

Newspaper stories say she was not identified until friends went to police after hearing descriptions of Mary's clothing on television.

Jacqueline O'Keefe Lincoln, a close friend of Mary's who had last seen her that Friday night, said she and Mary both wore scrimshaw star pendants like the one police described. A mutual friend, Debbie DeTesso, called Lincoln when she heard it on television. "She thought it was me," Lincoln said.

Lincoln and DeTesso went to police with the information.

The shoes, jeans and a blue and white bandana she was wearing the night she disappeared were never found. The murder weapon, believed to be a "blunt object," also was never found.

Bob Pelletier knew the Tanner family well. Pelletier's mother and Mary Tanner's mother, Shirley, had worked together at Jones' Diner on Main Street in Kennebunk, which is now the site of the gas station where Mary was last seen the night of Friday, July 7, 1978.

Pelletier was dispatched to inform the Tanners of Mary's death.

"I was a police officer and I was the first one on the scene and seeing as how I knew the family as well as I did, it was kind of left up to me to do that. It was not easy."

The state medical examiner at the time, Dr. Henry Ryan, said death was caused by blows to the head.

It would be a cliché to describe the town of Kennebunk as shocked and angered to learn that one of their children had been brutally murdered. The 6,000 residents of Kennebunk knew one another like members of an extended family. They looked out for one another, trusted one another. And until that Tuesday morning of July 10, when the papers reported that Mary Tanner was the woman in Gracie Evans Field, they had felt safe, free to let their children come and go in the belief that they were looked out for wherever they were.

Mary Tanner's death brought that sense of security to a sudden end.

Because Gracie Evans Field was so remote, so difficult to find that only locals for the most part knew where it was, the immediate conclusion was that only someone intimately familiar with the area, most likely someone living among them, would have known that was a place to leave Mary's body.

Nearly 35 years later, that feeling of loss, tragedy, grief and suspicion still lingers in the town. And police are still looking for the killer.

A CLOSER LOOK

A memorial service for Mary Tanner will be held June 29, at 7 p.m., at the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church, 114 Main Street, Kennebunk.

For more information, see www.facebook.com/pages/Justice-for-Mary.

Anyone who has information about the case can contact Maine State Police Detective Corey Pike at corey.p.pike@maine.gov or call 800-228-0857.

As the 35th anniversary of her murder approached, a group of people have come together around the idea that they can help find the person or persons who killed Mary Tanner. Some are Mary's friends and former classmates. Some are older, adults at the time of Mary's death; some much younger than Mary. All had been deeply marked by the brutal murder of one of their own, and they all are determined to bring the killer to justice.

A Facebook page was created in March. Entitled Justice for Mary, its mission is "to honor the memory of Mary Ellen Tanner of Kennebunk, Maine, and to seek justice in her unsolved 1978 murder."

Launched on March 17, within four hours the page had garnered 125 "likes." In the succeeding weeks, the number of people joining the page has grown to more than 400.

The Justice for Mary folks are an industrious bunch. T-shirts, bumper stickers and posters have been printed and distributed throughout the area. A generous donor has given \$1,000 for a memorial bench in Rotary Park at the end of the Mousam River Bridge, where Mary was last seen about midnight Friday night, July 7. More than \$500 has been raised for the Mary Tanner Memorial Scholarship, which is given each year to a graduating senior chosen by the faculty. And a memorial service has been planned. To be held at 7 p.m. June 29 at the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church in Kennebunk, hundreds are expected to attend.

Charles Tanner III, Mary's brother, 12 years older than Mary and living away from the home at the time, has become one of the unofficial spokesmen for the group, and is the sole contact with state police, who have never closed the case.

In the meantime, there have been hundreds of posts to the page, including pictures of Mary and her friends, planning notes and



A portrait of Mary Tanner, age unknown



The three Tanner children, from left, Gail J. Tanner, Mary and Beth (Elizabeth), 1969.



From left, Elizabeth Tanner, Charles Tanner Jr., and Mary Tanner, 1977



Celeste Wormwood Lessard and Corine Wormwood-Baker pose with their Justice for Mary T-shirts. Photo by Rich Obrey

pep talks to keep working hard for Mary, comments among friends, transcripts of newspaper stories, recollections and expressions of hope that the case will be solved.

There also have been frequent pleas to contact police with information.

The result has been that people have come forward. Names, places, dates, all gleaned from memories of what happened the night of July 7, have been forwarded to investigators.

Charlie Tanner believes that the Justice for Mary page "has definitely revitalized the investigation."

"The wheel wasn't squeaking. She was dead 34 years," he said.

The officer in charge of the case is Detective Corey Pike, a member of the Maine State Police Major Crimes Unit.

Tanner says he and Pike have spoken on the phone, exchanged emails and had at least one face-to-face meeting in recent months.

"She set my mind at ease," Tanner said of his recent meeting with Pike.