

names of potential suspects “have been banded about for years” among residents in Kennebunk. The name of one in particular, a man who no longer lives in Maine, is well-known among many of the people interviewed for this story. When asked about it in interviews, they say, yes, that name is on their list of suspects.

“If the point comes to it that they get a real good suspect that they like,” Tanner said, “it would still come down to a confession case. There isn’t enough DNA evidence to do any good.”

The body was so badly decomposed that little physical evidence could be gathered that would be useful even with modern DNA technology, according to Tanner. The question of whether Mary was sexually assaulted, Tanner said, also could not be conclusively determined because she had lain in the hot field for two days.

Shelley Wigglesworth, a writer and lifelong resident of Kennebunk, has been an active supporter of the Justice for Mary project from the beginning. Charlie Tanner says a column Wigglesworth wrote for the York County Coast Star was the spark that energized the movement to find Mary’s killer.

The column, which appeared in January, describes the cloud hanging over the town over the unsolved murders of two young girls in Kennebunk in the span of almost eight years: Mary Tanner and Mary C. Olenchuk. Olenchuk, 15, disappeared Aug. 9, 1970. Her decomposed body was found in a barn in Ogunquit two weeks later, on Aug. 22. Olenchuk’s murder also has never been solved.

“My hopes are, that by periodically highlighting these cases, new light may be shed on one or both of these horrific crimes that shook up our small town all those years ago, altering it forever,” Wigglesworth wrote in the column.

In virtually any conversation about Mary Tanner, people mention Mary Olenchuk, and some wonder if the two crimes are related. Police have said there is no apparent connection.

“We have nothing to lose,” said Wigglesworth, who was 9 years old when Mary was killed. “You can’t ever give up hope, you just can’t. We’re not going to.”

Wigglesworth says Facebook and other social media offered people the opportunity to organize in a way they hadn’t been possible before.

“People had waited long enough. That’s how I felt,” Wigglesworth said. “This has been ignored for too long.”

Timothy Ames, director of sales at the Nonantum Resort, who was two years ahead of Mary Tanner at Kennebunk High School, said the Facebook page “got people talking again.”

Ames worked on the fundraising effort to purchase the bench for Rotary Park. The group also plans to plant lilac bushes taken from the Tanner’s yard on Cat Mousam Road, Ames said. Lilacs were Mary’s favorite flower.

The Tanner property was purchased by the Maine Turnpike Authority years ago and the house was torn down. But the lilac bushes remain on the site.

“I’m just a classmate interested in keeping the conversation going,” Ames says of his role with Justice for Mary. “There are a lot of people out there,” he said. “A huge part of us are still young, still back in 1978, thinking, ‘Who did this?’”

“Thirty-five years ago our lives were just totally turned upside down,” said Jackie Lincoln, who now lives in Virginia.

Losing a close friend that way was crushing, but they had to find some way to go on.

“Back then we choked it back and swallowed it down. We didn’t get counseling for it. We just grieved quietly, she said.”

Tanner puts it this way: “I’m past it but I’m not over it.”

Dawn Osborne Ames, described by many as Mary’s closest friend, seems to have been hit the hardest by Mary’s death. Friends say Ames collapsed at the graveside the day Mary was buried in the family plot in Biddeford.

Ames, who had been friends with Mary “ever since first grade,” had expected to graduate with her best friend the following year.

“I couldn’t go back to school,” Ames said. “I had to go to night school.”

Since she “only needed a couple of credits,” Ames said, she took the classes in the evening at Kennebunk High School.

“I just didn’t want people coming up to me and stuff,” she said.

Police reports, interviews with friends and news reports create a mosaic of the events that occurred that Friday night Mary disappeared.

The evening began with the Kennebunkport Dump Association’s annual dump parade through Dock Square. It was a satirical celebration of the days when town dumps were places to meet and gossip and search for cast-off treasures. The parades featured a dump queen and floats decorated with junk.

Dawn Ames said she saw Mary in Dock

Square briefly before the start of the parade. Dawn was with her boyfriend, John Ames, Timothy Ames’ brother, whom she later married. Dawn and John went off together after talking briefly with Mary. Dawn never saw Mary again.

About 7 p.m., Mary turned up at Glen-Mor Lanes bowling alley on Route 1, a local hangout. From there she hitchhiked with a friend to a local party spot on a hill overlooking Route 9, not far from the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge and Parson’s Beach.

The hill, known then as “Nigger Hill,” was a popular party spot with local youth because they could drink and smoke marijuana and keep an eye out for police, who could be spotted coming up the road.

Among the many young people at the hill that night were Jackie O’Keefe Lincoln and her sister, Candice. Mary and the O’Keefe sisters left the party together. The last time the sisters saw Mary was at the intersection of Routes 9 and 35, Cooper’s Corner, in Kennebunk Lower Village.

“Mary was heading towards Kennebunk. I’m across the street heading toward Wells. My sister was heading back toward Dock Square, Lincoln said.”

It was still reasonably early in the evening, just dark, maybe 9 p.m.; Lincoln doesn’t remember exactly. Mary was headed home early because she was getting up early to attend a funeral the next day in Massachusetts. Her father was planning to drive her, Lincoln said.

The funeral was in Waltham, Mass., for the brother of Mary’s boyfriend, Michael Higgins, whom Mary had been dating for some months. They attended prom together that year. Higgins’ brother had been killed in an accident on the Maine Turnpike over the July 4 holiday.

Phone calls and messages to Higgins had not been returned at press time.

It is 3.9 miles up Route 35 from Cooper’s Corner to the Mousam River Bridge, where Mary was last seen around midnight. Neither news reports nor recollections of friends account for how Mary got from Cooper’s Corner to the bridge, whether she walked or caught a ride.

That young people walked alone at night or hitchhiked from place to place was not unusual.

Linda Lawrence Frederick, who hitchhiked with Mary from the bowling alley to the hill that night, said that was just how kids got around those days. Frederick, one year young-

er than Mary, said she never hitchhiked alone, however.

“We were young and invincible and we didn’t think anything could happen to us,” said Frederick, who now lives in Sanford.

Corine Wormwood and her younger sister, Celeste, now Corine Baker and Celeste Lessard, say they spotted Mary on the bridge about midnight. The driver of the car they were in was contacted for an interview but declined to comment.

“I don’t remember where we were coming from or where we were going,” Baker said. “My memory was that we were at Cumberland Farms,” the gas station at the south end of the bridge where Jones’ Diner used to stand. “She had asked us for a ride. We were going somewhere and we told her we couldn’t give her a ride. We were going down the road – my memory – we were on the road and we felt a little guilty, and we came back and she was gone. That’s all I remember.”

Fancine Battles Tanguay, who now lives in Wells Branch, just over the Kennebunk line, graduated from Kennebunk High School in 1964. She was an adult and had children when Mary was killed.

She didn’t know Mary personally, but she knew the Tanners. Her father and Charlie Tanner Jr. worked at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard together. She went to school with Charlie Tanner III.

Tanguay describes herself as “the grandma” of the Justice for Mary group.

“I want to see this solved. It’s not going to change anything, but it needs to be solved. Somebody needs to be held accountable,” she said.

“You have to remember that this was the second murder that Kennebunk had had in less than 10 years. So it was not only noticeable, it was frightening,” Tanguay said. “And I saw what it did to the people in the town. It was very unsettling, and if it could happen in Kennebunk, it could happen in my neighborhood in Wells Branch.”

Last month, on May 6, more than 30 people gathered at Kennebunk Free Library to talk about Mary and to hear progress reports on the projects they had undertaken. T-shirts, posters and bumper stickers cluttered the table. On a table by the door was a jar for donations.

In an interview outside the meeting, Mary’s sister, Gail J. Tanner, described her sister as “a beautiful kid.”

She also spoke bitterly about people in town