

# DARING TO DREAM

A remembrance of the late Morris Pesin's crusade to establish Liberty State Park

ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON in 1957, a 46 year-old Morris Pesin packed up his family, got in his car, and took off on what he thought would be a short ride to the Statue of Liberty. Little did he know that this routine trip would launch him

to the symbol of the American dream was a nightmare: it took them three frustrating hours to travel from their Jersey City home through Manhattan to the Statue. What really riled Pesin was that from Liberty Island he could see the shore of his hometown Jersey City

was a mere half-mile away.

The view, however, was not pleasant. Broken barges, rotting piers and abandoned boats rested in shallow waters. Decaying railroad cars and rusting tracks were strewn along the waterfront. Garbage and litter lay in Lady Liberty's shadow.

Most people would have seen this backdrop to one of America's proudest shrines as a junkyard. But Morris Pesin looked at this scene of urban blight and dreamed.

Pesin's vision would transform the Jersey City

waterfront into a green, scenic urban park that would enhance the Statue's background and create something of beauty on Jersey City's shoreline.

Morris spent 19 years trying to get the park started, and the next 16 years fighting to preserve it as a park for the people.

In the beginning, Pesin, a lawyer

and merchant, knew that the best way to get support for his project was to get the public fired up about the idea. And he did, in dramatic fashion.

Pesin launched a public crusade. He formed the Statue of Liberty Causeway and Park Association which fought for government support and planning. He made trips to Trenton pleading his case. He ran for public office and was elected Councilman. He became a regular in local newspapers and at forums for public debate.

To kick off his crusade, Pesin went on a canoe ride in 1958 which has become legendary in Hudson County. Morris wanted to illustrate how close Liberty Island was to Jersey City. He and a journalist rode a small canoe from the Jersey City coast through New York Harbor to Liberty Island. The trip to the Statue, which had taken him almost three hours by car, was finished in eight minutes by canoe.

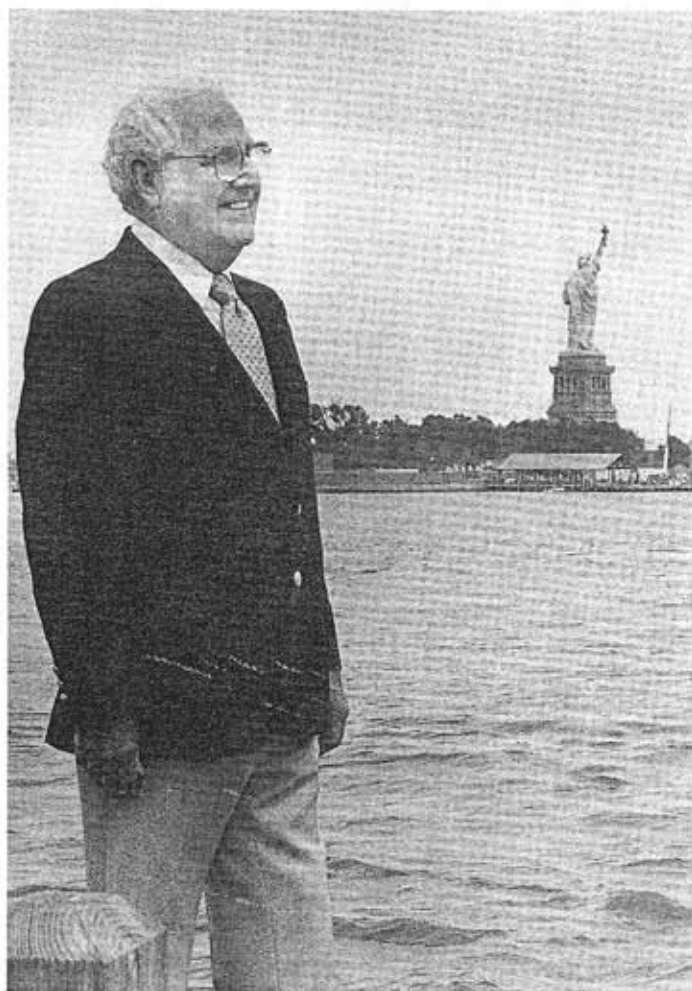
After the ride, people took notice of Pesin's dream. They started to read stories and hear their neighbors talk about the man with the idea of building a park among the abandoned piers on what would soon be known as New Jersey's Gold Coast.

Pesin appealed to every citizen's sense of patriotism. "Dozens of American cities are associated with a national shrine symbolizing the struggle for freedom and the story of America's greatness," he said. "We have here at our doorstep America's greatest shrine — the Statue of Liberty — and we have failed to realize its potential."

After 19 years of struggle and disappointment, Pesin's dream finally came true on Flag Day, June 14, 1976, when Liberty State Park officially opened. On that day, the proud Father of Liberty State Park rode down his street — Morris Pesin Drive, listened to Gov. Brendan Byrne, and watched Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts raise 50 state flags lining the park entrance.

The first phase of Liberty State Park was only 35 acres, featuring a southern overlook with a 14 acre lawn, a picnic area, a flag plaza, and a concession area looking out at the Statue of Liberty, less than 2,000 feet away. Today, Liberty State Park has grown to 800 acres and has become the most visited urban national park in the Nation with two million visitors a year — all beginning with one man's dream.

— by William T. Price III



"The Father of Liberty State Park," the late Morris Pesin smiles with pride at the sight of "America's proudest shrine," the Statue of Liberty.

on a much more important journey — a journey that would eventually leave his mark on Hudson County, New Jersey and the nation. For it was this experience that first planted the seed for Liberty State Park in the mind of Morris Pesin, the "Father of Liberty State Park."

For Morris and his family, the trip