

1996 Yuletide Confessions of an Innkeeper

by Deanna Brown

Dear Friends and Family:

In December 1995, I mailed my first Yuletide Confessions to my long lost friends and family. With over 25 written letters and many phone calls I decided to write and share with you my "true" confessions for 1996. Happy Holidays to you and your families!

Dedication

I dedicate my 1996 Yuletide confessions to a dear friend Mary Crilly who died January 2, 1996 at the age of 93. Her guidance and support helped me start a new life as a simple Cape May innkeeper. A red poinsettia sits on the altar during the holidays at the local Catholic Church in her honor.

The Odd Couple

Undoubtedly, the biggest change this year for me occurred in late January. I now have a roommate - my dad, Fred! After close to a year being alone in a farmhouse, Fred decided to make a change. There were only a few close friends still living in Pennsylvania.

On December 12, 1995, I received a phone call from my Dad saying he's leaving Pennsylvania. Gee, I thought he was coming down for the holiday. Well, he surprised us all. Fred loaded up his car with most of his treasured things and headed south. His first stop was at his youngest daughter, Lydia's, for four days. Then his next stop was Judi's, his second youngest daughter, for four weeks. His final stop was Cape May at Antoinette's. He did exactly what we asked him to do; moved closer to the family!

The plan was to let him stay in apartment 4 on the second floor for the winter. When he unexpectedly arrived, it was under major construction. He decided to move in with me on the third floor until that was ready. Well, he's still here. Fred was smart. Where would he go when spring arrived and the customers came back? Fred was safe with me.

Since I thought it was temporary, I moved my computer, my sewing machine, my lampshades, my files - my belonging to the rear of the third floor. In the morning when I start my day, my bed becomes my office desk. Making my bed has become a daily ritual.

After 10 months we've managed to be roommates. Fred calls the third floor the club house and I call it the "Anne

Frank" attic. I guess my Yuletide Confessions is now my diary.

Spanish Ship

Over the fireplace on the first floor, you will see a handmade wooden 1847 Spanish Ship made by Fred. It's quite a sight to see. Fred's first month here in Cape May was spent putting together this ship. As he was completing this piece of work, he attempted to make sails but they were sagging. He enlisted me to make them since I had the proper sewing credentials. Now the sailboat sits proudly on the mantle and is Fred's artistic contribution to Antoinette's.

Let's Recover a Couch

In late 1995, I had gotten some well constructed sofa beds that were in excellent condition. The only problem was that gray leather did not fit well with the Victorian decor. I decided it was time for Fred to move from his ship building job to maintenance engineer at Antoinette's. His first assignment was to recover this couch. As he starting removing all the staples and tacks from the couch, I began cutting out patterns from new fabric and making cushions. Over the next few months, Fred worked on upholstering four couches, six kitchen chairs, two living room chairs and six outdoor director chairs. By spring Fred had proved he had hidden talents other than retirement.

Blind Date

When I wrote my Yuletide Confessions, it became a personal dating ad, much to my surprise. A friend shared it with a staff worker's brother. On President's Weekend, I got a phone call from my friend saying that this guy was in town and he wanted to meet me.

The five us met at a local pub - my blind date, his sister and husband, my friend and myself. Within fifteen minutes, I became Dr. Brown. This man was very unhappy with his life. He was in a rut. He hated his job, divorced from his wife, had not seen his daughter in two years. After reading my confessions, he thought maybe he could learn something from me. By the end of the night he knew first hand about how I changed my life and what steps I took to get there. The evening ended and I wished him luck with his future endeavors.

Recently, I heard that he went back home, put his house up for sale and sold it within two weeks. He now talks to his daughter and is exploring other job opportunities. He made the decision and took the plunge - great news.

Cold but No Snow

My first year in Cape May brought three inches of snow that quickly melted. My shoveling days were over. During the winter of 1996, Cape May surpassed all records in over 100 years. One snowfall was over 12 inches, while other areas had 30. I began taking photos of these rare sights. One Sunday I walked to church and found only 12 people there. This church can handle over 500 people. Fred reminds me that he came to Cape May because it didn't snow here. Oh, well!

Painting, Painting and More Painting

During the spring, Antoinette's would have our first wedding, her great granddaughter Renee. With 150 people coming to the wedding, I wanted to make sure we were in tip top shape. The interior of the house needed painting. After three months of painting, 25 gallons of paint, most of the fifteen rooms have a new fresh look.

Let's Try Wallpapering

As you tour the Victorian Houses in Cape May, wallpaper is very commonplace. Today you can find some great looking borders that really brighten up a room. We started with one living room and finished with 10 rooms. One room had to be re-done. I forgot to factor in the impact of curtain fabric patterns and wallpaper patterns. Fred and Guy thought it looked fine but finally gave in when they were overruled by the boss. They re-did the room. Fred's new role was the dipper, one who dips the paper before applied to the wall.

Keep the Coast Guard Training Center

During the winter months, the Cape May Coast Guard Training Center was one of five bases in the country being considered for closing by the government. The impacts on the economy and the safety of our waterways were some key concerns. Cape May is a great place for the recruits to bring their families and receive their training given the surrounding and benefits of the area. It's enjoyable to attend their Sunset Parades when the recruits graduate and receive their new assignments.

I decided to attend the public meeting at our local City Hall. The attendance was high with over 100 people there. The speeches were given by a very impressive line of influential people. These people included our mayor, council members, Freeholders and State Senators. After about 15 prepared speeches the public now had the opportunity to speak. There was silence. No one came forward. I decided to break the ice and give an extemporaneous speech.

My simple speech centered around my parents going off to the Great Lakes in the dead of winter to watch my brother

graduate from boot camp in the Navy. Comparing this to visiting Cape May for graduations was a much more enjoyable trip.

Following my speech, other local people got up and shared their viewpoints. The mayor, the Coast Guard Captain and a few other people thanked me for getting up and speaking out. My speech is on video tape and maybe someday I'll listen to it.

Gettysburg Gets a New Ship

My Dad received an article from his grandson, Lee. A man from South Jersey built a model of the U. S. S. Eisenhower from a popular mechanic's photo. This ship was of special interest to the family, since my brother, Greg, became the Captain in September 1995. This model took the builder four years to make, was 9 feet long and had moving parts. Given the proximity, I thought it would be an adventure for my Dad to see the unusual model.

I quickly tracked down the model builder and found that he lived one hour and 15 minutes from Cape May. As I was traveling to Princeton for my niece Renee's wedding shower, I decided to take a 4-mile detour off the road to see where they lived. I came upon their house and decided to meet the couple for a few minutes. It was delightful to meet a wonderful and gracious couple, Bud and Emma Miller. I was awed at the model and the handiwork of this engineer.

I returned on my way home to spend more time. Following my visit, I sent them a note with some photos. A few days later, Bud and Emma wrote to me and offered to donate this ship to the Navy and maybe my brother could find a home for it.

In September 1996, four Navy people picked up the model and transported it to Gettysburg. In one building, a museum was being opened for President Eisenhower and the Navy thought this would be a very appropriate place. This magnificent model is now in a place of distinction. I look forward to the day, when we can visit Gettysburg and see this model again in its new resting place. I thank my brother Greg, for finding an appropriate place for it.

Beginning Gardening-Class 101

My people garden survived their first winter and bloomed in the spring. Phil, Joe and Mary, my hydrangea bushes, each in a separate part of the garden, blossomed beautiful pink flowers.

For the spring my instructions were to plant only white

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flowers in the front of the house. Since we were holding our first wedding, white was the designated color. After much torment, I finally decided that the first row would be white but the other rows would have a variety of colors. So I planted my first flower garden. We never really saw the other colors. My white flowers just took over the flower bed and hid everything else. I should have listened.

I continued being a tour guide for the Cape May Tulip Festival. This year it was easier. My job entailed keeping the rear of the group happy. The actual tour was led by an expert gardener. My flower identification skills are improving.

Next-door Neighbor

In May, a new bank opened its door as our new neighbor, Sturdy Savings Bank, a South Jersey bank. This bank was in the planning stages for over two years and it went up quickly in just six months. In November 1995, the excavation began, with the demolition of the gas station. During the construction of the building's foundation and structure, the bank vault was installed. Day by day we watched the progress. The snow came but by then they could start the inside work. By spring the tin roof and clock tower were put on. The clock tower was most challenging and difficult to build.

The crews were excellent builders and extremely courteous to us as their neighbor. During a snow storm, as I looked for a snow shovel, they came over and cleared my car path within seconds with their construction equipment. As the final weeks came, the new 6 foot privacy cedar fence was installed between the properties. Since this fence was placed 3 feet into their property, they lined our side with a variety of 20 shrubs with an automatic sprinkler system. I have some great candid photos of history in the making. This fall the bank received a Beautification award for the design and architecture of the building. Welcome.

Southern Mansion Opens

Across the street, on a 1.3 acre plot of land, the George Allen Estate opened its doors to the public. It took 21 months of restoration work and several millions of dollars to make it ready for the public. It is a Bed and Breakfast with 13 rooms with an additional nine available in 1997. We wish the new owners well with their new business.

I still have fond memories of my daily visits to see my dear friend Mary Crilly. Cape May is known to have ghosts. Recent reports claim that Mary's spirit is still in the house.

The Philadelphia Inquirer has been doing some investigative work in this area. I am looking forward to their findings.

Maiden Voyage

In May, my Dad and I with 500+ people took a maiden voyage on the MV Twin Capes. This ship is a Cape May-Lewes Ferry refurbished at a cost of 27 million dollars. We were excited to be part of this cruise. Just image yourself being on the Love Boat. As we left port to Lewes, Delaware, the fireworks were on display, hundreds of boats were in the port to wish the ferry a safe journey. The ship had 10 open bars and several areas where food was available. Seventy-five people manned the food stations alone. The ship now has entertainment for the children with video rooms and gift shops. They had dixieland bands and soloists to add music to the festivities. We had a great maiden voyage. If taking the Cape May-Lewes Ferry, try this new ferry boat ride. It's a great trip.

Back to Nature

Our second boat trip for the spring was a tour of the Cape May wetlands on a Skimmer boat sponsored by the Cape May Historical Society. The skimmer is a flat level boat that takes you through the canals and up and down lower level areas. They had an excellent tour guide from the Cape May Bird Observatory giving us lectures as we passed through various areas of the wetlands. They brought us right up to the shoreline where we could observe the horseshoe crabs in their natural habitat. We saw a vast variety of birds some of which are extinct outside the Cape May area. We came off this boat with a wonderful appreciation of mother nature.

Sail boating

After making a sailboat model, Fred had this desire to go on an authentic sailboat. We took a sunset cruise on a restored Oyster Schooner, the A. J. Meerwald. This boat was part of a fleet in the early part of the century. During World War I, the masts were cut down and it became a Fire Ship with water pumps. In 1928 it sank to the bottom of the bay. Eight years ago this boat was brought up and restored to its original beauty by a nonprofit group. This spring they began running cruises on the ship.

Since this sailboat was authentic, it lacked modern conveniences that we all assumed existed. There were no side rails just a metal cable, only one light and no comfortable seats. As we set out to sea, the weather turned into a storm and the mist came in. After some scurrying, they managed to round up a lawn chair for my father to get off his unsteady feet. We were all put to work in raising the masts ("heave ho") and turning the boat into the wind to

have it sail on its own. We managed to enjoy the ride but got a real appreciation of what it was like for the men who worked and sailed these ships.

The Big Wedding

The second biggest event this year was the preparation and Wedding of my niece Renee and her fiance Todd Frechette in June 1996. It was a wonderful wedding from start to finish. We enjoyed the extra trips made by Todd and Renee and the family in getting ready for the big event. I enjoyed having this as a goal to get many things done at Antoinette's that were long overdue. We all enjoyed the fantastic weather that continued for three days while 150 people came to Cape May and over 100 people visited us at Antoinette's. I wish Todd and Renee the best in marriage and continued love for a long time.

Let's Go Fishing

My local bank was having a complimentary half day fishing trip for all its customers. With all my experience on the seas I was ready for fishing. They took us out to the ocean and began searching for the schools of fish. After overcoming how to put bait on the line and cast my line, I quickly went to work seeking out the big fish. With a few mishaps, like pulling up my line and hitting my neighbor in the face, I did enjoy my first day fishing. During my four hours I caught a baby shark, immediately used for bait and three fish that were too small to keep. I am ready to go fishing with Uncle Joe for a big fishing trip. Let's go fishing!

Fallen Trees

At the rear of Antoinette's property, there stands an old maple tree. During cleaning up of the patio area, we removed the disfigured trunk of the tree lodged in the ground. We thought everything was safe.

In July we had three big vans parked in the rear lot of the house. Out of the clear blue sky, a strong wind came up along the side of the house. My guests sitting out in the patio area noticed this big tree beginning to rock. With quick thinking, they immediately moved their vans to the street. Not a second later, very gracefully this tree came falling down and covered the entire back of the house out to the street. The door bell rang and they very calmly they told me I had nothing to worry about. When you look at the result, it was a miracle that no one got hurt and the damage to the property was small. It took us weeks to dispose of the remains of the tree. We were all grateful. The following morning I sent the families off to a complimentary breakfast for their speedy action.

Niagara Falls Comes to Cape May

My large kitchen on the first floor played host to an anniversary, birthday and wedding parties. We finally plastered and painted it. In August, one of our guests arrived back one evening from a local movie and found the entire kitchen looking like you were under Niagara Falls. The water was dripping from one end of the room to the other. The only thing that did not get wet was my 36-hour handmade Tiffany lampshade. Did a pipe burst? They immediately sought my help.

After four attempts to get a plumber, my friend's husband came to the rescue. Drilling holes in the ceiling relieved the pressure and centralized the flow of water. Our French bathtub overflowed on the second floor. My guest noticed the tub overflowing and sopped up the water on the floor. Unfortunately, she did not realize how long the water had been spilling over. She thought the faucet was turned off. We immediately noticed that this tub had one major flaw - no overflow valve.

Well after three days of leaving the doors and windows shut the water dried up. In retrospect I felt very lucky that Bob came to the rescue in preventing a major disaster. Without his quick reaction, the ceiling would have come down. We all laughed about our newest addition to the house, our waterfalls. My guests were very understanding with the inconvenience. I now await the day when our Niagara Falls ceiling can return to its normal state.

Parasailing

Parasailing, a popular water sport in Cape May, has always intrigued me. In August, after arriving home from church that morning, Fred informed me that one of our guests wanted to go parasailing and was I interested in going. The day was absolutely gorgeous, 80 with sunny and clear skies. I immediately called the local business and made a reservation for the 2pm trip. When I came back down stairs, Fred informed me that my guests were unable to go. My dad said he would join me. We packed our bags and headed to the boat in Wildwood Crest.

There were six of us scheduled to go out on the 2pm trip. This included two boys in their early twenties, my Dad and I. As we left the shore, the two boys and I were ready to go parasailing. The others would observe.

This speed boat headed straight for the ocean. You put a harness around yourself, stand on a rear platform, attached to the parasail and then wheeled up 500 feet up for eight minutes. Following the two boys, it was my turn. With only

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six pictures left, I decided to bring my camera along by strapping it to my harness. Within seconds I was up-up and away. The view of the land and beaches was spectacular. For my first four minutes of suspension, I did not dare move. By the end of my eight minutes I did finally take pictures. Parasailing, given the right weather conditions, is a fun sport.

Watching Sunsets

Cape May is at the tip of New Jersey and is surrounded by the bay and the ocean. One beautiful sight enjoyed by many visitors and locals are the setting of the sun each night. If the weather conditions are clear this can be a magnificent site to behold.

One local TV station advertised a restaurant which has a relaxing meal while watching the sunset. One day, my father and I found this place on the Delaware bay. As the Sun sets, you watch people take out their cameras to catch this moment in time. Following the setting of the sun, the people in the restaurant clap.

I have been back several times to let my family and friends appreciate this magnificent view.

Physically Fit

In late August, I decided that I needed to become physically fit. This was a long overdue goal. What was I waiting for? I joined a local Weight Watchers group and found the group to be supportive and inspirational. I transferred my annual lifetime \$49 membership for Jack LaLanne to my nephew, admitting they were not opening a spa in Cape May. My membership at the local fitness center was renewed. By now I am halfway to my final goal and plan to reach it in 1997. I feel and look better and am enjoying wearing some of those clothes that I was saving. I'm glad I finally started!

An Airplane Ride

In late September, Peter called and asked if I wanted to go flying. Peter lives in Cherry Hill with his wife, Doris, and they have been coming to Cape May at Antoinette's since 1992. His Dad was in town from Kansas and he wanted to give him an afternoon ride. Let's go to Cape May.

By 1pm, my Dad and I headed over to the airport to meet Peter and his father. The airplane was a four passenger Cessna and was ready for all of us. My Dad decided to keep his feet on the ground and entertain Pete's dad while we went flying. After two rolls of films and a thrilling ride in the sky we landed safely at the airport. Thanks, Peter for a great trip.

Victorian Lampshades

I continue to make my Victorian lampshades. At last count I was up to 120 custom made shades. In September, I was invited to give my lampshade seminar at Kuser Mansion in Hamilton, NJ. This historical house, 70 miles from Cape May, is host to many interesting programs. The chairperson heard about me from two ladies that attended my seminar in October 1994 here in Cape May. Their seminars have ranged from quilt making, coin collecting to lampshade making. Being very nervous in unfamiliar surroundings and people, I found myself feeling right at home within five minutes of starting my seminar. There were over 40 people attending. I tried a multimedia presentation with excerpts from my lampshade video to explain how used clothing are excellent sources of fabric selection.

By 10:30PM I was all set to head back home. As I was heading out of the driveway from the mansion, the chairperson stopped me and invited me back for 1997-8. She surprised me when she said "I have had many speakers come to give seminars, some very highly paid and respected in the Victorian field. Given tonight's personal reactions, I feel you were the best speaker since we started this program two years ago." It was worth the experience and trip.

Jazz Involvement

I continued my involvement with the Cape May Jazz Festival. In February, I became Director of Volunteers. This role encompasses organizing and coordinating over 70 volunteers to work at the jazz festivals twice a year. After telephoning over 100 people to volunteer to staff 15 different venues, we managed to staff the events. We established Site Managers to manage each event with very good results. In November, we streamlined the Volunteer program and I could find free time to enjoy the Festival myself. For music lovers, it's the best bargain in town and wonderful musicians.

My First Turkey

My family was coming down for a pre-holiday turkey dinner the week before Thanksgiving. It would be great to make a fresh turkey. This would be my first official family Thanksgiving in Cape May. I decided to practice ahead of time - who would be my guinea pigs?

At my wrap up meeting for my site managers, I'll make it into an experimental dinner. We agreed that I would prepare the turkey and the rest of the group would share with the other dinner preparations.

I asked my Dad to go to the local market and pick up a fresh turkey. After much reminding, I stopped and ordered one myself. The same day, my Dad brings home a second turkey. So now we have two to cook. I read five cookbooks to get second opinions and was ready to cook turkey.

Sunday, at 10:30 a.m., I began my two turkeys cooking - one being fresh and the other frozen. I used Reynolds wrap turkey bag approach, a simple method. By mid afternoon I was running up and down the stairs checking my two turkeys each in a separate oven and on different floors.

Meanwhile, I decided to make 10 lbs. of mash potatoes - why not have leftovers. I prepared the potatoes but forgot to cook the potatoes ahead of time. When my friends arrived, everything was hot except my turkeys and the uncooked potatoes. Where was the turkey gravy? We managed to save the dinner and within one and ½ hours everything was ready. It took a trip to the store, a stop at a friend's house to get missing ingredients including a mixer for the potatoes.

I was ready for the family. Our family dinner was very successful. They arrived Friday and with many assistants we prepared our family turkey dinner Saturday. Given my recent experiences, I am considering having a 1997 fireside dinner for Coast Guard service people that are away from home for the holidays. Can I handle it?

Wow, A Big Refrigerator!

One item that came from my father house this past summer was his refrigerator. After three hundred miles of traveling, this refrigerator arrived at Antoinettes. After our pre-Thanksgiving weekend, my family carried it to the third floor and it fit like a glove.

As I was cleaning the refrigerator, a very strange sensation came over me. I felt my mother was trying to communicate with me and tell me that she was pleased with my father's relocation to Cape May, enjoy my old refrigerator but watch what you eat. It is a documented fact that Cape May Victorian Houses do have spirits and ghosts. What do you think?

Computer Repair Man

My father, at the age of 81, has decided to take up a new profession, being a computer repair man. I had an old computer that Fred could experiment with. The next day, I found that he totally rebuilt the computer after six hours of work. He asked me to turn on the switch to see if it would work. Much to his and my surprise, it worked.

He decided he wanted to buy a newer model. My local printer who was planning to upgrade his office computers, sold him his computer. The drawback was Dad had to wait a week till his new one arrived. Within a day of it sitting on my father table, he decided to take apart a working IBM Compatible 486 computer. Unlike his first computer, this one failed to start. It sat for two weeks while every attempt brought the same results - two beeps (machine not functioning). A friend arrived in town and quickly detected that the wires were criss crossed. One lesson he learned was to keep close track of how you dismantle your machine.

The following week I had to go to the local church to replace a monochrome monitor for a color. I brought my Dad along to try his first road assignment. Within a half hour, the priest had a working color monitor. Bravo Fred!

As of today, an older model (386) is apart with no clue of what is the problem. He replaced the floppy drive with a new one but it's still unable to work. Can Fred fix this one? I'll let you know in 1997. He is now attempting to try some jet fighter games. He finally got off the ground but says it will take him time to get the hang of it. Keep up the good work.

Finally Automation

As an experienced computer expert, I should have a sophisticated system for running my own business. Unfortunately, my process of tracking a guest from phone call to check out is a very cumbersome system using databases, spreadsheets and word processors to handle the job.

In November I decided to look into what software was available to make my life easier. I contacted the developer of a product that looked like something I could use. Would they be willing to let me try out this \$499 product if I wrote up an evaluation and had it published in my local computer club? Yes. After 60 hours of testing, I have now converted my business into using "Guest Tracker," a MusenWare Software product from Elk River, Minnesota. In just two minutes, I had my reservation confirmation letter and lease prepared, printed and faxed to my customer. Much to my surprise, they signed their lease and faxed it back to me. It only took five minutes. I'm finally automated!

In the winter months, I plan to submit my evaluation and provide consulting services to local businesses who would like to automate. I did have fun being a "beta tester" in Cape May.

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Queen of the Ball

On December 7th, at the local Arts League Carriage House, they held their very first "Beaux Arts Ball". I had helped the chairperson in preparing over 1200 mailing labels for invitations to the Ball. This ball was a black tie affair, with valet parking, great food and wine selection and wonderful music. It included a silent auction as a fund raiser for a well-known artist in town that had lost most of his family and is in a nursing home with Alzheimer disease. At the last minute I offered to volunteer to work at the ball. They gave me ticket sales at the front door.

What should I wear, where is my mask? Well, I quickly found an evening dress but was lacking a mask. Why not use my Victorian hat that was hanging in my hallway, it that ostrich feathers attached to a beautiful black medallion. After five minutes of wearing it and collecting tickets at the door, I took it off because it was too cumbersome. I decided to put it on the rack with the handmade masks for sale.

The mask contest began - the ladies first! On an impulse, I threw my hat on and my friend gave me a mask and I entered the contest. Much to my surprise, within a few minutes I became the first queen of the Beaux Arts Ball. This was a once in a lifetime experience for me. Following the men's contest, we were both crowned as King and Queen. The next week my picture appeared in two local papers. My gift that evening was a hanging 12 plant red poinsettia. Today I plan to donate it to the church to sit on the front altar in memory of my mother and my friend Mary Crilly.

Cape May Historical Society

In the early spring, my Dad and I took the skimmer boat to the Cape May Wetlands. The local Historical Society was looking for new officers for their organization. After a couple of phone calls I agreed to be nominated as their Treasurer for 1997. They have over 400 members and run a historical building a block away from my home with a gift shop. They are very excited that I was willing to take on this assignment with my computer background. I look forward to working with a group dedicated to promoting Cape May history. Since many active members are seniors, I'm sure I'll learn a lot from them. On the other hand, maybe my Dad may make a few new friends.

Being an Auctioneer

One of my favorite pastimes was going to auctions. In my travels I've gone to about 50 since 1970 and most of my

house belonging came from them. Our computer club has their annual auction in December. They asked me if I would be willing to run it. Why not, it looked really simple.

I gathered up a few people and tried to plan the auction to be a smooth running operation. Our November newsletter provided a sheet on which members could identify their auction items, and fax it to me the day before the auction. All went well, 50% came in by fax and other items were brought to the meeting. We collected \$500 and next year we plan to top that. One man stopped after the auction and asked if I had done it before because I looked like a natural. It was fun being an auctioneer for an evening!

Furry Friends

The day of my father 81st birthday, I was working on my wash from the weekend visitors. I forgot to close the outside door to the cellar and the kitchen door to the basement. At 10:30 p.m., after the family phone calls were received, I decided to check on my wash in the basement. Much to my surprise, I saw two brown kittens run across the living room rug. They slid across the waxed kitchen floor and down the basement stairs. These kittens were obviously enjoying my lighted 9 foot Christmas tree and sitting very comfortable, on the handmade tree skirt until I arrived. Did my Dad have visitors for his birthday? Was it Antoinette and my mom? Today, my Dad says he has a furry friend on the front porch. My dad sits on the porch while the little kitten sits on the first step enjoying the sunlight. Will these two become friends?

Meeting People

The most enjoyable part of being an innkeeper is meeting a vast variety of people. They are from all walks of life and different parts of the country. I now have a book in each of my units that have all our newsletters and my Yuletide Confessions. Those who choose to pick it up, remark how enjoyable it is to read. Recently, a psychologist who stayed at Antoinettes, read my confessions. She was actively involved with many employees

who left Prodigy in 1993. Her reaction to my confessions was "you finally got a divorce and are free at last". Also she was not sure how many people who left the company were as happy as I was in my new lifestyle change.

Chamber of Commerce Involvement

I continue to be active in the local Chamber of Commerce and am still on the Board of Directors. In the spring of the year, I received a special award for my role as Membership Chair and helping the organization reach 300+ members.

Church

I continue to go to church on most Sundays and provide them with computer assistance. By convincing the liturgical publications staff of the need, the Church has a new Compaq computer. This computer is a 586 pentium machine with Windows 95 and a \$500 Hewlett Packard printer. It sits at the office waiting for me to help them convert their system from their 386 machine. In January, we hope to have both machines running as the church has to print out 800 donation forms for the 1997 tax returns.

Fire Escape

My two historical Christian Admiral fire escapes still sit on the lot of a Welding company in North Cape May. Architectural drawings are needed to be approved before we go on. I hope this antique increases in value.

Antique Store

My antiques from my move to Cape May, still sit boxed up waiting to be opened and sold.

Toastmasters

I retain my membership in Toastmasters International, an excellent communications and leadership organization that I joined in 1981. I've had inquiries from local people and active members on forming a local club. The new two story bank next door offers their second floor conference room to local groups for use. Maybe, someday.

Computer Teaching

I continue to do computer teaching and consulting in my spare time. For 1997, I will be offering my guests onsite training as they vacation, advertised in my next Antoinette's newsletter in January.

Reflections

Well, I have less than 24 hours BEFORE the Post

Office closes for the holiday.

After moving and getting settled here last year, I found this year to be a bigger challenge.

The change and adjustments I had to make by having my dad live with me were significant. On the other hand, I was blessed with the opportunity of getting to know my father. Like many seniors he was struggling in a world with no place to go after he lost his companion and best friend of 54 years.

He forced me to learn to live with less space. I worked at finding ways to have him find a better life. For both of us, it was a mutually beneficial situation.

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Antoinette's

717 Washington Street
Cape May, NJ 08204

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Sailboat riding, fishing, parasailing, sunsets, exercise all happened because he was here. My experiences increased tenfold. Many of these precious moments are remembered with our snapshots.

I thank my family for assuming the responsibility of selling his house without his involvement and letting Dad start a new life here in Cape May. I thank my family for keeping me away from my father's auction, because who knows what I would buy for "future" resale values. I'd like to thank all my customers and friends who have continued to make my life here in Cape May enjoyable and challenging.

Have a great holiday and a wonderful and prosperous New Year!