

# Brave Sikh Protester Finds Refuge in North Carolina

By Karen Brodsky

In August of 2009, Carolina Refugee Resettlement Agency resettled an interesting refugee in Charlotte. Hailing from Burma, many of his family reside in Rangoon. He has never cut his hair and has kept it covered throughout his life.

Pan Cha is a Sikh. He and his family are the only Sikhs CRRA has settled in Charlotte. Tall, dark, soft-spoken and wearing a turban, he cuts a striking figure. His father is Punjabi, from northwest India, where Sikhs are in the majority. His father left India after WWII to live in Burma and married a Burmese woman. They had eleven children, among them Pan Cha.

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion founded in northern India in

the 16th century by the guru Nanak. Sikhism preaches a message of devotion and remembrance of God at all times, truthful living, equality of mankind, social justice and denounces superstitions and blind rituals.

Among Sikhism's values:

\* to see God in everyone; understand and practice equality among all races irrespective of caste, religion, color, status, age, gender, etc;

\* to engage in selfless service and help build a loving community life; to be a contributor to society whenever possible;

\* to be ready to protect and stand for the rights of the weak among us; to fight for justice and fairness for all.

Currently, there are about 23

million Sikhs in the world. Nineteen million Sikhs live in the state of Punjab in India. Large populations of Sikhs can be found in the UK, Canada, and the U.S. They also comprise a significant minority in Malaysia and Singapore, where they are sometimes made fun of for their distinctive appearance, but are respected for their drive and high education standards, as they dominate the legal profession.

In Burma, Pan Cha performed the Sikh version of tikkun olam, repair of the world. In 2007 there was a series of Burmese anti-government protests. Among the causes was the unannounced decision of the ruling junta to remove fuel subsidies that caused the price of diesel and petrol to skyrocket. This increase in fuel prices led to an increase in food prices.

Pan Cha, a veteran of similar mass protests earlier in 1988, was among the Burmese who organized civilian protection circles that ringed Buddhist monks as they marched through the streets of Rangoon for eight days demonstrating against the military junta. "I took up the protest again because prices were rising and people were starving around me."

The protest began without violence, until the army surrounded both civilians and monks. When three monks went to beg them not to use violence, they started beating the monks and shooting.

Pan Cha said that originally, 100,000 civilians marched with 5,000 to 6,000 monks. "I thought

we were winning; in the midst of flying bullets we were able to march. We had people in the side streets, with stones and rocks ready to give protection to the protesters."

But on the second to last day of the protest, the monks were gone, and the crowd dwindled. "Many people were scared," Pan Cha said. "When the Japanese [photographer Kenji Nagai] was shot, they [knew] the government would shoot even foreigners." By the last day, the movement had all but disintegrated.

Pan Cha fled to the Mae Sot refugee camp in Thailand, where many Burmese opposition groups are based. There he applied for refugee status for his family — a wife and two young sons.

After the protests, other Sikhs lauded Pan Cha's efforts: From England, "How incredibly brave this man is and an inspiration to Sikhs outside India. ... He is also so humble and devoted to justice for the people of Burma. [It is] a ... a shining example to us all."

Pan Cha lives in apartment in Charlotte, where CRRA resettled him. He and his wife welcomed a third son here. He has just received a promotion within Dole Foods — to be the manager of the night shift. It is a simple and quiet life — and much safer.

Each refugee settled by CRRA has a unique, often harrowing, story of life before Charlotte. Please help us to provide safety, security and self-sufficiency to these new community members.

Cash donations may be sent to CRRA, 5007 Monroe Rd., Charlotte, NC 28205 or may be made on the website [www.carolinarefugee.org](http://www.carolinarefugee.org). Currently the need is great for beds for our new arrivals. Please call 704-535-8803 if you can donate mattresses, box springs or bedframes and other furniture. ✧

## Book of Life

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we could raise children (not that we had any yet!) in a supportive Jewish environment. We found that community in Temple Beth Shalom, which then merged into Temple Beth El. And when we were blessed with Joanne, and later, with Jonathan, they were received with love into the temple family. Through religious school, Bat and Bar Mitzvah, and confirmation, our children grew in their Jewish learning. Their trips to Israel with Rabbi Barras, Susan Jacobs, and their Temple friends further cemented their Jewish identities.

In gratitude for the impact that Temple Beth El has had on our family, Bruce and I have supported the Temple each year, and provided for the Temple in our wills. It is our hope that it will always welcome each individual and every family who honors the Jewish people, and who seeks to observe our mitzvot, and to pass along our rich heritage. ✧

## Scouting for Boys and Girls at Shalom Park

If you have a son or daughter and are interested in participating in Daisies, Brownies, Girl Scouts, Cubs, or Boy Scouts at Shalom Park, mark Thursday, September 1, at 7 PM on your calendar. We will have sign up informational meetings at Camp Mindy for those interested in participating during the 2011-12 school year. Meetings are generally Sunday afternoons, but that could vary depending on the needs of the individual groups which are divided by



age/grade. Girls may start in Kindergarten (5 years old) and boys may start Cub Scouts in First Grade. These are fun, values based programs which strongly encourage parent and family involvement. Leadership is generally provided by parents of children in the group with ample training and support provided by the local and national councils of both organizations. For more information please email [dlintzscout@AOL.com](mailto:dlintzscout@AOL.com) or phone 704-364-0227. ✧

## "Not-My-Kid" Battling Substance Abuse in a Jewish Setting

By Shelley Friedman

On May 21, The Charlotte Mecklenburg Drug Free Coalition (CMDFC) presented a panel of experts to discuss the topic **Not My Kid: Dispelling the Myth that Alcohol and Drug Issues Do Not Exist in Jewish Adolescents and Young Adults** on Shalom Park. The CMDFC coordinated a panel of experts with experience in the field of substance abuse, alcoholism and other addictions.

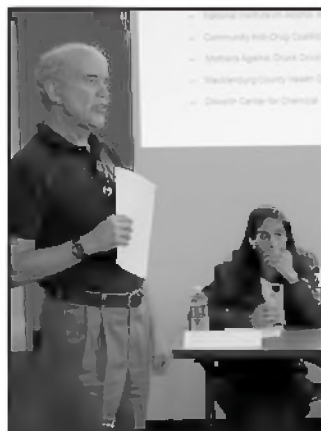
The distinguished panel consisted of Darcy Alban, Case Manager with Jewish Family Services, Devorah Werner, a Physician's Assistant with CMC Mercy Horizons Detox unit, Andrew London, a 2011 graduate from the College of Charleston and currently a counselor at Hope Homes Inc., a non-profit residence that offers counseling services to addicts and alcoholics in recovery, Jane Goble-Clark, the new Executive Director of Substance Abuse Prevention Services which provides prevention services to organizations and individuals in Charlotte Mecklenburg and helps to strengthen youth, families and communities, Elda-Rosa Coulthrust, Clinical Supervisor for adolescent treatment services at the Anuvia Prevention and Recovery Center, Officer Tommy Shankle, of the Law Enforcement Division of the Mecklenburg County ABC Board, and Special Agent Jeff Ferris of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Shelley Friedman, a com-

munity organizer with the CMDFC and a member of Temple Beth El and the temple's Social Justice Committee, organized the event and the panel with Steve Newman of the Mecklenburg County Health Department and also a member of Temple Beth El moderated.

Darcy Alban said that Jewish Family Services treats Jewish teenagers and families that have substance abuse issues. All of the panelists agreed that substance abuse crosses all religious, ethnic and economic boundaries. In fact some upper economic neighborhoods in Charlotte Mecklenburg have more substance abuse issues than some poorer communities do.

The adolescent brain does not fully develop until the early to mid-twenties and alcohol and other drugs can affect the development of the brain. Adolescents who drink do not typically drink like responsible adults drink and some binge drink.

It is critical to talk to children from a young age about important issues and talk often about not drinking alcohol until 21 and not using other drugs. Kids have a lot of outside influences through television, alcohol advertisements, music and the Internet that glamorize youth drinking and using drugs. Parents and other caring adults can have more influence than all of the other outside influences but they must speak up. Talk to your kids about the nature of some youth to be impulsive.



Alcohol and other drugs can add to the impulsivity which can lead to criminal activity, pregnancies, and, in the worst of all cases, possibly even death.

The ABC officer and the DEA special agent both agreed that hanging out at the Arboretum Shopping Center or other shopping centers is bad news for youth. The shopping centers are where drug deals commonly happen.

A question was raised by a Temple Beth El congregant whether there are colleges that enforce no drinking and drugs rules. The question was asked because one of the panelists stated that there is a college in Charlotte that drops bus loads of kids off at a club and picks them up so they do not drive under the influence. While this keeps the kids safe from drinking and driving it doesn't promote health of mind and body through abstinence. ✧

There are many local and national resources that are dedicated to preventing underage drinking and substance abuse.

- \* Charlotte Mecklenburg Drug Free Coalition: Prevent Underage Drinking Initiative, 704 375-3784 (Ext. 24), [www.drugfreecharlotte.org](http://www.drugfreecharlotte.org)
- \* Anuvia Prevention and Recovery Center, 704 376-7447, [www.anuvia.org](http://www.anuvia.org)
- \* Substance Abuse Prevention Services, 704-375-DRUG, [www.preventionservices.org](http://www.preventionservices.org)
- \* Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)
- \* National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, [www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)
- \* Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, [www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org)
- \* Mothers Against Drunk Driving, [www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org)
- \* Mecklenburg County Health Department, [www.meckhealth.org](http://www.meckhealth.org)
- \* Dilworth Center for Chemical Dependency

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If you have questions or would like a panel for a discussion with youth, parents, congregations, or students please contact Shelley Friedman, Community Organizer, Charlotte Mecklenburg Drug Free Coalition, [Friedmans@preventionservices.org](mailto:Friedmans@preventionservices.org), 1117 E. Morehead St., Suite 101, Charlotte, NC 28204, [www.drugfreecharlotte.org](http://www.drugfreecharlotte.org), 704 375-3784 ext. 24.