

I'd been called out on the morning shift to respond to a motorhome rollover collision where five people had been ejected. And luckily, when I arrived on scene, everyone was alive at the time. It'd been such a warm summer that the ground was really soft and everyone had landed in fairly decent spots that they were injured, but they – no one had died on the scene. And there was one girl, Jayla, who was nine at the time, and she had the misfortune of striking some concrete with her head and was being transported, and while I was there, I was freshly out of the academy, it was my first big collision scene by myself, and family started coming to help collect things because they'd been coming home from the rodeo in Montana.

And family members kept saying how much Jayla loved her cowboy hat. She had a personalized hat with her name. It was pink with sparkles all over it and she loved the rodeo. It was her favorite thing and she couldn't talk stop talking about it. And I'd spotted it up in a Russian olive tree a little ways in, and I just kept thinking about how much – when she wakes up, that she's gonna want something there that makes her smile, that brings her a little bit of comfort. And so I went in, I got scratched up a little bit, but went in and grabbed the cowboy hat so that the family could take it to her.

Coming out of a collision like that where you are sleeping, and the next thing you know, you're going through the air, and then you're in a hospital where you don't know any of your surroundings and you're a kid, is gonna be very scary. You're not gonna know where your family is because the rest of them are in hospital beds. I can only imagine that she would've woken up and been scared and confused, and that – my hope is that it just gave her a little bit of comfort, helped her be a little less scared.

{Later} when I ran into her father, we – I caught up with him about how the rest of the family was doing and specifically asked about Jayla, and he said that she was doing marvelous. She's got her personality back, she's laughing all the time, and she's gonna be starting school again this year. When I saw Jayla, she came up and she gave me a big hug, and she just said, "Thank you," for finding her hat, and that she still wears it, and she loves it. She told me that she still loves wearing that cowboy hat, and just thank you for finding it and getting it to her, and she just gave me a big hug, and it was great to see her doing so well.

I love the difference that being a Washington State Trooper means. You get to help people out. You get to keep your community safer. And that's the biggest thing is being able to make an impact on my community in a positive way, keep people safe, and going home at the end of the night in one piece.

I'm Trooper Jerrica Sparks with the Washington State Patrol.