

Dear Friends and Family:

It's been a long time since I wrote out Christmas cards or spoke to many of my old friends. I started with the idea of a short note with my Christmas cards but there was more news to share. I hope you enjoy this as my Yuletide message to you and your family.

Merry Christmas and a Happy Holiday!!!

Introduction

This story is dedicated to all my friends and family members who gave me the emotional and moral support to start a new life in Cape May, N.J.. Special dedication is to my mom, Phyllis Brown, who worried about her daughter making such a dramatic change. Mom, I'm OK!

Where Do I Go from Here

It all started when I lost my job at Prodigy in White Plains in February 1993. Over 250 people were laid off especially many in the area of Middle Management like myself. After 24+ years in the computer field my natural tendency was to look for work in the computer field. So I prepared my resume, received counseling and began searching for my next job.

In the meantime, I decided to take on some temporary work. My first job was by accident. I became a factory worker in an upholstery shop for \$10 per hour. I went looking for fabric but they were short of help. After one week of working, "I was too slow" on the sewing machine, and they politely let me go. I was fired!

My next big job was to reupholster 2 couches and 2 chairs for a lady who's daughter was getting married. After working out of my house for 3 months in the summer time with no air-conditioning, I finished this job. However, I decided that this type of work was not for me. So I fired myself!

My family and my friends kept on telling me to move to Cape May. I had no commitments, like husband, children etc.. and real ties to the area. I was part owner of Antoinette's in Cape May. Why not move there! So in November, I packed one bag and moved in to try it for a month or so. I experienced a whole different feeling about the meaning of life. That it can be more interesting than traveling 100 miles to work, working 5 days a week with a guaranteed weekly salary.

By January 1994, I decided to make it official and I put my house up for sale. Fourteen months later, this March 1995, my house was sold and I became an official resident of Cape May. Let me share with you why I made the change and how my life has improved.

Healthier Environment

To begin with, the air is healthier in Cape May. With the ocean air, summers are cooler and winters are milder. Yesterday morning I woke up and found an inch of snow on the trees and houses. It looked so pretty. But what was also nice, it melted by noontime.

Mary, My Dear Friend

In September of 1991, I met my neighbor,

Mary Crilly who lived across the street in a grand house on 1.3 acres of land. Little did I know then how she would impact my life. Mary lost her husband and children. She lived by herself and had a few people that also lived on the premises with her. Our relationship developed as I was making the transition to move to Cape May. She was always there to give me guidance and help in searching for a better life. She now lives in a Nursing Home at the age of 93 and I miss our teas and chats. Thanks Mary, for our friendship.

Meeting People

By being a full-time Innkeeper, you meet many wonderful people from different parts of the country. My furthest guest was from South Africa. Every day is different in my life.

Chamber of Commerce Involvement

I have become extremely active in the community. In November 1993, I became a Board of Director for the local Chamber of Commerce. By being in charge of Membership, I've been able to meet many business people. I find many of the business owners are ex-Corporate people (e.g. Lawyers, Salespeople, Administrators, Vice Presidents, Management) who just got tired of the rat race and wanted to enjoy life more. In 1994, I plunged forward to meet one on one with the 3 top commanders of the Coast Guard base in Cape May. After 3 weeks with 4 hours of indepth discussions I felt we made good progress towards good communications between the Coast Guard and the Chamber of Commerce. Some of the officers were quite shocked to find a picture of their Membership Chairman in the

paper with these top 3 commanders.

Just today I was invited to a private party to thank all those citizens in Cape May that helped save the Coast Guard base from closing in Cape May. I am looking forward to this party. I realize now how invaluable my Toastmasters skills came in handy far exceeding any Corporate training received.

You Own an Apartment Building?

In 1991, when we opened Antoinette's, we quietly put out our sign "Apartments for Rent". My sister, Judi, and I found out very quickly that accommodations of this type were not well publicized and had a less than positive reputation. Cape May was known as the Bed and Breakfast Capital of the World and had widely publicized them.

In January 1994, with the help of a few other business owners, we decided to organize an apartment group to better advertise our type of business. By April we published a simple brochure listing all available apartment houses, sizes etc... The local Welcome Center, Chamber office and Ferry staff loved it. We gave them a handy tool to give to visitors when looking for places that cater toward families, have Victorian charm with kitchens.

In September of 1994, the group elected me President, and by January 1995 we had a great advertising two page ad in the Chamber of Commerce Guide Book. Apartments are no longer hidden signs in Cape May and two of the Bed and Breakfast owners have now switched to Apartment owners. We are now approaching our 22 months of existence. This week I am hosting our first Christmas dinner to

celebrate our existence and success in Cape May.

South Jersey Computer Club

After 24+ years of experience I decided it was important to stay "connected" with the computer field. I joined the local South Jersey IBM PC Users Group. After 8 months, they asked me to be on the ballot for First Vice President and was elected. Two weeks ago, they asked me to becoming President for 1996 of the club with over 230 members. I declined because of lack of time but will stay on as 1st Vice President. I have made some good friends especially from the FAA near Atlantic City.

Computer Teaching

Over the past 18 months I designed and developed 12 classes in a variety of subjects for personal computer training. I gave close to 35 classes in 1994 and worked for a Computer store 35 miles away. As the owner of the computer store explained, I was the only teacher from six computer teachers that could teach and talk English at the same time!

Travel time once again became an issue so I quit and gave some classes locally including teaching all the Elementary School teachers in Cape May. Recently I provided onsite training for a retired lawyer at his home only 3 miles away - a lot more interesting. I love teaching like my mom and hope to explore more of it as time permits.

My Mom

The saddest part of 1994 was when my mom died the day after Christmas. After suffering

4 years with a variety of problems we knew it was a blessing when this happened. But it's still very hard to not be able to pick up the phone and give her the latest happenings from Cape May. Over 70 people attended her funeral at the school that she taught at 35 years ago. It was indeed a tribute to see the impact she made as a teacher on her students years later.

Gardening, Who Me?

This spring for the annual Tulip Festival they were desperate for tour guides. I figured what's the big deal. On Thursday we had a trial run. After visiting 18 houses and being briefed on hundreds of flowers and leaves I realized that I was way over my head. You just don't learn gardening in two hours.

I convinced another tour guide to join me on Saturday for my first tour with 50 people. On Sunday, it was pouring rain, so I figured, eaaasy! No tourists. Well, I was wrong. I had 35 people all by myself. I managed to go to all 18 houses but did a lot of stuttering.....

Anyway, it turned out to be a real eye opener to the world of gardens. I actually have plants in my garden that I water.

I started a people garden in my front yard with Hydrangea bushes. My first was dedicated to my Mom, who loved gardens. My second one was Mary Crilly, my dear senior citizen. The last bush planted for 1995 was for Joe Langenbach, a dear friend of the family. If I don't water them, they let me know.

Cooking, Who Me?

I have begun to take an interest in cooking. I actually opened a box of mix and made muffins for my family visit to Cape May. For Christmas I actually asked for a cookbook.

Dating

Would you believe since I've moved here I've even tried dating. One thing I found out in Cape May is that there is no such thing as a formal date. Things are very casual - so a drink at a local pub is very common. After four "dates" this guy was looking for someone who would pamper him. Obviously I did not fit the bill. As he explained to me my level of self confidence was too high and knowing where my life was going was out of his level of comprehension. Life for him was just take it as it goes and plans are unnecessary. So, so much for dating.

What's Jazz Music?

Six months ago the Jazz committee was looking for someone to take control of the ticket sales and finances for the semi annual Jazz festival. I knew nothing about Jazz music. The chairperson knew of my work from the Chamber activity and asked me to get involved. Being a "bag lady" to pick up the money and controlling the flow was indeed an awesome responsibility. So I joined forces with one of the board members and took on the challenge. I have enjoyed working with a great couple. Deciphering different musical instruments and sounds as well as counting money is now on my list of experiences.

25th Anniversary Surprise Party

In March of this year, with the help of many friends and family we had a 25th surprise anniversary party for 3 couples: my sister Judi and John Anderson, my Brother Gregory and wife Alice and my friends Bonnie and Tom Herd. Within a 12 month period these couples were celebrating their 25th anniversary - quite an accomplishment. We had over 85 people and had a great time. Chris, my brother's son, did a great job capturing the event on video to watch and remember it for years to come.

Rejoining the Church

Going back to church was something that my family hoped I'd do someday. It finally happened In April. I was beginning to receive subtle hints from higher powers.

I became involved in the church indirectly by doing 125 hours of computer work. Being served tea by the Monsignor and having Pizza in his private kitchen became common.

It happened quite suddenly. Following the anniversary party, I called the church to thank them for the mass and find out what my bill was. As I was writing out the check I got a call back informing me that there was no charge. The monsignor said it was a gift from him for my recent contribution to the church. At that point, I decided I had enough hints from the higher powers. So I rejoined as a practicing Catholic with a few masses missed.

Big Trip to Norfolk

In September, 1995, 54 family members traveled to Norfolk, Virginia, to be part of

my older brother, Greg, taking over command of the USS Eisenhower, a nuclear powered Aircraft Carrier for the Navy. The ship can house up to 6,000 personnel, is the size of 3 football fields and takes 5 miles to stop the ship when the Captain says "stop". Missiles can be launched from Norfolk and can reach as far as Massachusetts.

It was an awesome event and we were all very proud of his achievement. His wife Alice and two sons are part of this achievement for standing by his side as he faced his challenges leading up to this special day. We all look forward to our "dependents tour" when he can take us out for a day to find out what a day on the life of an aircraft carrier is all about.

Now, I understand why I only saw my brother a few times since he left home in 1965 and joined the Navy. We know Mom was there in spirit and shared in the pride!

My Dad

After being married for 53 years with my mom, Dad has joined the ranks of the widowed men. Living in Pennsylvania is a great place but very few people remain from their original friends.

In August, the local Cape May Retirement Complex had a lottery for their apartment vacancies. My mom asked me to put in an application for them in 1994. Maintaining her independence was very important to her. People have waited over 5 years to get in. We found out that he came out #59. After eight weeks having met all the financial requirements, the staff wanted to meet Fred.

The ratio of men to women is 1 to-10. Was he being sought out?

After much coaxing, he had his interview. My Dad was offered to move in on November 1st, my parents wedding anniversary. He decided he was too young for the place (80 years) and didn't like the idea of paying rent. Was my mom and grandma's spirits behind his invitation!

Our Dad needs to decide for himself what he wants and where he wants to be. Being close to one of the family members will make all his children very happy. So we hope that soon he decides to try an alternate place to live close to his family.

Wall to Wall Carpeting

Buying and laying rugs seems like a very straight-forward thing. As my family says, for me everything becomes a big project.

On Thanksgiving weekend last year, my friend Tom Herd and I were enjoying a nice leisurely walk near the beach enjoying the morning fresh air. We spotted some beautiful powder blue rugs under the carport of a beach front motel. It was a great color for my house. I needed new rugs.

So the next week through several phone calls I got in contact with the owner. He advised me that if I wanted them, he would give me the same deal as a local flea market shop, \$15 per rug for a 15x15 rug. So I stopped by and decided to get a few more than I needed to do wall to wall for the first and second floors. With 15 rooms that's a lot of carpet needed.

So I left there buying the entire lot and one

of my garages became filled with the rugs. By the time I was finished we carpeted the second floor. Two other apartment houses owners bought 8 rugs. My initial costs of my purchase were covered. The rugs were actually in very good shape and they have definitely cut down on the noise of the tenants of the house plus enhancing the rooms.

Meeting Cape May Fire Requirements

Since we bought the house, John, my brother-in-law, kept on reminding me that I need to purchase a fire escape for the third floor. That was the only remaining item needed to meet Cape May fire standards, a \$12,000 investment.

On November 15th, the Christian Admiral was having a grand indoor yard sale. This building is a beachfront historic landmark and can house over 3,000 people and unfortunately was sold for demolition. The land will be broken up into 16 parcels for resale. At the sale, I decided to ask about the fire escapes on the building. After some negotiations, I managed to walk away with the purchase not 1 but 2 fire escapes (one for spare parts).

We managed to get the first one down before the building was turned over for demolition. The second one still remains intact. The demolition owner claims that all items left behind are theirs. I hope to get the second fire escape because I found out that since it is a historical structure that it has market value. So maybe after all is said and done, my fire escape will only cost me 1/6th the cost. But stay tuned in 1996 for how this story ends.

Big Sister

In April I began bringing in part time help. I realized I could not run this house by myself. My first person was Leslie, who decided that spring cleaning at Antoinette's was something she wanted to do. After 70 windows, she managed to continue cleaning for me. She has now advanced to being innkeeper when special events occur. With some guidance Leslie has managed to rent a house, open up a bank account and get her own phone. These may sound trivial but these are big steps for her.

My second staff person was Guy. We met at Staples and I saw talent in him with his patience and conscientiousness that was hard to find. Since May, Guy has been a godsent to me. All those little odds and ends jobs are fairly well caught up. He and I actually cleaned up the garage and the cellar.

Finally, John, the carpenter arrived at the scene. He is a very talented 38 year old carpenter. After close to 500 hours of work, my front porch, steps and fence have been fully renovated. It looks great and I thank John, with help from Leslie and Guy.

Without Leslie, Guy and John, Antoinette's guest house would be in the state of deterioration. Thanks for helping me get back on my feet and improving our house.

Victorian Lampshades

I have been continuing to make my handmade Victorian Lampshades. At last count I was over 70. During the 1994 Victorian Week, I gave a seminar on the art of this lost art and had it video taped. My seminar went well. After 6 months of

editing my tape from 90 minutes to 60 minutes, my first 50 video tapes were available. I gave a copy of the tape to the local paper for review. Four months later, their review finally appeared last week in their "Cape May Christmas Gift Guide 95". It got top billing and appeared on page 3. The editor called me yesterday and informed me that she received a lovely letter from a lady in Scranton, PA. I made my first credit card sale yesterday. We all have to start someplace.

Toastmasters Membership

I still retain my membership in Toastmasters International, a excellent communication and leadership organization which I joined in 1971. My local club is 40 miles away at the FAA and meets at lunch time. In conversations with the local Coast Guard there is interest in building a future club with my assistance. Certainly, it would be closer to travel to. The excellent training and experiences I gained by being a member far outweighs the training and experiences in my 24 year corporate life.

Antique Collection

When I had to pack up my house I realized I collected over 5,000 pieces of handmade lace and linens. They are now sitting in 16 Rubbermaid 18 gallon containers waiting for me to open my antique shop someday. I also have a garage filled with the "better" junk to surround my laces with a variety of furniture, games, china, bottles, lamps etc... Now that I've experienced packing and unpacking, I am more selective with my bargains. My family may not believe it but it's true..

Future Plans

In June of 1996, my niece Renee and her fiancée Todd plan to wed in Cape May. I look forward to giving them any help they need. I'm sure it will be a great family event.

I joined the local health spa to get back in shape. My friend and I plan to join weight watchers in January to balance exercise with dieting - a sure must!

Over the next several months, the Antoinette's partnership will be dissolved. Antoinette's has now become my private home as well as a business. Judi and John would like to begin looking for a retirement home in Cape May. I hope to make their dreams become a reality.

Considering consigning my laces and antiques to a local store will be explored in 1996. The long term approach would be seeking a licence to open a store right at Antoinette's. I hope to begin seeking my dreams in this area.

Computer consulting for motel, B&B, guest houses and apartments will be more seriously explored over the next 12 months. The need exist and I could provide such a service.

Reflections

In January 1995, I stayed a week with my sister Judi and her family and enjoyed the stay. I realized then that her life evolved around the family, her husband and her children and her major achievement in life was the joy of developing the family and watching her children grow and mature.

year!

As a single person, I was missing this and had to find another way to make my contributions to society.

In looking back, losing my job in February 1993 was actually a blessing in disguise. Like many, the security of receiving a weekly salary was comforting. But the fear of losing it always existed. Making changes in my life was extremely difficult. In my case it was a total change - work, environment, people. But I learned that making money and having a steady job was not the answer to total happiness. You have to enjoy what you are doing!

If I still worked in White Plains could I have shared with you my experiences that have changed my life so dramatically. Only 24 months have passed since I moved here and already my life experiences have increased 10 fold.

Do not be afraid of change. Going forward and not looking back is important. Make your new problems into opportunities! If it doesn't work out try something else but don't stop. Remember Time marches on! Believe in yourself and go after your dreams.

I hope that you have enjoyed reading my confessions.

Happy Holidays to each of you and I hope our paths cross in the near future. Please drop me a line.

If you ever get a chance look me up at Antoinette's, 717 Washington Street, Cape May, NJ 08204 (609-898-0502).

Again - Merry Christmas and a Happy New

