



December 21, 2012

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 2012 Yuletide confessions of an Innkeeper.

The Sprits of Antoinette's

Earlier this year, a family of 14 from Long Island visited Antoinette's to attend their son's Coast Guard graduation. As I was showing the family all the suites and they were deciding who was going to sleep where, Anthony O., one of the sons, told me that he MUST talk to me.

Anthony claimed that he could communicate with the dead. But he had promised his mom prior to their arrival that he would not do a reading if he started feeling the spirits. But, the spirits in the house were so strong that he insisted he MUST talk with me. I had no ideal what was about to happen. Fifteen minutes later I had my first experience with a Medium. He wasn't Theresa Caputo, the Long Island Medium, who takes 2 years to get a reading and charges a mint!

Anthony O. started his reading with the arrival of Eva/Ava and of our cousin Rose who had passed recently and said that she was OK. He said, "Cousin Rose knows her 2 sons are having the hardest time but will be OK soon. Although they were unable to pinpoint exactly what caused her death, she would not have lasted much longer." I got chills. He said both my mom and dad were OK now, but when they first were reunited, they had problems. No surprise!

He asked me if someone died in this house and did they fall down the stairs? When my dad was living with me for 7 years on the 3rd floor, his doctor said that it was unsafe for him at 86 to stay there because of the chance of falling. Bizarre!

He asked me if I knew someone called Captain Black wearing a cap and surrounded by smoke. My dad always wore his son's Navy cap and loved smoking his pipe on the front porch each day. Was Captain Black my dad?

He continued with other eerie observances and gave me a lot of food for thought. What an experience hearing from the other side! On his departure the next day, he reminded me that Eva/Ava is still living at Antoinette's. I haven't run in to her yet. Maybe I'll meet her someday if things go bump in the night!

Antoinette's Guests

The majority of my guests continue traveling from within driving distance of Cape May (New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, Virginia, Washington D.C.,

Connecticut and Delaware). We greeted guests from Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont and Canada.

Our out of country visitors traveled from Austria, England, Ireland, Germany, Holland and Switzerland. I expanded my babysitting service by offering a night of golfing and ice cream with the children while the parents were out having a long overdue “date night”.

This year Antoinette’s began offering online bookings via Booking.com (owned by Priceline, a Dutch company) eliminating direct conversation with the Innkeeper. Reservations come in while you are sleeping and the results were very good. Their website is translated into many foreign languages and opened up a whole new market. The biggest challenge is many of these guests just arrive at the Inn. I encourage them to call when I confirm via email but... Oh well, that’s part of the job – waiting for the guests to arrive.

Thank you to all my guests who chose Antoinette’s as their home away from home.

Antoinette’s Improvements

With a slight upturn with the economy, we’ve been able to tackle some major house improvements that were long overdue. These included redoing my tin roofs, removing asbestos and rebuilding the roofs outlining my chimney. No more leaks, we hope! We upgraded a washer/dryer, several electrical jobs, replaced sofa beds with Axiom mattresses (more comfortable), and replaced older bikes for our guests. Painting Antoinette’s, of course, continues. We invited Bathfitters to evaluate my Victorian tubs but realized for now the cost to upgrade them would break the bank (till another year).

Local happening’s in Cape May

Here are just a few local happenings.

After 3 years, our new Cape May Convention Hall on Beach Drive opened for business Memorial Day weekend. During the summer months, Stockton College and Cape May collaborated and offered eight great concerts. I attended several of them including: the Lettermen, Ricky Nelson Remembered and Gary Puckett to name a few. It’s great to bike or walk just a few short blocks and enjoy fine entertainment.

The Abbey, a well known B&B, was sold and is now a whole house summer rental. Just a week ago, the new owners opened it up for the holiday Candlelight tours and proudly showed off their new high end kitchen. I hear the kitchen is fabulous! Congratulations to the new owners and wish them success. The exterior looks great with it’s new paint job.

I heard this week that the John F. Craig House (another B&B) will be sold in January, also as a whole house rental. Sadly our B&B community is dwindling.

Cape May lost a well-known and Grammy nominated jazz pianist George Mesterhazy. He was known for being the pianist and manager at the Merion Inn in Cape May. George has been sorely missed.

Our one and only local movie theatre (Franks) on Beach Drive was demolished and now is an open lot waiting to be rebuilt as stores and/or beach front condos.

Unexpected Cape May Visitors

In August, we had some other rather mysterious visitors. They arrived unexpectedly and landed at my neighbor's house just a couple of doors down, while the owner was away in Yosemite National Park- in the mountains with no cell phone service. I was the main contact for her guests - and boy did they contact me!

I was informed that these little visitors were honey bees and are an endangered species. We immediately called up our local beekeeper. After three days of activity with firemen, policemen, local residents and visitors peeking in on our little honey bees, the swarm of 30,000 bees were vacuumed into several containers and transported back to a honeybee hive where they can continue making their honey. Well, it was scary in the beginning but as the tale unfolded, it turned out to be a wonderful example of how Mother Nature takes over.

I asked the beekeeper why the bees would relocate here, and he said, "Like lots of people that come to Cape May, love the city and the beautiful flowers, trees and homes - the bees do too". Well, hopefully the bees have recuperating from their Cape May "vacation" and are back to work!

Our Newest Family Guests

Sometime during the winter, an active bird nest was built right outside my window, next to the air conditioner on the third floor. By spring time I had a new family living there. It was adorable to watch the little ones playing and learning how to fly. It was time to turn on my air conditioner. After the babies became mobile, I decided that I needed to move their home to another place. I contacted the local Audubon society who gave me instructions on how to relocate my friendly visitors. Fly away to another Home!

Social Media

In an effort to keep our customers aware of Cape May happenings, I began using online email marketing (Contant Contact) to send out monthly newsletters. With the help of a local expert, we sent out several e-news. I hope during the upcoming winter months to gain experience by doing it without help. I have dabbled with Facebook and hope to experiment with Twitter and other social media areas like Pinterest. My Yuletide

Confessions will continue to be published on Antoinette's website. Hopefully, I will become more "socially" skilled in 2013. I await the challenge.

Well Ok - I 'm Now on Medicare

Happily in August, I got my Medicare card. It's significant savings from Individual Health Insurance to Government subsidized with lots more benefits. On the down size I'm getting older and things like short term memory seems to be fading (I think?). Must start working on brain games to restore these losses. Do you think it will help?

Since my cancer surgery 2 ½ years ago, I feel fully recovered. At a recent visit to my cancer Doctor, she felt her diagnosis of my present condition was "boring". What a wonderful word to hear. In October, after a 7 year delay, I finally had my second colonoscopy.

Education - Expanding Personal Skills

This past year I attended both local and out of town seminars on Innkeeping, social media and personal development like Italian cooking.

The three day seminar on Innkeeping in Williamsburg, Virginia was by far the most enlightening. I walked away with tons of information and began implementing some of the lessons I learned. The most valuable was learning that today's guests "don't want to talk to the Innkeeper" but just want to make the reservation electronically. Thus joining Booking.com became a reality. I guess it's like texting and not talking, you think!

In December, I attended the Restore the Shore after Superstorm Sandy all day seminar in Cape May. Local, state and federal participants shared every aspect of disaster recovery planning from the Red Cross, FEMA, Small Business Development Center, social media marketing and much, much more... It was great clarification for small business owners and included a takeaway CD with lots of great documents to lay out a DR plan.

I plan to continue attending these Innkeeping Workshops when possible to keep up with the trends my guests are seeking.

Saving History – Is it Worth the Effort?

My family calls me a junk collector. I love antiques and have trouble throwing away my stuff. Should I keep it or toss it?

In an effort to downsize, I began converting critical historical documents into more state of the art media (VHS to DVD, Microcassette to MP3/Wav files etc.). With some simple equipment and time for Do it Yourselves, it can get done and pretty easy.

One video, very precious to me, was of my dear friend and neighbor, Mary Crilly who owned the Victorian house for 50 years across the street from Antoinette's (now known as the Southern Mansion). Being born in 1902, she would have been 110 years today. She gave me the courage, encouragement and guidance as I relocated to Cape May in 1993. We had her 90th birthday party at Antoinette's and videotaped it. Bravo, it's now converted to a DVD.

One audio, of same importance, was a Mary Crilly oral history microcassette recorded in 1990 by close friends. When the house was sold in 1994, all the local papers did several articles on the sale. A newspaper reporter borrowed the cassette for research. When contacted this year for his relatives' stay at Antoinette's, I reminded him about the cassette. Well, finally after being lost for 18 years it arrived in my mailbox.

While taking the Christmas tour at the Southern Mansion this December with friends, lots of memories were reignited of my past visits with Mary in her home while she was alive. When we returned home, we decided to replay the 1992 video of her 90th party. We all agreed the importance of preserving this Cape May history. Now that I have both video and audio, it adds a lot more tangible value to the preservation process.

Excitingly, my nephew Peter magically cleaned up the audio file to the point of hearing her words. Shortly, he expects to have it transcribed so I can read and hear Mary Crilly's words once again. Can't wait!

2012 Travels

This year, I enjoyed lots of fun time away from the Inn and Cape May while traveling. Since I'm now of retirement age, why not!

In January, I visited family and friends near the Pocono area. We bused to New York City to see the Anderson Cooper Show, toured the Guggenheim and enjoyed fine dining. I reconnected with my friend Cynthia & John (prior B&B owners) who now own a Christmas tree farm in Phillipsburg. (Just learned their tree farm was written up in December issue of NJ Monthly Magazine.) We also (happily) tracked down our Cape May Pharmacist Bill, who relocated to CVS in Bethlehem, PA. It was a great reunion.

In February, I headed to Boston with my cousin and visited family and then stayed at the historical Custom House for a fun filled week. Amazingly the weather was in the 40's. We were able to tour the city, visit lots of museums, enjoy live theatre, and eat great pastries in the Italian section of the city. We ended the week by rooting on the NY Giants to win the 2012 Super Bowl against the New England Patriots. We got lots of heat from the locals! Sorry.

In March, I headed to Williamsburg to attend my first MidAtlantic Innkeepers Conference. I added some extra days to visit the sites, spend time with my brother Greg and stop at Annapolis on the way back to Cape May.

In late August, I headed to the Hoboken area and enjoyed the American Idol Travel show in Newark with my friend Jane (her birthday gift). It was great being able to see the New York Skyline and visit historic Hoboken (sadly before Hurricane Sandy hit). As we headed south, we stayed at the newest casino, the Revel in Atlantic City, with great sunrise views right from your room. I hear this Casino is in trouble?

In November, I headed to Florida to visit my sister Lydia near Venice, highlighted by visiting the famous sand sculpting contest at Siesta Key. I then headed south to Naples and enjoyed a fun filled week of relaxing, sun, fun, touring etc with family and friends. A guest from Naples gave me great insider's reviews of where the locals dine. Yummy.

The week ended with a challenging 4 mile tour via a SEGWAY (almost by foot) of Naples. When I was the only one who showed up, it became a private tour. How cool! I left the Florida gulf and headed east to Jacksonville to finish up my vacation with special family time with my nephew Max, Lynne and family.

Superstorm Sandy hits the Northeast

On October 29th, Hurricane Sandy made a devastating impact on the Jersey Shore. Many of us in or near Cape May know that, despite some flooding and power outages, we suffered relatively minimal damage. Sadly, many of our neighbors in the north of us have been less fortunate. Our hearts go out to them as they recover and rebuild. Antoinette's would like to do its share to help restore the Jersey Shore by donating \$10 to the American Red Cross for all new reservations made by May 1st, 2013.

Future 2013 Plans

In late January, I'll be heading to the west coast to attend my first Professional Innkeepers Conference (PAII). By adding a few extra days I can stay behind for Super bowl Sunday. I hope to connect up with my nephew Jeff and meet Matthew the newest addition to the Brown family from San Diego. Congrats, Jeff & Suzanne.

In March, I will be going to Baltimore to visit Lee (nephew) and Kelly, and then head to Midatlantic Innkeeper Conference in Hunt Valley, MD. A few extra days are planned to catch up with High School friends and see the Maryland area.

In November, I will head to Hilton Head Island in South Carolina to enjoy some quiet, relaxing time and seeing first hand my timeshare resort.

Final Remarks

The clock is once again ticking and 2012 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 lets' remember our Military personnel who are serving our country while we are enjoying our holidays. Also pray for all the Sandy victims and Newtown, CT tragedy victims and families. Happy Holidays.

Fondly,

Deanna