



Brutus, Alicia Killam and Jeff Wiggin.

Faithful boxer shows he's man's best friend

By JOHN McNICHOLAS
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SANTA CRUZ — Brutus is an honorable dog. The six-year-old boxer was stabbed and nearly killed protecting his master and his master's girlfriend from a knife-swinging assailant in Nisene Marks park.

Jeff Wiggin and Alicia Killam, both 17, escaped unharmed. Tuesday, Brutus was in good condition at the Santa Cruz Veterinary Hospital.

"The only thing I'm worried about is that he's going to be O.K.," Wiggin said Tuesday. He's my best friend."

The couple was walking Sunday in Aptos' heavily-wooded Nisene Marks State Park, when a bearded man in a leather jacket and knee-length leather boots began berating and cursing them, according to Wiggin.

They walked away, but a short time later, the man jumped out from behind a tree.

"He started yelling at us about our dog and a bunch of other stuff," Wiggin said. "He really seemed like he was on drugs or something. His eyes were wide and all glazed. He was ranting and raving, and pulled a large hunting knife. Then he slipped on a rock and yelled, and that's when I turned my dog loose."

As Brutus ran toward the man's dog — "to see whether it was worth the

fight" — the attacker regained his feet, kicked the dog and then stabbed him deeply behind the right shoulder. Then, the man turned and ran screaming up the creek, Wiggin said.

Killam had run for help, and Wiggin struggled to carry the bleeding, 80-pound dog as far as he could. When he could go no farther, he sat trying to staunch the bleeding and waited for help to come from the park's entrance, some two miles distant.

After some three hours, rangers and a passer-by arrived and rigged a stretcher from their shirts and branches to carry the dog through knee-deep water to the park's entrance.

By the time Brutus arrived at the animal hospital, he was ice cold and nearly dead, said one of the two doctors who worked on him for three hours.

However, by Tuesday he was doing "remarkably well," Dr. Thomas La Hue said. If infection doesn't set in, he should recover completely, a prospect which cheers Wiggin.

"He's always been a protective dog, but he's not a people-eater or anything. He's just kind of my best friend, and he looks out for me."

Rangers say there is a suspect in the case and have turned over the investigation to the Sheriff's Department.