

After crash, girl walks through woods to safety

AP | By BRUCE SCHREINER | Jan 4th 2015 7:03AM

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KUTTAWA, Ky. (AP) -- When the small plane crashed into the woods, 7-year-old Sailor Gutzler called out to her family. No one responded.

She thought they might be knocked out, or possibly dead. Either way, police said, she knew she needed to get help.

So, bleeding and alone, Sailor, dressed in a short-sleeve shirt, shorts and one sock, walked about a mile

in near-freezing temperatures through thick briar patches and woods before she found Larry Wilkins' home. She knocked on the door, and he answered to find a thin, black-haired girl, whimpering and

trembling.

"She literally fell out of the sky into a dark hole and didn't have anybody but her own will to live and get help for her family," Kentucky Police Lt. Brent White said. "Absolutely amazing."

Wilkins said the girl had a "bloody nose, bloody arms, bloody legs, one sock, no shoes, crying."

"She told me that her mom and dad were dead, and she had been in a plane crash, and the plane was upside down," Wilkins said.

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The home of Larry Wilkins sits nestled in the woods, Saturday, Jan. 3, 2015, in Kuttawa, Ky. A plane crashed in the woods beside his home and a 7-year-old girl, the lone survivor of the crash, walked approximately three quarters of a mile to the house where Wilkins called for assistance. (AP Photo/Timothy D. Easley)

Federal Aviation Administration officials arrived at the

crash scene Saturday to try to determine why the small Piper PA-34 crashed on Friday evening, killing four people, including the girl's parents, Marty Gutzler, 48, and his wife, Kimberly Gutzler, 46, authorities said.

Also killed were Sailor's sister Piper Gutzler, 9; and cousin Sierra Wilder, 14. All were from Nashville, Illinois.

The plane reported engine trouble and lost contact with air traffic controllers around 5:55 p.m. CST, authorities said. Controllers tried to direct the pilot to an airport 5 to 7 miles from the crash scene.

About 40 minutes later, 911 dispatchers received a call from Wilkins.

Wilkins said he brought the girl inside, got a washcloth and "washed her little face off and her legs."

"Brave little girl, outstanding little girl," he said. "I feel real bad for her."

The girl had a broken wrist, but was coherent and calm when interviewed by authorities, White said.

White and Wilkins both described the terrain she walked through as heavily wooded with thick brush. White said the girl traversed two embankments, a hill and a creek bed. Wilkins said the temperatures were below 40 degrees when the girl showed up at his door.

The girl was treated at a hospital and released to a relative, police said.

In Nashville, a man stepped outside the family's white, split-level home on Saturday and politely waved off a reporter.

"Not now," he said, his head lowered, before he stepped back inside.

Neighbors said Marty and Kim Gutzler had lifelong roots in the largely rural southern Illinois town about 50 miles east of St. Louis.

Marty ran the furniture store that his father started, and the couple was well-known and well-liked, said neighbor Carla Povolish.

With two basketball hoops in the driveway, the

Gutzlers' home was the center of neighborhood fun on a block full of children.

"All the kids in the neighborhood are just so upset about this," she said.

Povolish said the two sisters - Sailor and Piper - were together constantly.

"That's what's going to be so devastating for the little one," she said.

The FAA said late Friday that the plane had taken off from Tallahassee Regional Airport, Florida, and was bound for Mount Vernon, Illinois. Sailor told police the family had been to Key West, Florida.

Attorney Kent Plotner, who was serving as family spokesman, said the Gutzler family was devastated.

"We ask that you respect our privacy at this difficult time. Please pray for us, especially for Sailor Gutzler," the family said in a statement.

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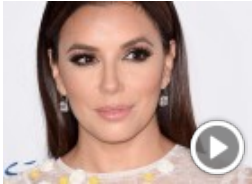




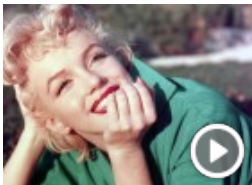
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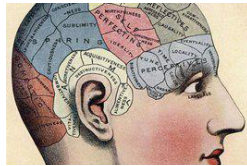
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