



December 23, 2013

Dear Family and Friends,

In just a few days we will be celebrating the holiday season. May you all have a festive season with a very healthy New Year's. Let me share with you my 2013 Yuletide confessions of an Innkeeper.

Winter Getaways

In the last few years, I realized that it is ok to have more time off during the slow seasons since I am now in the Senior category. In January I mixed business with pleasure and attended a Professional Innkeepers Conference in Las Vegas. After four jam-packed days of seminars, I walked away with a ton of information and new Mugs for Antoinette's. Learning the current trends in the hospitality business was key and how to implement them was my next challenge. Off to San Diego to meet my family's latest off spring, Matthew Brown, son of Jeffrey and Suzanne. He is so adorable.

In March, I attended an East Coast Innkeeper's conference in Maryland and following it up with a trip to Baltimore with an old high school friend. Found a really cool Jazz club there and loved visiting Fort McHenry, home of the star-spangled Banner. Heading home I finally visited nephew Lee and Kelly in MD (there for six years). My final trip was visiting Myrtle Beach for more R&R and picked up my first embroidery machine to try my hand at. My family already gave me orders. They are optimistic!

Getting Ready for the Season

Our spring-cleaning starts in April at Antoinette's to insure being ready by Memorial Day. It takes that much time to make sure my house is cleaned from top to bottom. Fortunately, Cape May was hardly hit by hurricane Sandy, but there was a ton of dirt leftover from the aftermath.

This year I decided to take my friend up on her offer to provide some gardening help. With the right plants, some plant food and watering, Antoinette's garden came alive. Already planning 2014.

Summertime

Stronger than the Storm. With the advent of Sandy in October 2012, visitors to the Jersey shore were hesitant to make summer reservations. We, in Cape May, were blessed to be barely touched. New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and Maryland accounted for 70% of our guests this year at Antoinette's. With online bookings capability, visitors also came beyond the USA from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Australia, Poland just to name a few. It's fun to greet visitors from abroad and find out how they found Antoinette's. In August we welcomed a TV Producer from Canada who was doing a feature on the Jersey shore and Stronger than the storm followup.

Can we train the Family's Next Generation?

In late June, when the family headed to Cape May, I offered three of their boys (Ages 9, 11 & 12) to earn some money and help me with my guest house chores at Antoinette's. My grandmother and my two

aunts were Innkeepers in the 60's with help from their children.

With a full house checkout that day, we began by teaching them to make beds (only 15 to do!). Well by 12:30 P.M. we finally finished the beds, hospital corners and all. They wanted lunch but my guests were arriving by 2 P.M.. Talk about a stressful day.

Day two arrived and one of the three boys decided not to work and wanted to go to the beach. Well he just became a "Cape Maybe - maybe I will work today, maybe I won't." But gladly the other two boys continued working. One of the boys was lacking energy due to skipping his breakfast. Oops! Day three arrives and only one boy was left. Their favorites was getting paid and checking in the guests.

Following this experience, they informed their family that their next job was the Fudge Kitchen so they get free candy! Nothing like a child's perspective. Well when they return in the summer of 2014 will they be ready to give it another try. I need to be ready too!

Recognition Awards in 2013

In May, TripAdvisor, the world's largest travel site, announced the 2013 Certificate of Excellence award recipients. The award celebrates hospitality excellence and is given only to establishments that consistently achieve outstanding traveler reviews on TripAdvisor. Winners of the Certificate of Excellence are located all over the world and represent the upper echelon of businesses listed on the website, with only the top 10 percent receiving the prestigious award. Antoinette's was one of them. We especially thank our guests for taking the time to write their reviews.

In September, Capemay.com , a popular local online website announced their "Best of Cape May 2013" contest results. We were pleased that in " Best Places to Stay - Guest House" category, Antoinette's received Runner Up. Once again, thanks to our customers for voting for us.

Lets Grill the Southern Way

During the summer a young couple came to stay for a week at Antoinette's. The boyfriend was stationed at the Coast Guard base in Cape May. Each morning he would leave early but came home to spend time with his love one from North Carolina. Well outside his door was a bag of briquettes. I thought it belonged to one of my guests who checked out and handed them over to my niece for her Dad to use.

I get a call from the Coastie that night and he asked me where were the briquettes. Well I explained they were given away but I would be glad to see if they were still here. Happily they were still here! Well I returned them and asked him what was he doing with the briquettes. Well, of course he was using them on my grill. My grills are gas and use propane. Oh, My!

So we looked at my grill and found out it would not start. Low and below, all the embers were cold and clogging up the holes in the grill burners. When he returned from work the next day, with the use of a shopvac, he proceeded to remove all the debris in my gas grill burners. Well, soon after an hour of hard labor, my grill came back to life. So now if I see a bag of briquettes hanging around my house I know what to do to make sure this incident does not recur.

Filomena Delivers a New Dollhouse

As the summer was winding down, I got an email from a stranger who wanted to downsize her

possessions and asked if I was interested in a dollhouse. She offered to bring it down from her home on her next trip to the shore. It arrived a week later, and to my surprise, she donated it to my collection on the front porch. My outdoor dollhouse collection clearly needed new life after 18 years. When she went to find me in the house, she saw her name over the first floor suite - Filomena (my mom's name). Wow what a coincidence. My family always said strange things come in three's (Italian tale I think?) Within a few days, I welcomed guests from Rome, Italy and Newark, NJ (home of my ancestors). Was my past family spirits spoofing me or had a hand in this donation? Thank You if they did!

Improvements to Antoinette's

In the fall, we began working on improvements at Antoinette's. This included: replacing our water heaters, upgrading our windows blinds (only 56!), and began the arduous task of interior painting of our suites starting with the trim work. After 13 months of waiting two dead trees were removed.

In 2014, we will upgrade our 800-pound porcelain bathtub and replace it with a long overdue modern shower. We will complete adding an auxiliary washer/dryer for our one bedroom suites.

Post Summer Fun

As October arrives and it quiets down till the holiday season, I headed north and first stop was my niece in CT and her family for Halloween. It was so much fun to watch the four children collect and count their stash at the end of the night!

In November off to a week in Newport, Rhode Island and loved visiting the grand mansions there. My favorite of the six we visited was Rough Point, home of Doris Duke, who also resided in New Jersey. Her house was donated to a preservation group after her death 27 years ago in it's lived in state. The other mansions were not lived in for many years and much of the contents were sold at an auction before they were preserved years later. After visiting the beaches in Newport, I realized how nice the beaches of the Jersey shore are. Being in Newport while they had Restaurant Week was an added treat.

Finished my vacation by heading to Cape Cod to see the sights. Like Cape May, many of the restaurants, tours and activities shut down after October. I enjoyed a visit to Provincetown and a ferry ride to Martha's Vineyard. The ferries to the Vineyard was triple the size of our Cape May/Lewes ferry and run frequently each day and carry hundreds of people on each trip. The road to the ferry took me twice as long as it would in New Jersey. Their roads are slow going and summertime must be a nightmare.

The highlight of the Cape Cod trip was attending a seminar given by the youngest of 11 Secret Service men that are still alive that witnessed the assassination of JFK in Dallas, Texas. In 2010 he was given permission from our government to talk about his experiences. It was a fascinating seminar about a historical event that sadly took place 50 years ago .

Entertainment Why Not

Getting a seasons pass to Cape May Stage, a local theater group, this year turned out to be tons of fun. You attend the first night of each new play throughout the year. Live theater is great entertainment and very enjoyable. We signed up for next year and look forward to it.

Headed north in August with a friend to the American Idol concert to hear the top 10 contestants. Before the show we visited Antoinette's neighborhood in Newark to see where our Italian ancestors were born

and raised. Their house is still standing and is very, very tiny for 12 people. The neighborhood was significantly improved since when I visited years ago.

In the fall, I attended 3 Viking Cooking Classes in Atlantic City and learned how to make southern cooking inspired by the movie the Help, seafood, soups and sauces. One of the classes celebrated our friend's big birthday. The first two hours you work with a team of four to make a well-thought out menu of fine dining. The final hour is spent drinking wine and dining with 15 other people enjoying the fruits of your labor. Look forward to my next class in 2014. If you have a chance, give it a try. Well worth it.

Future Travel Plans

During the winter of 2014, I plan to visit family in Jacksonville, a conference in Charleston and back to San Diego. In March I will attend another east coast Innkeepers conference in PA and then head to Branson, Missouri for some R&R. In May, our family will be heading to the Grand Cayman Island to join my nephew Peter and Carly at their destination wedding. His brother Lee and wife Kelly will be expecting their first baby then. It should be an exciting time of year to see these special events unfold.

Challenge in 2014

My biggest challenge in 2014 is to come to an agreement with my neighborhood bank to continue an ingress/egress to my rear lot to offer off street parking to some of my guests. Our 15-year agreement has expired thus loss of access. With some legal help I hope to recapture this access but it is not a sure bet.

Final Remarks

During 2013, I feel very blessed to have had a very healthy year and lots of fun traveling. Antoinette's business continues to grow thanks to all my guests for their return visits. Please pray for my cousin's husband who was stricken with Leukemia in March and is recovering from a bone marrow transplant. May his recovery be speedy and successful. Since his immune system has been compromised, most of the family has not seen them. We look forward to our family reunion soon once he's given the all clear.

As usual, the clock is ticking and 2013 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. Please keep in touch and Happy Holidays.

Fondly,

Deanna