



December 21, 2005

Dear Family and Friends,

Where did the year go? In a few days the Christmas holiday will be here. As you join your families and friends, may you all have a festive season with a Happy and healthy New Year. Let me share my **2005 Yuletide confessions** of an Innkeeper.

Christmas Day with a Friend

My story begins on Christmas day 2004. In the past, as the only single child, I brought Mom and Dad to see their other children for the holidays. Well, this year I was perplexed on what I should do since both were now gone but I had several options. Since Christmas is the time for giving, I decided to go visit Eugene (my father's roommate in the nursing home).

He showed me my dad's scooter and how great it rides on a little trip around the nursing home. For holiday entertainment we decided to play poker but was missing poker chips so we had to resort to using rocks from the nursing home grounds. Works real well. After 3 hours of poker, I left the nursing home and hooked up with family and friends. The next day I dropped off a pack of poker chips for Eugene to enjoy for future games as I headed back to Cape May. In April 2005, I learned that Eugene succumbed to all his medical problems and was only 61. I mailed off copies of the Christmas photos I took to his sister. She was profoundly thankful. It made me feel good that I took time for a friend on Christmas, because sadly it was his last one.

Las Vegas Vacation

In late January, I headed off to Las Vegas with my sister and a friend to enjoy a five day vacation. We stayed at the Venetian, spent 4 days at the health spa, enjoyed 12 outdoor pools and Jacuzzis and had some fabulous entertainment. The highlight of the trip was seeing the Celine Dion show at Caesar's with last minute tickets. It's a very pricy show (cost of an airline ticket) but a once in a lifetime experience. The next night we attended 2 live shows for the Wheel of Fortune with Pat Sajak and Vanna White (thanks to my sister who got the tickets on EBAY). It was so much fun. We taped the show when it aired this February but never located us in the audience. Some relatives claim they saw us on their big screen TV.

Florida Vacation

We arrived home from Las Vegas, unpacked and packed and headed to Orlando, Florida the next day. If we waited a day or two later, all the flights doubled because of the Super Bowl in Jacksonville the following week. We enjoyed our time with my nephew Max and his wife, Lynne and had fun at Disneyland. Max and I tried the thriller ride, Space Mountain (just like being an Astronaut). I learned he was trying to get other relatives to take it for 2 years but I was the first dummy to say yes. It was a scary ride but worth the thrill.

After a few more days in the Disney area we headed to the Gulf Coast and enjoyed 4 relaxing days at St. Pete's beach (near St. Petersburg and Clearwater). It was great to have a hotel on the beach and soak in the sun. We visited all the surrounding towns including Yuba City (cigar capital of the world), Busch Gardens and Tampa, Florida.

As we headed back to Orlando, we took a side trip to the Villages, a 55+ retirement community with

over 50,000 homes. The town is 20 miles south of Ocala in the middle of the state. There is everything you ever needed to retire, 7 golf courses, pools, theaters, restaurants, private hospital. The people in this community still looked young. After an 80 minute bus tour it gave us enough information to consider moving to in my senior years. I may just try visiting for a week or two in the upcoming years.

We had one day left and with the help of Priceline we got a fabulous one night stay at the Marriott/Ritz hotel in Orlando. I still remember sipping our last pina colada and enjoying a wonderful sunset pool side. Well, it was time to head back to New Jersey the next day but it was two great vacations.

Of Mice or Men

After being gone for almost 4 weeks, I noticed when I returned that a friendly family took over my 3rd floor with obvious signs they were there. I contacted my pest control service and they provided me with packages to help them become extinct. Time passed by and the next weekend I had a family of guests. On late Saturday night at 5:30 A.M. I got a call complaining about sounds coming above their ceiling on the 2nd floor. I graciously moved them to the 1st floor and decided to take matters into my own hands.

My sister suggested laying traps with cheese and peanut butter. Our local store had sticky peanut butter traps. I laid my first trap and within 30 minutes the first one arrived and got stuck. I could hear him/her moving around and trying to release itself from the pad to no avail. Well, I must remove it from the house but how? I grabbed some kitchen tongs, picked up the sticky pad and dropped it into my 3 layers of Acme bags and closed it real tight. I ran out of the house and threw it in the garbage can and closed the lid. Ah ha, I finally got one. We shall overcome!

Well a little while later, I caught the next one and was much calmer and just threw the trap in my garbage. Within the next few days, I caught the whole family (6 mice). The kitchen tongs still sit in my dishwasher waiting for the next catch. I'll be ready when they are.

The Neighborhood and Cape May County

Like all the towns up and down the Jersey shore, hotel/motels are being changed to condominiums. This change has also affected Cape May. If you go up and down the beach, some of our motels are now changing to condos. Even houses like mine are being converted into condos and selling off individual units. I have a few friends in town that will be doing this for 2006. Although I am not ready to do this, this could become a future possibility.

Cape May finally opened its doors to our first community college. As they were preparing their curriculum, they had to cancel some of their "Introduction to Computers" classes because there was a shortage of teachers. One of the adjunct professors suggested my name since the computer field was my profession for 25+ years. I purchased some computer training material and with a little brushing up I may consider some night teaching. One side benefit is access to their health benefits after 2 years of teaching one class. Something to consider.

Another change in Cape May County is the addition of a mall 5 miles from Cape May in Rio Grande. Lowes to Walmart are some of the stores arriving in our County. It sure beats driving 40 miles to find one of these stores.

In late September the Lobster House had a kitchen fire and forced them to close their dining rooms. They have the fish market open but don't expect to reopen till 2006. They are the largest year round employer in Cape May and put over 250 out of work till they reopen.

Tourism is Down but Antoinette's Survives

Over the last 3 years since September 11th, the tourist business has been dramatically affected all over

the Country including Cape May. Unlike the past, families are taking shorter vacations and making last minute reservations. We know many jobs are in jeopardy, there is a war and money is tight.

This is the first year since I moved here that several of my visitors came for shorter stays during the summer which is the heart of your business for a tourism town like Cape May. I learned real quick to be more flexible and try to accommodate their special needs. With the tourism business, I learned that you have to be prepared for dry spells and take it's ups and downs gracefully and with a level head.

In 2006, Antoinette's will reach it's 15th year in business. Since we opened our doors, I estimated 2200+ reservations. We met and welcomed thousands of people from all walks of life and tried to make them feel that were at home away from home. In 2005, my guests have come from all over the world including Canada, Buenos Aires, Australia, India and France. Just last night I got a call from a women in Japan who is planning a visit in January for a Coast Guard graduation and wants to stay at Antoinette's.

I feel very fortunate that I have met many wonderful people and many of them have become my extended family. I look forward to meeting them as well as my future guests in the up and coming years. Thank you all for joining us in Cape May and spending time at Antoinette's.

Deanna's Projects - Let get them Finished

My garage is still full of junk but I did make a dent in it's contents by having two yard sales and great help from my sister Dolores and my friend Betty. They did a great job and I thank them both.

I've been attending upholstery and furniture refinishing classes to force myself to get my projects finished. After nearly completing a couple single chairs 3 years ago, I was stumped by the detail work like the trim. Our upholstery teacher was replaced 3 semester ago and is a professional upholster. I decided that I needed his help with the finishing work although I was embarrassed to bring in old projects. With a few tips, I was able to get both chairs finished. It felt so good. With 3 weeks left should I start another project which would just be another incomplete one.

So I picked one that was sitting around for 6 years and I didn't know how to begin it. I have about 20 awnings on my house but one was never completed before the awning company closed their business. I purchased the fabric in 1999 and thought I could do it. Since I just took all my awnings down for the winter, I decided to bring one to class before I stored them away. With much ease the teacher showed me how to make a pattern and begin sewing it together. By the end of the 3 weeks, I was able to see most of the work done. By the next semester, within a week or two, the new awning should be ready to be hung. Should I go into the awning business when business is slow?

Gingerbread Returns

For years I have wanted to put back some gingerbread on my house that was removed years ago. I have sample patterns in my basement and an old scroll saw but never made any progress. This spring I found in an antique store 10 matching pieces of old gingerbread that could be used on the front of my house. The only downside was that it was filled with old paint and had to be refinished. After three weeks of hard labor in my refinishing class, I decided it was a painter's nightmare. One of the student was doing a similar project and just wrapped theirs' up. I asked him if he would be willing to work on my gingerbread. Much to my surprise, within the next month, the gingerbread was finished and hung on my front porch for the holidays. It looks great and adds some of the charm from the past. Thanks Mike.

Who Needs a Refrigerator?

While visiting a demo house sale in West Cape May I came across a 2 year old Sears refrigerator. The

sale got rained out and the seller was anxious to dispose of everything. I offered him half the price of what he wanted and he decided to accept my offer. When I returned the next day with the payment and to get the measurements, he asked me if I was interested in the matching stove since the deal fell through. I could always use a newer stove. We agreed on a fair price and I had to get it moved within the next week prior to the demolition.

The challenge I had was getting them moved from that house to my house. Usually the store will have them delivered and remove the old appliances. The guy who helped me decided to rent a U-haul and the only ones left was a big one. All the smaller trucks were being used in New Orleans because of the Katrina disaster. To get this one stove and one refrigerator in my house it took one week and several hours of labor. We moved 5 refrigerators between the 1st, 2nd and 3rd floor. I cleaned all my hallways to make room for the move, removed molding and doors to get the refrigerators in. Cleaning the dirt underneath the refrigerators was the easy part. Moving the stove in was much easier since one went in and one went out and it was only on the first floor.

Buying a refrigerator and a stove started out simple but turned out to be a big project. Oops. They look great and should last another 10 years but I vow to avoid demo sales.

Dishwasher & Microwave Safe

Over the past 12 years I have gone through a lot of dishes in my five kitchens. Since some of the sets are older sets, I learned quickly that old sets crack and lose their color when used in a microwave or a dishwasher. Since each kitchen set is different I have to go through the cabinets and return dishes from a group reunion.

For my birthday, I decided to start in my own kitchen and get a new set of pretty dishes. The set I selected was discontinued in 1997 and was imported from England of Wedgewood china selling at 80% below cost at Value City. For a five piece place setting, which was microwave and dishwasher safe, it could be purchased at \$9.99. When I got to the cash register with my 8 place settings of dishes my bill was only \$24. The cost dropped from \$50 to \$3 a place setting because they were having a special sale. Immediately I decided to replace all my sets in my house for my five kitchens. Swapping dishes or breaking them would no longer become an issue.

After purchasing 48 sets (240 pieces) how do I get them into my kitchens while I still have guests? Of course I had to wash them first. Since each set came in an individual box, I had to make several trips to the 3rd floor and after a week I finally had all the dishes washed. My 3rd floor looked like a bargain basement market with dishes everywhere. It took me a couple of weeks to replace all the sets. Just when I thought I was finished, I carried my last set of old dishes to the garage and the box broke. All the dishes came tumbling down. I just shut the door and decided to clean up the mess later. Although it was a lot of work I'm happy with the end result.

Lending a Helping Hand

During this year I befriended an 87 year old lady. She once owned a shop on the mall but lost her husband 6 years ago. Last year she leased out the store and moved all her shop inventory in her home. She hardly had an inch of space to walk around. I offered to help her clean up her junk. After several attempts, we finally had paths that she could walk around.

She asked me to help her find a new doctor because she was unhappy with her current one. I offered to bring her to my father's doctor because I thought he was an excellent family doctor. I made 3 appointments for her but each one had to be cancelled for one reason or another.

On Halloween, I invited her to join me on my front porch to give out candy to the trick or treaters. She

didn't want to impose on me but I insisted. It was a beautiful night and she was very happy joining in on the festivities. With a spot of tea halfway through the night it was a perfect evening. By mid November, she called and let me know that her family was picking her up and that she was moving to Baltimore. This was totally against her wishes but at 87 the family needed to keep a closer watch on her. As I pass her house and find it dark, I think back on the great Halloween night we shared together. I hope she has adjusted to her new life style. Getting old and losing your independence is something most people don't look forward to happening.

Am I getting Older? Should I Get My Own Doctor

Since coming to Cape May 12 years ago, I've been fortunate to require minimal medical help. I found an excellent women doctor but never connected with a good GP to help with future medical needs. I watched some of our local people struggle when it comes to medical help. Most go to a local health clinic where Doctors change. I was one of those people.

After watching my 87 year old friend struggle with a doctor she was unhappy with, I decided that I didn't want to face the same problem as I got older. When she asked me to cancel her 3rd appointment, I decided it was now time to get my own doctor. Although the doctor was surprised to meet a much younger woman, we both agreed that it was a good thing to do now while I'm still young.

Last week I had my first colonoscopy which is recommended from age 50 and up. I had cancelled it several times in the past because I couldn't be bothered. My father had colon cancer and had 1/3 of it removed at 88. The procedure is very simple because they sedate you. The downside is you have to go on a liquid diet the day before to clean out your colon. I'm glad I succumbed to the procedure with very minor results.

Secret to Living a Long Healthy Life?

For the past four years I have been attending a furniture refinishing class at our local technical school at night. Our teacher, Wally, this year turned 84 and decided to retire. I was fortunate to learn techniques to restore and refinish old furniture during several classes. The other educational aspect was learning from the other student projects.

On December 15th, we took him out for a nice dinner and had a retirement party at my house. Wally was in shock all night that we wanted to do this for him. Since he lives 25 miles from Cape May, I decided to let him stay overnight here at Antoinette's. At 7:30 the next morning Wally was ready for a nice breakfast but not at Antoinette's. By 8 am we were comfortably dining at Dock Mike's having some great pancakes. That was the price I had to pay for letting him stay overnight.

I brought him back to his farmhouse and found out his secret to staying healthy at 84 was keep yourself busy. Sadly, his wife has been in a nursing home for 10 years with Alzheimer and Wally visits her every day. He has 2 small fishing boats, loves to fish and duck hunt, carves wildlife figures, makes lots of fishing lures, has a large garden. He still lives by himself and his mind is sharp as a tack. I am convinced that you must keep your mind and body active to live a long life. Wally is an amazing person. He's already planning a picnic for us at his house in May 2006 and I look forward to seeing him again.

Golfing Anyone?

A friend from upstate New York has been trying to get me to go golfing. I remember trying it in the 70's but found my score over 160 was unacceptable. After months of discussion, she finally took me to a local 3 par course and we warmed up at the driving range. She took me out on the putting green and we tried to hit a few holes in one. Well, in September we finally went out and played my first round of golf

after all those years. By hole 13, it was getting dark and we decided to call it a night. We never kept score but I would guess that my par 3 was really a 6. Although I didn't do well on my first attempt at golf, I decided that I would go back to the course in 2006 to improve my game. I have a long way to go but it was fun and is good exercise.

Trying Outdoor Sports

This year I decided to try the popular sports at the Jersey shore that many come to enjoy. My first one was going on a fishing trip. My friend and I brought a cooler with 2 bags of ice to store ALL our fish and boarded a 6 hour party boat which took us 50 miles off the jersey shore. Well, once we dropped our lines into the water to catch fluke, the seas got really rocky and rough, had our first casualty, a 10 year old girl sitting next to me. Unfortunately, I soon followed suit and found my stomach couldn't handle it either. I never thought of taking Dramamine like my friend did. So as we headed back to shore 5 hours later, without ANY fish, I was determined to not let this happen again.

The next week I learned of a fishing class that was going on by the owner of a local fishing store. I took diligent notes and felt I once again could tackle this sport but on dry ground. We headed off to Higbee Beach near the Ferry and cast our lines out to sea. After 3 hours of waiting for the fish to find our bait, we both went home empty handed but had a fun day. To get really serious I went to the local fishing store and bought my first 10 foot fishing pole. There it sits in my garage waiting for 2006 to come around and give this sport another try. In the winter of 2006 I signed up for a 6 week seminar sponsored by party boat captains on the art of fishing. Well, wait till 2006 to find out if I do finally catch a big fish.

Big Fishing Tournament

Annually, at the end of August at the Canyon Club on the way to Wildwood, our marina host a very large fishing tournament, called the Mid-Atlantic \$500,000 Fishing Contest. For a boat to enter the contest you must put up \$6000 plus possible side bets (Calcutta) for another \$10,000. I learned about the contest 7 years ago when we took a whale watch boat ride on the Friday night, the last night of the contest. As we were heading out to sea at 6 p.m. all you could see was a fleet of 50+ boats heading back to shore. These boats were big and gorgeous with fishing equipment that you could die for. I vowed to watch the parade of boats enter the harbor every year to enjoy such a beautiful site. A couple of years ago, I walked the docks and watched the excitement of the fishing crew as the week festivities were happening. There were thousands of people of all ages.

This year I decided to stick around for the final weigh in of the big fish. Since 168 boats entered the tournament and they had to dock some of them at a marina in Maryland. All fish weigh ins must be done in the Cape May marina by Friday night 9pm to qualify. To see the culmination of a week of hard work, a few folks suggested that I'd come back around 5:30PM Friday night as the final catches were being brought ashore. After 3 hours of waiting for the big fishes to be weighted in I finally saw first hand weigh ins of tuna, white and blue marlins and sharks. The final tally of the contest was 1.7 million was bet on these various categories of catches and the winners were thrilled. I'll be back next year.

Birthday Fun

On my birthday at the end of the summer and in the middle of the week, it was a beautiful day. I had just checked in some new guests and found the day half over. On the spur of the moment, I decided to head to Atlantic City and treat myself to a Swedish massage at the Taj Mahal. Since they couldn't take me till 6 p. m. I decided to explore the game show "The Price is Right" at Showboat. The 7pm show was sold out but the 4pm show still had tickets. I got into the show and found out how much fun it was. This show has been around for 33 years and although the Atlantic City version is somewhat different it's still a lot of fun. I wasn't picked as a contestant but enjoyed every moment of it. Well, without any

planning my birthday turned out to be a fun day. Treat yourself sometime. You deserve it.

The following month, my older sister came into town and I took her and our 82 year old Aunt back to the Price is Right. With a little luck 2 of 3 of us were picked for free Showboat rewards. Because the show was such a hit, they moved it to Bally's and it will be running in 2006. If you have a chance to go to the show, you'll have a great time.

Going to A Class Reunion

For years I was of the belief that why bother with a class reunion. It's too much effort and why remember the past. This year I learned of our High School reunion from a classmate that was passing through Cape May and located me. I had six months to plan on going and had plenty of time to make the necessary arrangements. I didn't remember ever going to any one of the past reunions.

I lined up a friend to manage my business for the weekend and headed up north to join the other classmates. On Friday night I was in a state of shock trying to recall the other student names but was not doing well. I thought I never went to any prior reunions but found myself in a picture of our 25th reunion. By Saturday night my memory began to return and it was nice to see a lot of the people I grew up with. Only about 10% of the students brought their spouse so it was a lot easier to mingle with the students. The next day I decided to stop at my old high school and take some photos for the reunion committee while the school was in session. I had a wonderful tour from the Director of Development who gave me a complete tour of the school, including the Principal's office. By the time I returned to Cape May I got over the fear of school reunions and look forward to our next one.

Being Healthy

In August I rejoined Curves to get some regular exercise. It's so easy to put on weight and get out of shape and each year it becomes harder. Once you get in the routine, it's amazing how much more energy you have. I even tried making and eating bran muffins (which my Aunt Mary always ate) to help lower my cholesterol. Progress is slow but I'm still moving forward.

Cooking 101

This year I decided that I would like to change my eating habits. Basically, there were none. Anything goes, on the fly fast food, outdoor dining etc. So I began watching the food channel network and listen for interesting recipes. I selected a recipe for St. Patrick's day since I love cabbage. When I heard my family was coming for the weekend I offered to make them a good old Irish dinner. After all day preparation only one family member liked by dinner. As usual I got a lot of heat for the less than perfect meal. Thanks to my food saver bags, I froze the remainder and with a little doctoring it became edible for my next friend who visited me.

For Thanksgiving, they were advertising fresh turkeys. Should I try my hand again? Since I had dinner plans, I decided I would cook my 22 pound turkey on the weekend. My sisters insisted that I cook it immediately since it was fresh. On Thanksgiving day I got up early, followed the recipe and put the turkey in the oven (not really much work). By 2pm the turkey was done and the house smelled like Thanksgiving. On Sunday I finished the other parts of the meal, stuffing, yams and the fresh gravy. While making the turkey gravy a strange thing happened. I decided to use "Wonder" flour that my guests left behind. I heard it eliminates the lumps in making gravies. Little black things floated to the surface as I was mixing the flour and water together. I threw it away and started over again with another batch for the gravy. By the time I got down to the bottom of the container no more black things were found. The gravy tasted good but I threw away the remainder of the Wonder flour. The next time I made gravy I used a new wonder flour box with no special surprises. Now I know you must keep your flour in Tupperware to avoid friendly invasions. Lesson learned.

Let's Bring in the Recruits

Since I relocated to Cape May in 1993, I was always impressed by the families that invited the Coast Guard recruits for Thanksgiving. This is just a small way to make the young men and women enjoy the holiday while being away from their families. I've put it off for 12 years because I was lacking the cooking skills and I thought they might be unhappy with my take out dinners.

On the weekend following the holiday I saw Bill, the Captain in charge of public affairs who I've known since I got here. I asked him how the program works. He advised me that I should contact the County Red Cross and put my name on the list immediately. In the early days of the program there were last minute openings but now it seems that most of the 450+ recruits are already invited for dinner way in advance. I explained to Bill that I felt comfortable with making a turkey but had little experience with the pies. Bill response was "the recruits only want to eat, talk on the telephone and watch TV. Just buy the pies from the store and they'll be happy."

Shall I offer my home for 6 Coast Guard recruits for next Thanksgiving? I sent out a note to a couple who did it for years before they retired. I'm now awaiting their feedback before I make my final decision. To be continued....

Final Remarks

As I close my confessions I realize that I would be remise if I didn't wish all the Katrina victims that lost their homes this year to look forward to a positive future. Many people from all over the world are lending a helping hand and I hope each of us can do our share to offer hope to all these victims.

Next week, my older sister will be visiting Cape May to enjoy her stay and to show the rest of her family that she is a breast cancer survivor. We all look forward to her visit and will try to make it a memorable holiday.

Please lets' **remember our Military** personnel who are serving our country while we are enjoying our holidays. Thank you for everything.

Please keep in touch and would love to hear from you via email at deannab@snip.net. <http://www.antoINETTEScapemay.com> Happy Holidays.

Fondly,

Deanna

P. S. I am so sorry that my confessions went beyond a page or 2. I had more stories but no one would read them. For some reason this year seemed to be a year of progress, risks and change. Not a bad thing I think.