

## The Incongruous Urban Angler

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My father, who owned and ran a barge company in New York, told me more than once that New York harbor waters were so full of life-destroying chemicals and noxious germs that his wooden vessels were safe from the worms that in cleaner rivers would eat their exposed timbers. Perhaps the memory of this description made me scoff at recent reports that, over the years, the construction of new sewage treatment plants, the decline in local and trans-ocean shipping, and the closing of a copper refinery in Brooklyn had so purged the waters that sportfishing in the harbor's center was becoming a popular pastime.

Not necessarily that successful anglers bring their catch home to eat or to feed to their cats. The thrill is sporting rather than culinary. Although some fishermen lose interest in their sport if they are unable to eat what they land, my son Adam and I do not share this disposition, and so I suggested to him that he accompany me in an effort to test New York City's waters.

We communicated with Captain Joseph Shastay of Jersey City—said by a knowledgeable acquaint-

ance of ours to be the sole full-time sportfishing guide in New York City waters—who agreed to meet us at the dock at Twenty-third Street and the East River at 8 AM. When the day came, I was on time, but, perhaps disoriented by the promise of catching healthy sport fish in waters I had known as too sordid even for worms, I took two circuits of the parking lot between Twenty-third and Twenty-fourth streets before I recognized that the khaki-clad man who had been sitting on the dock reading the *Wall Street Journal* was my son. We stood amongst the parked cars, looked at the slips filled with pleasure boats and rental yachts of varied sizes and conditions of cleanliness, and saw

no one who resembled a fishing guide.

The possibility of a hoax was beginning to grow in my mind when a 19-foot Mako—a center-console fishing boat powered by a substantial outboard motor—turned the corner of the Twenty-third Street pier. It bristled with fishing rods held in perpendicular holders—all presided over by the very model of a sportfishing guide: a man in his thirties, concealing his face behind the early stages of a reddish-brown beard and a fisherman's billed cap. Following hasty introductions, we boarded the Mako and headed downstream, pushed along by the East River's hearty current.



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