

who had characterized her sister as irresponsible, a “party girl, like she deserved to die.”

“Stuff was said that wasn’t true, that was cruel,” said Tanner, who was born two years before Mary.

“She was just the family pet,” Tanner said. “She was our little sister, we were protective. She was a wonderful kid. Everybody loved her. Everything she did she did with love.”

Gail went on at length about her sister’s zest for life, her sense of humor.

“She would have been a great comedian. She was funny. She could make anyone smile, no matter how they felt,” Tanner said.

“She was the type of person that if she knew someone hadn’t eaten, she would make them a peanut butter sandwich so they would have something to eat.”

Mary’s eldest sister, Elizabeth, now living in South Carolina, did not wish to be interviewed for this story.

All of Mary’s friends described her in similar terms.

Jane Whitten Needham, a retired U.S. Navy chief now living in Virginia, who lived next door to Linda Lawrence Frederick, drove up to Maine for the meeting at the library.

“She was very fun-loving. She loved everybody and everybody loved her,” Needham said in a telephone interview. “She was fun and just somebody you wanted to be with. She was kind and warm and she was always smiling, always,” Needham said.

“They keep saying she was a party girl, but that doesn’t describe her,” Needham said.

“She was a majorette and I was a flag girl,” Needham said. “We did normal things, the things kids do. You go to school, you come home, you do your chores. She was a majorette. You have to practice. You work.”

She noted that Mary had a summer job at the Glen-Mor Restaurant, which burned in 1997.

But yes, Needham concedes, the kids did party, and Mary was among them.

“We did go in the woods and we did drink in the woods and we did pee in the woods, but our parents did not know where we were. They trusted us.”

Frederick’s description is as simple as it gets: “We drank and smoked marijuana.”

Needham was emphatic that parents looked out for their children.

“They trusted us,” she said. “It was safe there ... or everybody thought it was.”

Mary’s mother, who died in 2011 at the age of 92, was “a strict and caring person,” Needham said.

“Her parents were not not supervising Mary,” she said. “They were supervising her.”

“She had beautiful parents,” Lincoln said. Mary’s father, Charles Tanner Jr., “was a wonderful person, a beautiful person and really good dad.”

Shirley Tanner “was funny, Shirley was outgoing,” Lincoln said. “She had a great sense of humor.” She and Mary were alike in that way, Lincoln said.

Lincoln added, “They trusted her.”

Tanguay also dismisses the negative talk about Mary.

“She was in gymnastics, majorettes. The kids who do that usually are so busy they’re not a problem. She involved herself in good things,” Tanguay said.

So why, after 35 years, have people become so intent on finding Mary’s killer?

“You hit a certain age and everyone wants to go home again,” Tanguay said. “You start thinking and reminiscing, and now there is Facebook. I think Facebook has had a big effect because they have been able to talk about it.”

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