



## Morris Pesin's Legendary Canoe Trip Which Launched Liberty State Park

On the foggy, drizzly morning of June 13, 1958, Morris Pesin (1911-1992) made his historic 8 minute canoe trip to the Statue of Liberty with a *Jersey Journal* reporter to dramatize the close proximity of the Jersey City shoreline to Miss. Liberty. The newspaper story focused public attention on his ideas of public access from New Jersey to the Statue and of an open space family park rising up from the waterfront wasteland of decaying piers and abandoned railroad yards. Morris repeated the canoe trip on October 28, 1961, the Statue's 75th birthday.

Morris Pesin, known as the 'father' of Liberty State Park, spent 18 years spearheading the crusade to create this urban state park, which opened in America's Bicentennial year on June 14, 1976. He then continued to work with other park advocates for 16 years to guide the park's progress as a free and green park for people of all backgrounds to enjoy, within view of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

A year before his canoe trip, Morris and his wife Ethel had arrived on Liberty Island from his hometown of Jersey City with their two children, after a frustrating three hour trip which included a Holland Tunnel traffic jam and a long wait in line for the Circle Line ferry in Manhattan. He looked to the west and was struck by two things. One was that the Statue was very close to Jersey City, and the other was that the desolate waterfront was a shameful background for the sacred Miss. Liberty.

A few days after the 1958 canoe trip, he stated to the Jersey City Commission (the forerunner of the City Council) "we have here at our doorstep, America's greatest shrine - the Statue of Liberty - and we have failed to realize its potential."

The plaque in the nearby Visitor Center reads, "A tribute to Morris Pesin whose imagination, dedication, and perseverance were prime factors in making the dream of Liberty State Park a reality." In 1985, President Ronald Reagan presented Morris with the Volunteer Action Award at a White House ceremony.