The bank actually apologized to my lawyer for the delay with a recent follow-up and hopefully by 2021 we can resolve this issue. Thank you Lord!

Becoming A Destination

Over the last 25 years I have attended all sorts of classes, from inn keeping to cooking. One class that caught my attention was call Destination Bootcamp. They were usually held in Colorado and helped you focus on growing your business. Like other training seminars, they began to offer online virtual learning. Well since it was on my bucket list, I began an 8-week class in August. Most of the students were from Texas, from a Chamber of Commerce President, to a woman who was opening her own Cigar Bar and Restaurant. In preparation for my 30th year, I walked away (so to speak) with lots of new ideas to use in 2021. Watch and see what we have planned in 2021 to celebrate 30 years.

Feeding the Homeless

Following a quiet Easter in the stores, my friend alerted me about a great sale on Spiral Hams with a 75% discount. I hear they're really easy to use or reheat. I bought one for my family for when they return in the spring. However, I thought it might be a nice gesture to get a few hams for the local homeless people. Well, 4 more hams later, how do I give them away? Our local community group explained to me that they deliver food to the homeless in motels on Friday. With the help of a friend, we spend the afternoon, carving the hams into 25 packages and delivered them to the staff. Of course, I still have the bones in my freezer and hope to make some good old fashion soup from the leftovers. A 2021 project for sure.

My First Thanksgiving Dinner at Home

Since I was staying in for thanksgiving I made my first turkey breast. I searched all my recipes from my 15 Viking Cooking school classes and came across my Cranberries Apple Chutney. Perfect. All my neighbors and friends were very happy with the outcome and I have orders for more in the future. I repeated this for Christmas day. The spirit of giving,

Miscellaneous

Sadly, my garden suffered badly this year. My friend did her annual plantings but wasn't able to return due to the virus. Of course, there was no time for me to tender to it and besides it's not my cup of tea.

The Christmas house tours were all canceled and have to hold off till 2021. It was always a lot of fun.

All my business travel conferences were canceled for the year and many through mid-year 2021. Virtual conferences are here to stay for a while, but miss those casual conversations from other business owners.

Memorable Guests Experiences at Antoinette's

As you might imagine there was a significant drop in customers' arrivals for 2020 in Cape May and at Antoinette's. I'd like to share 3 heartwarming stories with you. A few appeared on Facebook.

Antoinette's is Missing My Favorite Thing – Where is it?

As mentioned earlier, all the extra amenities were hidden or removed. One of my returning guests called me on the day of arrival and asked me if I could stop by for a minute. I was concerned about the seriousness of the call. I immediately followed up. To my surprise here's what happened.

Her 10-year-old son was wondering where my robes were since that was his favorite amenity while visiting here at Antoinette's. Within a few minutes, I delivered a white robe hidden to Josh but reminded him that it has to be returned to storage once he leaves the suite. It's funny what can be important to a 10-year-old boy.

How to keep your Customer on the beach! (posted on Facebook)

"This week I witnessed a driver hit my customer's car on the street. I immediately went into action. Checked out the damage, got driver's information, verified his phone was working and alerted my customer. "Don't worry, it's a small dent, but just enjoy your beach day." Well, these two drivers connected that afternoon and agreed it wasn't worth an insurance claim. The driver was a Vietnam veteran too. Thank you. I was happy to have my guests enjoy their day at the beach.

A Key Item Lost in Cape May (posted on Facebook)

"When moments like this in Cape May happen you realize how lucky you are to live or visit our lovely town. My two lady guests arrived last night at Antoinette's on Washington St for a two night stay. They were brave enough to weather our first winter storm. The one sister just lost her husband in November but needed the getaway. This morning they lost her pocketbook. The pocketbook appeared on one of our local Facebook posts (not this one). I alerted them and they got it back. Here's what they said:

"Thank you so much for turning in the bag!!! A true Christmas Miracle."

"I love our little town. Happy holidays and thank you to our pocketbook finder."

(I posted my guests experiences and had close to 700 reactions. I guess that is a viral post.)

Off Season Winter Plans

All my winter plans for 2021 have changed. My annual San Diego trip has been postponed from January till March. As the news reports, California has serious pandemic issues. When cancelling my plans, I found out I would lose my points if not used by end of year. So, I quickly booked a flight to sunny Florida to visit my family for a few weeks. Just have to monitor the pandemic carefully while there. I look forward to the day when we have some sense of normality.

The rest of the winter will take advantage of my extra time home to continue to downsize while doing my online sales. A must do!!

As usual, the clock is rapidly approaching 2021. 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 let us 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

Online Link; <https://www.antoinettescapemay.com/confessions-of-an-innkeeper.htm>