Growing up on the Point in the 50s, I enjoyed what we now refer to as a “free range” childhood. Free range means that in days gone by, children were given quite a bit of freedom to wander, explore, and even roam the streets of their neighborhoods. There were boundaries, of course, with Hunters Playground extending my own backyard to the east and Van Zandt Pier to the west. It was a magical place to roam, especially for the youngest (by 14 years!) child of George and Gwen Behan. Quite shy as a youngster, for me spending time by myself was a habit. It was interrupted by visits from my cousin, Carol Beekman, who was only 6 weeks younger than I. Either alone or with companions, I delighted in my special place.

I attended Saint Joseph’s School, at Washington Square, and in 5th grade a large enrollment forced the school day to be split into two sessions. My session began at 12:30, giving me weekday mornings all to myself! I remember walking down to the Pier, bucket in hand, to collect periwinkles and catch crabs. To catch larger crabs, I followed by mother’s instruction. I would crack open a mussel, tie a string to its broken shell and using this bait, “fish” for crabs that were too scary for fingers alone!! Waiting for one to slide out from under a rock, I would find and latch it onto my bait, and then slowly hoist it successfully out and into my bucket. It was a thrill! After a quick trip back up the street to show off my catch, I would return to release them for another day. I remember my mother telling me how she and her siblings (more free range youth) would gather mussels and cook them in a tin can over a small fire they would build on the beach. I was fascinated and amazed. (I still am.) It seemed so exotic, like a scene from The Box Car Children, my favorite book.

Learning about the seasons and the natural environment was part of growing up on the Point. My mother was a great friend of the sisters at the Cenacle, and each September, she would get permission for me and a cousin or two, to collect chestnuts from the huge trees on their property. We came home with grocery bags full of beautiful, shiny, mahogany-colored treasure. In wintertime, a good snowfall would turn Hunters Playground, in my imagination’s eye, into an Artic landscape, where I, with my trusty sled dog, Peppi, (of short haired hound extraction) could trudge through mounds of snow and drifts, hoping to make our way back to base camp through the blinding blizzard!

Ah, growing up on the point was GREAT for the imagination!!