

Women describe kidnap ordeal

Gunman arrested; charges include attempted murder

By CATHY REDFERN

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Three Santa Cruz women won't soon forget their harrowing run-in with an armed and desperate fugitive. But perhaps they can rest a little more soundly now that David Melberg is in jail.

Melberg, 38, allegedly shot a female park ranger Tuesday at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park before kidnapping a mother and daughter at gunpoint and stealing their car.

The women were released hours later, unharmed.

Melberg was nabbed Wednesday in San Jose, after a struggle with members of a special police unit searching for him. He faces charges including attempted murder.

Melberg was the focus of a manhunt in Santa Cruz early Tuesday and later in San Jose after he shot Lt. Sharon Galligan when she questioned him about camping illegally at Henry Cowell park.

Galligan, a 16-year veteran of the state park system, is expected to be released from the hospital this week. She underwent surgery Tuesday to insert pins in her right knee.

A star volleyball and basketball player at Chico State and a Police Olympics medalist, Galligan, 45, will need to stay off that knee for at least 30 days, he said.

After allegedly shooting Galligan, Melberg fled to Deer Path Road, off Graham Hill Road about a mile from the campground.

Eleanor "Ellie" Williams, 84, was outside her home on Deer Path Road picking up the newspaper when a desperate Melberg ran up to her, held a gun to her head and demanded her car keys.

He forced her inside the house, but she couldn't find the keys and had to wake her daughter. Melberg then fled with the two women in their Mercedes.

"Of course, I was a little stunned," a tired Williams said Wednesday. "I'm very happy he was caught. He frightened us to death and would have gone on doing that if they hadn't caught him."



GALLIGAN

Park ranger recovering from gunshot wound

Ordeal

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Her daughter, Marty Williams, said they were able to remain calm despite Melberg's agitation. He told them he had shot someone, she said.

"It was quite an ordeal, to say the least," she said. "I don't normally have armed men walking into my room."

"But I'm not going to let it overpower me. Stuff happens and you deal with it. It's over."

Melberg was caught about 8 a.m. Wednesday after leaving a home at 397 Arleta Ave. in San Jose, close to where he had dropped off the Santa Cruz women the day before.

Police were canvassing the neighborhood and happened across Melberg. They walked up to him intending to show him what turned out to be his photograph, said Joseph Deras of the San Jose Police Department.

Melberg, who had shaved and cut his hair, was wearing a hooded sweatshirt and tried to hide his face, Deras said.

When he realized the officers seemed to recognize him, he dropped the newspaper he was carrying, revealing a gun, Deras said.

Two officers fought with him, wrestling the gun away, Deras said.

They later arrested two men and two women inside the house where Melberg had apparently been staying. The four are wanted for a variety of drug and parole violations.

One of the men inside the home, Troy Bickham, 34, of Redding, is wanted for questioning in the same string of robberies and carjackings in Shasta County that police suspect Melberg of being involved in, officials said.

"I'm just glad it's over," Deras said. "If this guy

is armed and willing to use force on an officer, we take that very, very seriously."

Police don't know why the men were in San Jose, said Capt. William Cox of the Shasta County Sheriff's Office.

The other three arrested are San Jose residents. They are Dallas Wayne Finley, 27, Naomi Garcia, 40, and Mary Escamilla, 43, all of San Jose.

Melberg faces felony charges of brandishing a firearm at a police officer and resisting arrest in Santa Clara County, Deras said.

In Santa Cruz, he is wanted for attempted murder, kidnapping, burglary and car theft.

Deras was not surprised that Melberg remained in the area, especially after the Mercedes and a stolen van were found nearby Tuesday night. He described the neighborhood as "shady."

"It's not unusual for them to go underground and stay low when they know they're hot," he said.

Meanwhile, at Dominican Hospital, Galligan had many calls and visitors, hospital officials said, and it seems that her sense of humor remained intact.

It was so good in fact that she was willing to autograph a copy of the Sentinel and accept a rubber-band gun to practice her aim, said Tammy Bogaard, a Highway Patrol officer who visited her Tuesday.

"She considered herself a very lucky girl," Bogaard said. "She's a strong person, I'm sure she'll recover."

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