A Little Piece of Paradise

Summers on Long Island shore were glorious for suburban kids.

By Judy Moore, San Pedro, California

AT THE END of the school year, my family would flee the New York City suburbs and drive at the breakneck speed of 25 to 30 mph out to the eastern shores of Long Island.

On the inside shore of the northern peninsula was our little piece of Heaven, a cottage near Jamesport. The rented cottage sat alone in a field of tall grass about 100 yards from Flanders Bay. Farther down the road, almost out of sight, was a year-round house. Other than that, we were quite alone.

The rustic cottage included two bedrooms, an all-purpose living room and a primitive kitchen. Electric service consisted of single light bulbs hanging in the middle of each room.

The plumbing was a hand pump in the kitchen; our only other "plumbing" was a two-seater outhouse across the dirt road, near some bushes and poison ivy.

This is where I spent some of the first summers of my life, from 1936 to 1945.

We children were free to roam and explore. We swam, climbed trees, rowed our boat, rode our bikes, dug out hiding places in the bushes, played croquet and caught butterflies and fiddler crabs—but only after our chores were done.

My mother's day was quite different. She spent much of her time in the crude kitchen with an icebox, a three-burner kerosene stove, a two-burner hot plate and a portable oven that was moved from

burner to burner.

Mother did the laundry by hand with a washboard, pumping the water and then heating it on the stove. What a job—oh, the aching knuckles! She took it all in stride, although she did say that she had to get a vitamin shot after we returned to civilization.

During the workweek, Daddy stayed in the suburbs with my grandmother, but on summer weekends, he was ours. He rode the Cannonball Express to Jamesport every Friday evening. My middle sister, Carol, and I would compete to see who would be the first to see his train as it came down the railroad tracks, belching great plumes of smoke.

Then, there was Daddy, stepping down from the railway platform, the pockets of his business suit filled with Chiclets or Life Savers candy for us.

A good part of the weekend was spent fishing. Daddy loved to fish and taught us how to bait a hook and set it when we felt a nibble on the line. We learned how to clean the fish and prepare them for a meal.

As much as I loved being with my father, I would dissolve into tears when I saw the poor fish dangling from the barbed hook. I would beg Daddy to return it to the water, which he always did. Pretty soon, I was no longer invited to go on these family expeditions.

When we saw the swallows, we knew it was time to leave behind the lovely, warm, sunny days of summer, which passed much too quickly.

Before returning to the suburbs, however, we underwent the olive-oil ritual. The salt water of the bay and the baking sun had turned our hair into wild, wiry “frizz bombs.”

My mom’s remedy was to drench our heads with olive oil, which had to stay on all day—no swimming underwater during the day.

In the evening, we would undergo several shampoos and thus be made presentable for suburban society.

I still relive these times in my mind. Our cottage getaways were a wonderful gift from my parents that has carried me through the many difficult times that we all have to face in life. For this, I am eternally grateful.