

“Local Boy Makes Good”

by Ralph J. Ferrusi
and Ralph J. Ferrusi III



Saturday night, January 28, 2017, at the New York B.A.S.S. Chapter Annual Awards Banquet at the Hilton Garden Inn in beautiful downtown Auburn, New York, Ralph Joseph Ferrusi III proudly accepted the Non-Boater Lunker*** of the Year award.

Some years (decades...) earlier, Ralph went fishin' on Oscawanna Lake with his grandfather, Ralph Joseph Ferrusi I (Pops), and caught his first-ever fish, a White Perch. Here's how Ralph III tells it:

"...man was Pops proud !!...we put it in a bucket to take home and I was so happy and I just couldn't leave it alone....well...the bucket spilled in the backseat and the fish slipped down behind the seat and I started howlin and Pops wasn't quite as happy/proud as he was just seconds earlier....we got home and got the Perch out from behind the seat...unfortunately...Mr. Perch had expired, but we showed him off to Grams, then he got buried in Pop's tomato garden..."

Ralph III's been a fisherman his entire life.

Around the same time, Pops took his son, Ralph Joseph Ferrusi II ("Junior") fishin' out on the Hudson in a small, leaky, borrowed wooden rowboat. Ralph II wasn't lucky at fishin', but boating caught on, and he has been a "boater" his entire life, once upon a time zooming all up and down the Hudson in his 14' fiberglass runabout, currently canoeing all up and down the Hudson (and Beyond) in Kevlar or Royalex racing canoes.

Back to Ralph III:

"I joined Ulster County Bassmasters in 1997, won my first Angler of the Year award in 2000, then went on to win the Angler of the Year award 12 more times in a row from 2005 up to 2016 for my "lucky 13th" time..... I've been fishing in the New York Bass Federation



on and off since 1998 when I found out about it through my Club.... Bass fishing has totally changed my entire life...."

Saturday morning, January 28, we picked up Ralph III and Ruby the Wonder Dog in Saugerties and headed for the Thruway to Albany. We unanimously agreed not to take the Thruway west from Albany: we'd take "the path less traveled", and experience a slower-paced, quieter Americana on Route 20. (A word to the wise here: we jumped off Exit 23 into Albany to pick up 20. It seemed pretty innocent on the map, but Albany's western suburbs went on and on and on, with endless traffic lights about every block or so). It seemed to take forever for Route 20 to become a country road, but finally, we were cruising through 1950's Americana: farms and small villages; hardly any traffic at all. Amazin'...

Then, between Duanesburg and Esperance, traffic was stopped, dead, for a long distance ahead: flashing red and blue lights all over the place, on both sides of the road. We crept along, stop and go, at about two miles per hour, and finally could see something enormous up ahead, creeping along, pretty much taking up both sides of the road. What the heck??? Long story short, a small STATE BRIEFS article in the Friday, February 3rd Poughkeepsie Journal revealed it was a 350,000-pound (175 tons...) General Electric-built steam turbine on a 20-foot-wide 350-foot-long truck, on it's way to Pennsylvania.

It stopped dead in Esperance, and while we were stopped Ralph figured out a back-roads route that might allow us to get ahead of it, and we finally popped out on now-four-lanes Route 20, cruising up and down long rolling hills, often,



This Striper was caught up by the Federal Dam across the Hudson in Albany, in the 90's.

amazingly in this day and age, the only car on the road, past big farms and through small towns and villages—Richfield Springs, Sangerfield, Cazenovia, Pompey—and finally into ultra-charming Skaneateles. By the way, somewhere along the way it started snowing: steady but light "lake effect" snow. Halfway between Skaneateles and Auburn we reached our night's lodging, Sue Dove's quiet, clean, comfortable Skaneateles Inn on 20.

A few words about Auburn and Cayuga County: Auburn—a great decent-sized upstate city, a place I might like to live—is perched right above, but not directly on Owasco Lake, the third (from the east) of eleven Finger Lakes. A quick geography lesson: The Finger Lakes, east to west: Otisco (small), Skaneateles, Owasco, Cayuga (the longest—40 miles), Seneca, Keuka, Canandaigua, then the much smaller, Honeoye, Canadice, Hemlock, and Conesus. All the lakes flow north into Lake Ontario.

Cayuga County is named for the Cayuga—"people of the wetlands"—Indian tribe, part of the Iroquois Federation. It has

more freshwater coastline than any other New York State County.

Some name-dropping: Auburn was once the home of William H. Seward, co-founder of the Republican Party. Abner Doubleday, baseball's founder, spent much of his life in Auburn. Harriet Tubman settled in Auburn after the Civil War. Millard Fillmore, 13th US President, was born near the village of Moravia, just south of Owasco Lake. Henry Wells, founder of Wells Fargo and American Express, began his career in Port Byron, just north of Auburn.

Back to the Skaneateles Inn on 20: we checked in, cleaned up—there was plenty of nice hot water and nice thick white towels—relaxed a bit, then around 5:00 our Garmin led us to the Hilton Garden Inn. As we walked in, we ran into Chris, a fellow N.Y. B.A.S.S. Federation angler, that Ralph knew from the tournaments: good start. The banquet room was nicely set up, with a big table full of cheese, crackers, and veggies.

There were three speakers, all with different Bass-fishing slants: the first speaker provided all kinds of interesting facts and figures on how big fishing was in New York State, and how many billions of dollars it brought into the State's economy. Next, Joseph Sancho, from New Windsor, a Pro whose career Ralph had followed, elaborated on the pros—and cons—of becoming a fishing "pro". Finally there was a taped video of a Skeeter Boats sales rep, describing thousands of dollars in incentives if you placed in a tournament and used one of their boats.

Then, after a nice, filling buffet dinner, awards were handed out, and Kath and I beamed with pride as Ralph accepted the nifty Non-Boater Lunker of the Year plaque and check from Federation president Peter Knight. Pops woulda been sooo proud.

There were raffle tables full of fishin'"stuff" on both sides of the hall. Kath had bought some tickets, and the next thing we hear is "46026": that's us! 46026 popped up several more times, and we left the hall with about \$300.00 worth of "swag"; Kath gave most of it to RIII.

The 24 Hours of Daytona was on TV back at the cozy motel. Later, I slept like a brick. We had a nice breakfast at the eat-where-the-locals-eat Hunter's Dinerant perched over the Owasco River on Genesee Street in Auburn, then headed over to the gigantic Bass Pro Shop on the other side of town. Finally ,we headed east on Route 20, but jumped on the Thruway before the endless west Albany suburbs.