



December 16, 2011

Dear Family and Friends,

As we are preparing for the holiday season, I would like to wish you and your family a happy holiday. Here are my 2009-2011 Yuletide confessions of an Innkeeper. It's hard to believe that it's been 3 years since I shared them with you.

Cancer Claims those you Love

The year 2009 is like a blur to me. Our family was dealing with my sister's breast cancer which had metastasized to other areas. In September I joined her from upstate New York to Philadelphia to seek a second opinion at Fox Chase Cancer Center. The results were not favorable.

We decided to take a long awaited vacation to Myrtle Beach to enjoy the beach, the hot tub and just relax. It was a challenge to get there with 25+ mini oxygen tanks, medicine, frozen food and lots of other stuff. After a long road trip, we finally arrived at the resort. She was delighted to have an ocean view from her room and happily moved in. Her son Max and his wife joined us from Florida and we had a great time. Her favorite part was her trip to the beach and feeding the birds.

We headed back to NYC and put her on the train to Syracuse to be with her family for Thanksgiving. Three weeks later on December 16th, she peacefully joined the Lord with her five sons at her side.

Become Your Own Health Advocate

As our family began recovering from our lose, I returned to my Doctor's for the results of my recent mammography and tests. On Christmas Eve 2009, he informed me that I also had breast cancer. Unlike my sister, I wanted to become my own health advocate to beat the odds if possible.

I attended the Gilda Club, an invaluable local cancer support group. After several seminars, support sessions, doctor visits, and lots of tests, we determined the best course of action. Since I was in the early stage of breast cancer, my lymph nodes were clear. Having a double mastectomy followed by reconstructive surgery was my preferred choice. After sharing the news with my family, I had my initial surgery in June. By December 2010, my reconstructive surgery was completed. Thanks to the help of family and friends I was able to continue running Antoinette's.

The lesson I learned was early detection saves lives. If you are reading this and haven't had a recent mammography, do it now. Today digital mammography can detect breast cancer two years before a woman feels a lump. I am living proof. Today I feel really good.....

What's happening at Antoinette's?

With the economic downturn, discretionary spending has been severely affected, including taking a mini

vacation to Cape May and Antoinette's.

Over the last 3 years, we tried to maintain/improve Antoinette's as financially responsibly as possible. Maintenance comes first. It was time to replace my cedar shake garage roof since you could see the stars come out at night from inside. Support beams were added to secure the structure and gave us a sound ceiling floor to store all my stuff.

Once my health improved and I could concentrate on the business, during the 2011 winter months, we painted some long overdue interior rooms. To be more energy efficient, washer/dryer, refrigerator and air conditioners were upgraded. Our electrical service needed some upgrading too.

As the 2011 spring season began, we repaired and painted the front fence. We then expanded our efforts to my neighbor's parallel fence to improve our curb appeal of our properties.

This fall, with the help of mild weather, we began the awesome task of repainting the exterior of Antoinette's. We decided to tackle the higher parts (eves, peaks) first since my painter was fearless with a ladder. We removed the dead trees on the north side of the property and sadly it exposed the poor condition of the building (but no surprise). Just this week we had to stop painting and hopefully continue in the spring.

Antoinette's Guests

The summer of 2011 was a really hot and dry summer season. Cape May had just a few days of rain that barely put a damper on the beach goers. Most of my guests came from within driving distance of Cape May from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, Virginia, Washington D.C., Connecticut and Delaware. My guests also traveled from Massachusetts, North Carolina, Florida, California and Canada. Congrats to our returning guests from Norway traveled the farthest distance. Thank you to all my guests who chose Antoinette's as their home away from home.

Hurricane Irene's Causes Cape May County Evacuation

On August 26th, 2011, Cape May residents were asked to make a mandatory evacuation. It was a heart break to our Jersey shore visitors who had to cut short their long awaited vacation. We batten down the hatches and headed north. I landed in Galloway Township to join my friend at her cousin's who lived on the Mullica River in the Pinelands 60 miles north of Cape May. Hopefully their house was high enough not to flood (we hoped). To avoid potential flooding I assisted the owner in making 30 sandbags (a new experience for me) to ward off the high water into their basement. With the help of a boat pump and sandbags water never damaged the basement. It was a beautiful site to see the water receding from the foundation of the house.

After 3 days we were given the all clear and headed back to Cape May. Our town escaped from Irene with only a few down trees and limbs. However, several areas of the Tristate area were hard hit and took weeks to recover from the devastation. My prayers go out to all these folks that were hit by Irene.

Social Media

During the winter/spring of 2011, I took some basic classes in social media to learn how businesses can take advantage of this new form of email marketing. After 10 years, I upgraded Antoinette's website, went green by adding my short stories (Yuletide Confessions and Life with Antoinette) and links to Facebook and other social media sites. I am in the early stage of becoming "social media savvy" (I hope it happens soon). All my customer emails are organized and ready for use by 2012. I am excited to get into using this new form of marketing and hopefully I will I do my part to save the planet.

What's happening in Cape May?

Over the last 3 years, we have seen the demolition of the Cape May Convention Hall on Beach Drive to today which has reconstruction in full swing to a planned opening in May 2012.

Across from Convention Hall was our local movie theatre built over 50 years ago. For a long time, Franks Theatre has been fighting the city to demolish and rebuild new stores/condos there. After several attempts by local grass roots groups to save the theatre, it was finally demolished just a few months ago.

Recently, the MidAtlantic Center for the Arts announced that it would be closing the Tea room at the Carriage House at the Emlen Physick Estate. Like all non profits today, they have been severely impacted with the economic downturn. There are no plans to reopen it.

The Cape May Jazz Festival Organization cancelled their November 2011 festival. They are optimistic to bringing back the event in April 2012. They too were affected by the loss of our convention center and the financial downturn.

From a shopping viewpoint, several retail stores have either relocated or closed at the Washington Street Mall and around town. One store missed by some of my guests is "Oma's" Doll Shop that just closed in 2010.

When Hurricane Irene passed through Cape May, the cove beach at the end of the beach lost all its dunes. You now see a clear view of the Cape May Lighthouse. The restaurant owner loves his new view. Whether the dune comes back remains to be seen but we know the beach needs the protection.

Joining the US 2010 Census

Since the Jersey Shore was affected by the financial crisis, Cape May rentals were significantly down. I needed to find other ways to increase my income to keep my business afloat till the economy improved. Collecting Social Security was a partial solution. I dusted off my NJ teaching certificate and was put on the substitute teaching list. After just a few days back in the classroom, I realized quickly the challenges facing teachers today and decided to look for other alternatives.

In April 2010, I applied as a U.S. census taker. They offered me a crew leader job to manage 3 to 10 people (sounds reasonable). After two weeks of training and preparation my staff increased to 26. On the first day of training the "government paperwork" hit me hard. Each employee had to fill in 23 forms, all reviewed and authorized by me. Payroll had to be done daily. What a drag!

Although computers were used the year before to streamline the data entry process, they were canned for good ole fashion paperwork due to lack of funds. The results of the US Census determines every 10 years how many congressional seats each State gets. For NJ there was a big push to triple check the accuracy of full time residents versus casual visitors since they were afraid of losing seats. These 7 weeks went by quickly and by Memorial Day the majority of our work was complete. Now I could begin my summer season. The experience was certainly worthwhile. I felt like I was able to contribute to the success of gathering valuable census data for the city of Cape May. Maybe I'll be back in 2020!

Expanding my Personal Skills

For two years, all personal development had to take a back burner. Besides my training in social media, I reignited my interest in cooking healthy. I attended a Civil War series to help celebrate the 150th anniversary of the War. It was great to learn about the impact that women had on the war including local Cape May County women.

Now Lets Go Traveling

Once the dust settled from two years of dealing with medical issues and family losses, it was time to get on with my life and rebook some long awaited travel plans.

In January 2011, I headed to Virginia Beach to visit family. I headed east to Williamsburg for a long awaited relaxing week. Yorktown and Jamestown were great historic sites to visit. I only got lost on the battlefield at Yorktown twice, but finally found my way back to my home base. In the middle of an ice storm, we headed to Washington D.C. by bus to enjoy seeing the Capitol sites. Seeing the view of the city from the top of the US Post Office was my favorite. The week ended with a visit to friends near Washington D.C. Enjoyed the fine dining and a trip back to DC to see a live theatre production.

As I headed back to Cape May, I made a stopover in Annapolis, Maryland. The highlight was visiting the campus of the United States Naval Academy and the Annapolis seaport.

By February 2011, I traveled to New York City for a week of exploration. As a NYC commuter in the 70s and 80s, I never took advantage of being in the big city. It was cold but I had a terrific time going to shows (Jersey Boys, David Letterman, Wendy William's), seeing sites (Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, NBC Studios, Empire State building) and joining friends and family to catch up on old times.

The train took me to Philadelphia to pick up a flight to Las Vegas to warmer weather. Taking in some of the sites, casinos and shows (Viva Elvis, Circus de Soleil Las Vegas) made it enjoyable. The corner view of the Las Vegas strip from our suite made it even more memorable.

In late October 2011, I headed south to Jacksonville, Florida, to enjoy some quiet time with my nephew Max, Lynne and their family. Their son gave me a great tour of the city ending with my first experience in a micro brewing and getting a beer sampler, lots more beer than I bargained for. By the weekend, we headed to Tybee Island, 18 miles from Savannah, Georgia. Although our resort was beach front, it was too cool to fish on the pier or go swimming. The island is only 3 miles long and very low key. With the help of my niece we were able to experiment in the kitchen with some healthy meals. We took trips to

Savannah, toured the city and enjoyed downtown shopping on River Street. I returned to Savannah, following my family's departure to go visit Paula Deen's restaurant (Lady and Sons) - Yummy, yummy!

Savannah was getting ready for its' first Rock and Roll marathon. By Friday night 50 street were closed off while 23,000 runners were swarming the city. Although it was a drag trying to skirt the city to head back to Jacksonville, it was fun to be part of the excitement.

On Sunday I returned and attended the Jacksonville Air show celebrating 100 year of aviation history. The cloud cover cancelled 50% of the show, but it was still exhilarating. The Blue Angels were the highlight of the show. Given the financial state of our government, shows like this may be a thing of the past. My nephew introduced me to Al, one of three first Blue Angels from 1943. How cool!

I ended my vacation by visiting my sister and her family on the gulf coast near Sarasota Florida, where they relocated last year from North Jersey. The weather finally hit 80 degrees. We visited a pier on the intercostals' waterway to have a leisurely dockside fishing experience. I found later that picking up a glass of wine could be impaired by too much pole casting.

Vacation was finally over. At 9 am, I arrived safely at the JAX airport to head back to Philadelphia. After plane and train delays, Atlantic City was in site by 7pm. My plan to stay overnight was cut short by the NJ Teachers Convention in town as well as Veteran's day, with rooms going for \$199 for the night. At 1 A.M. with the help of a friendly NJ Transit lady bus driver I arrived safely in Cape May.

Losing People you Love

As a baby boomer entering the semi retirement years, life seems to get shorter for those you love. Over the last 3 years, our family lost Uncle Joe (my dad's last brother), my sister with breast cancer, Cousin Rose and my Aunt Lucille (last living child of my grandmother Antoinette). On Thanksgiving Day Lucille and I visited the local cemetery to place wreaths on her husband's grave and then had a wonderful Thanksgiving dinner at my cousin's house. Little did we know that she would be gone 2 weeks later?

In late October 2011, I traveled to NYC to visit my good friend and her husband, who was battling lung cancer. Just 10 days later, on November 1st, he lost his battle with this deadly disease. Teaching was his passion for years and Math was #1.

On November 28th, Cape May lost a local longtime Innkeeper from Alexander's Inn, just a block away from my home. At 71, he had a heart attack and died on the way to the hospital.

Please remember - enjoy every day because you do not know when it will be your last.

Future 2012 Plans

For the winter of 2012, I decided to make some local travel plans. In January, I hope to get back into New York City and see more shows including the new Anderson talk show. In February, we plan to pack

our boots and visit the city of Boston. I hear they have a great public transportation system. After 40 years, I look forward to revisiting the city. Although it will be cold, we hope that it will be enjoyable.

In March I will join others at an Innkeeper's seminar in Williamsburg. I hope to bring back useful information that is beneficial to my guests and running and Innkeeping business.

Finally, in November, I will head to Naples, Florida and hopefully find warmer weather.

Final Remarks

The clock is ticking and 2011 is just about over. 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's remember our Military personnel who are serving our country while we are enjoying our holidays. Happy Holidays.

Fondly,

Deanna