Persecution In Iran Affects A Guilderland Area Family

By KAROL HARLOW

The martyrs among the Baha'is of Iran have reached a local level. A memorial service held Jan. 8 in Guilderland commemorated the death of one distinguished Iranian Baha'i, two of whose children now reside in Guilderland.

The man, abducted several months ago, is thought to have been executed in December 1985. News of his death only reached his wife and other family members indirectly, and he joined the almost 1,000 other Baha'is either known or presumed to have been executed since the Islamic revolutionary regime came to power nearly five years ago.

Despite taped phone calls (written messages which speak volumes) and censored letters, the mother never received news of one kind or another from Iran. And it is becoming increasingly apparent that things are not improving. Any publicity of these outrages in the U.S. and in other countries does not go unnoticed because the Islamic government is not transparent to international pressure. When it does, however, more Baha'is would have been slaughtered long ago. But we can do a better job in highlighting awareness of these atrocities through initiatives that will prove indelible to the truth that Iran will one day wake up to the notion that diversity and openness can coexist.

Due to the extreme gravity of the situation facing all Baha'is in Iran, specific references to persons, places and dates must not be made public.

This eulogy is in memory of an Iranian educator whose children now live in the U.S., was read at a memorial service last month in Guilderland, although his name was not disclosed.

It is warming and moving to the family, and many friends, to gather here in memory of our father. He was deeply loved by his wife and six children. But he was also loved and admired by all who knew him for his kindness, generosity, and selfless devotion to the Cause he believed in. This devotion was manifested in all aspects of his life.

He was born in Central Iran in 1940 as a child. His parents had a small farm and he had a lot of education, which was available only to people of that area. He simply was able to read and write and was very much educated. As a young man he entered the army, and with his education, he had the opportunity to pursue a successful military career. However, within a few years he realized that values inherent in military life at the time were in direct contrast with his beliefs, so he left the military for the field of education.

It was at this time that he married another Baha'i woman, also eventually to become a teacher. They immediately decided to become pioneers, moving into settling villages, going to whatever need was greatest. Because of the prevailing climate of prejudice, they did not at first declare themselves openly as Baha'is, but instead they went into villages to teach and enlighten by example. Their goals were to establish schools, establish schools, establish schools where there were none, and to improve sanitation wherever possible. Characteristically, they never imposed their religion upon anyone, not even their own children. Nevertheless, all their efforts toward enlightenment and change still caused hostility among the local clergy and some residents.

I remember one village in which my mother was subjected to severe criticism because she helped her children free of ice...