

# The Washington Post

## Teen Recounts Night Of Medevac Crash

18-Year-Old Survivor Visits High School

By Jenna Johnson  
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Finally, Jordan Wells has mastered telling her story. There are still tears, but she has a mental script about how to answer the toughest questions: What is it like to be the only survivor of a fatal helicopter crash? What is it like to have a limb amputated? Why share this story so publicly? Isn't it painful to retell it over and over?

"I won't tell you the whole story," Wells began during a Wednesday morning visit to Westlake High School in Waldorf.

The 18-year-old graduated from Westlake in June. Less than four months later, the Maryland State Police medical helicopter she was aboard crashed in Prince George's County, killing the four others onboard.

Although Westlake students and teachers visited Wells in the hospital and at home, this was her first visit to the school. She was greeted by clapping teachers and screaming cheerleaders with orange-and-green pompoms: "Yay, Jordan! Yay, Jordan!" they shouted.

After several rounds of hugs, Wells sat before a small crowd in a music room and told her story. She began, as she often does, in the dark woods. She woke up and felt pain shooting up her legs. It was freezing cold. She was alone.

Wells figured everyone at the school knew what had happened before that. On a Saturday night in September, she and a high school friend, Ashley Younger, 17, were in a car accident in Waldorf. They were loaded into a medical helicopter bound for Prince George's Hospital Center. The helicopter crashed, killing Younger and three crew members. Wells was critically injured, and one of her legs was amputated below the knee.

While talking to the students, Wells skipped to the rescue. Expressions on the somber faces in the room changed quickly as she told the students how the rescuers cut off her prized designer jeans.

"I'm just thinking, 'Please don't cut the jeans,' " Wells deadpanned.

Her mother, Lynn Wells, said telling and re-telling the story has helped her daughter come to terms with what happened. The family also has visited the crash site and last month attended a National Transportation Safety Board hearing in the District that examined a spike in the number of medical helicopter crashes last year.

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For the students at Westlake, Wells kept the story moving. After she was found in the woods, she was loaded into an ambulance and slowly started to let go. "I guess I almost died because I felt so at peace," she said.

The next thing Wells said she remembered was a week and a half later, waking up in the hospital. Tears welled up as she recounted learning that her friend had died.

Wells decided to wear purple Wednesday because it was Younger's favorite color. It was the first time Wells has been able to wear purple.

"Lord knows she's in heaven," she said of her friend.

As students and teachers cried, Westlake Principal Chrystal Benson presented Wells with a gift. "We've been thinking about you," Benson said.

Then members of the Westlake football team gave Wells a signed football from the Class 3A state championship game that they had won in December.

"You were an inspiration to this team," Coach Dominic Zaccarelli said. "We were thinking about you the whole time we were on that field."

That's why Wells said she keeps retelling her painful story: to her friends and family members, to rounds of reporters, to the viewing audience of "Good Morning America" on Friday morning and that of the television show "20/20" on Friday night.

"As long as I know my accident and my suffering has helped other people," she said, "then I'm happy."

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