

DNA | FROM C1

Family gets first look at suspect

◉ sample ever submitted to the state lab and the oldest one matched there.

Gayle Hogland said getting that phone call and learning about the arrest was almost as shocking as learning their daughter had been murdered.

"After awhile it goes on for so long you think, was it a bad dream?" she said. "It has just taken such a load off our hearts and our minds."

Hogland, a 1990 graduate of Fort Zumwalt North High School, was last seen in the early morning of Jan. 6, 1991, after attending a wedding reception with friends in Old Monroe. On the way home, she got a flat tire and pulled into a driveway along Highway W. Investigators believe Dowell, who lived in the area at the time, stopped on the premise of helping her, but instead killed her. A highway worker discovered her body more than a day later about 15 miles away from her car in a roadside ditch. She had been raped and beaten on the head.

The Hoglands lived on a farm in Wentzville at the time, and the rumors swirled in the months following their daughter's death. Schoolmates asked Hogland's two younger sisters if the killer had chopped her up in pieces. Gayle Hogland would stand in line at the grocery store, look at the person next to her, and think, "Did you kill my daughter?"

Gene Hogland suffered a massive stroke two months after the murder, and doctors attributed it to stress. He went through extensive therapy but still has short-term memory problems. He can't remember details about his daughter's death. The family moved to Springfield in the fall of

1991, partly to get a fresh start.

"There was so much going on at the time, there were so many rumors, it had just become an uneasy, unsafe place for us," Gayle Hogland said.

The couple has three other daughters, Becky, now 36, Carrie, 30, and Amy, 28. Stephanie would be 34.

The Hoglands describe Stephanie as bubbly, active in sports and church and an honor roll student. She was getting ready to register for classes at the University of Missouri at St. Louis. She wanted to study law and help people who couldn't afford representation.

"She loved to speak out, and boy, she was good at voicing her opinion," she said. "She wasn't mouthy. She knew what she stood for and she stood up for it."

Gene Hogland agrees: "She was real witty. She could come up with more to say in five minutes than you could say in a half hour."

The Hoglands have used their faith to help them through the last 16 years. They are members of the United Church of God in Springfield.

"To keep our sanity, we just thought, 'We're just going to turn it over to the Lord and he'll take care of it,' and he has," said Gayle Hogland.

Still, it's hard looking across the dinner table and not seeing Stephanie sitting there, and it's hard not knowing whether she would have married and had children.

"We were talking about this on the way up here," Gene Hogland said Thursday. "We feel like we've been robbed."

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