

# OFF THE DOCK

WITH D. A. MANN

~ The Smiling Sheepshead ~

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I have a friend who is a diver and makes a good living cleaning the bottoms of large boats at yacht clubs, marinas, and private homes. Recently, he told me a story about a fish. This particular fish was a Sheepshead – a doormat sized specimen. Huge. As he scraped and scrubbed the hull, it became mesmerized with the particles being removed and floating with the current. It also became mesmerized with my friend; curious to the extent of hovering at arm's length while he toiled away. At one point, as he rotated around to continue cleaning, he was face to face with this fish. His mouth was open showing off rows of white “human” teeth; and, he appeared to be smiling.

As I was making my rounds as a dockmaster at local yacht club the following week, I spotted him with an arm on a swimmer's platform and his mask flipped up. He was grinning ear-to-ear. “I just met his mother”, he said, as I stood on the dock looking down at him. “I could have touched her. I've never seen these huge fish hanging out under the boats before; lots of babies; but, not the parents.” They definitely added a very cool dimension to a rather mundane job.

There is a lesson to be learned from this experience about how we interact with Mother Nature: When we are *on* the water, we are the aggressors; when we are *under* the water, we are all friends.

Welcome to their world.