

tens of millions of dollars. It was the biggest art heist in European history!

Luckily, the police eventually tracked most of the art. The last one was found in April 2012 when a Serbian S.W.A.T team stormed a home in Serbia and arrested a man who was believed to have been involved in the museum robbery.

The police confiscated the man's van, which was then thoroughly searched, and found stolen art worth \$113 million.

Since 2007, international police departments have carried out hundreds of arrests on Pink Panthers, but that has not broken the organization. Pink Panther membership has grown exponentially; just last year they inaugurated 180 new recruits.

And, of course, most of them manage to escape before finishing their prison terms. In July 2013, police in Europe undertook a massive operation to arrest a notorious Pink Panther named Milan Poparic. He had escaped a Swiss jail with help of other Panthers.

The escape took place in the afternoon, while the inmates were in the prison yard for exercise. Suddenly, a white van rammed into the prison gates and drove into the campus, tearing the barbed wire fence that separated the gate from the inside yard. The Pink Panthers then used ladders to help Poparic escape. As he ascended the ladder, Panther accomplices provide cover fire to keep prison guards locked down. Then, with Poparic's help, they set fire to the van and fled in a different vehicle which stood waiting for them outside.

The police spared no effort in trying to capture the villains. Interpol was likewise alerted, but the Panthers disappeared into thin air.



Milan Poparic who made a dramatic escape from a Swiss prison.

Poparic was supposed to serve a six-year prison term for a robbery he had committed in 2009. The police were most frustrated by his escape since he was



The last piece of stolen art was found in April 2012 when a Serbian S.W.A.T team stormed a home in Serbia and arrested a man believed to have been involved in the museum robbery.



Smashed doors at a Swiss casino raided by Pink Panthers.

the third Panther to escape a Swiss prison since May 2013.

Not only do police forces around the world need to deal with the largely damaging criminal activities the Pink Panthers are responsible for, but they also have to contend with “copycats,” those who read and hear about Panther activities and aspire to copy them.

Detectives now feel that bestowing the benign sounding name of Pink Panthers on the ruthless group was a colossal mistake. Somehow, it evokes the image of a pastel-colored, fuzzy cat—an association that could not be further from the truth.

Thus, international law enforcement agencies would like to make it very clear that Pink Panthers are not a benign or respectable group of people. They are a deplorable network of debased criminals and thieves—nobody you'd like to emulate. ■

The Jewelry Robbery Miracle

When Simon and Mazal Abraham decided to move from New York to Las Vegas to help the small but growing Jewish community there, they had no idea that it would lead to a terrifying yet miraculous event, one that would change their lives.

- By Moshe Holender

Las Vegas might seem an unlikely place for a flourishing Torah-observant community. However, several miles from the hustle and bustle of the city center are residential neighborhoods which include parks, grocery stores and libraries. Among them is a vibrant Jewish community comprised of several large *shuls*, an outreach

kollel and a wide selection of kosher restaurants. When *Zman* was informed of an amazing story of *hashgachah* that took place there, we had to investigate.

Walking up to King Solomon's Treasures, an elegant jewelry store, we noticed a sign: “Absolutely no weapons in store.” We were buzzed in by the proprietor, Mr. Simon



Abraham, and received a warm welcome from him and his wife, Mazal. It was closing time, and there were no customers in the store, but the Abrahams immediately made us feel at home.

Simon was born to a Jewish family in Kabul, Afghanistan. At the time, in the 1940s, Afghanistan was home to about 5,000 Jews. Simon's father was a wealthy merchant and financed the building of what is now Kabul's only remaining synagogue. The *shul* has been made famous by Zebulon Simentov, the last Jew in Afghanistan and the one who tends to the synagogue building. Later, Simon was to continue in his father's tradition of supporting centers of Torah and *tefillah*.

Simon Abraham visited his grandparents in *Eretz Yisrael* many times during his youth, beginning when he was nine years old. Finally, at 19, he left Afghanistan permanently for the Holy Land. There he met his future wife, a sabra born to immigrants from the Soviet Union. Later, they moved to the United States and established a jewelry business, a trade that Simon had learned from his father. He became, and remains, very active in communal affairs, and is always trying to help fellow Jews.

In Jamaica Estates, Queens, for years he served as the president of the only Afghani *shul* in America, Anshe Shalom. Subsequently, for eight years he hosted a very large *minyan* in his home, which he calls the *shtibel*, and was the chairman of the *kehillah*. There is a unique, flourishing community of Afghani Jews in Queens. It was there that the Abrahams raised their children and where Simon perfected his knowledge of the jewelry trade. The Abrahams were respected and involved in their community. Then, 14 years ago, he and his wife found themselves in Las Vegas.

"We did not plan to stay," he told *Zman*. "We came here on some business and sort of got stuck. Our original stay lasted longer and longer. Then we realized how much we could help the community. I was no longer chairman of the *shtibel*, so that obligation wasn't drawing me back to Queens. Las Vegas' Young Israel/Aish *minyan*, led by Rabbi

Yitzchak Wyne, *shlit'a*, at that time was in a trailer and rented office space. Now, *baruch Hashem*, they have a beautiful building."

Simon Abraham is a doer and his father's example always compelled him to do more. Without even realizing it, he was searching for the next project that would bring honor to his father's memory. As soon as Simon and Mazal discovered how much could be done in Las Vegas for the Jewish community, and how much they were needed, they were literally stuck.

The Abrahams have three grown children, one in Lakewood, one in Queens and one in West Orange, New Jersey. "They would like us to move back east, but they understand our need to help the *shul*. That's how we raised them," they told *Zman*.

Mr. Abraham has been the president of the Young Israel *shul* for many years. "There is an election next week," he said, "but the only person I have to run against is myself! No one else wants the job."

It was certainly an adjustment for them, but gradually both became acclimated to the climate, culture and food in Las Vegas. They became active supporters, both financially and socially, of the Young Israel. Rabbi Wyne was already a popular and successful outreach rabbi when the Abrahams arrived. Their timing was perfect. Rabbi Wyne was ready to expand his congregation and he needed strong supporters to provide his core membership. Simon Abraham lost no time in assuming responsibilities, working together with Rabbi Wyne to establish what is now a thriving *shul* in a prime location, with regular weekday and *Shabbos minyanim* and *shiurim*. At the same time, the Abrahams also opened their own jewelry store.

A Suspicious Visitor

Jewelry stores always receive visits from suspicious characters, some who turn out to be petty thieves or dangerous criminals. Like other jewelry store owners, the Abrahams have implemented various security policies, including requiring all customers to allow them to photocopy their identification

cards before patronizing the store. Simon pulled out one of these photocopies to show *Zman*.

"You see this man?" he said. "This is a crook I caught last week. He gave us a fake ID and tried to walk out with some merchandise. The police are still looking for him."

King Solomon's Treasures has several signs forbidding firearms in the store. Simon, for his part, is always armed and has a license from the state of Nevada to carry a concealed weapon. Yet, nothing previously in his life's experience could prepare him for the unwelcome visitor that appeared in the shop that day three years ago....

Everything started on Friday afternoon, Sivan 22, 5771 (June 24, 2011). During the summer, he closes the store at 3:00 PM on Fridays in order to prepare for *Shabbos*. At 2:30, he decided to close up shop a little early. He locked the front door and lowered the shades. Then he made his way to the back of the store to finish the week's accounting. Suddenly, the doorbell rang.

He went to the front and opened the shades. There stood a fashionably dressed black man, who looked to be in his early thirties. "What do you want?" Simon asked guardedly.

"I really need to buy a nice watch for my father. I missed Father's Day, and I feel so bad, I have to make it up to him."

Simon empathized with the man.

"This was the week of Father's Day for the American nation. For the Jewish nation, every day is Father's Day," Simon told *Zman*. "We must *always* honor our parents! I was young when my father, *alav hashalom*, passed away, so when the man started talking about his father, I just gave in to him. Usually, I am very cautious about who I let in and out of the store. After I close, no one is allowed to come in. This time, I had pity on the man and I let him in."

Mr. Abraham moved around behind the glass display cases and took out a few watches to show the man. He liked the watches, and selected two that he wanted set aside.

"Do you have any gold chains?" asked the

stranger. "I want to buy my father a chain, as well."

Abraham went to the large safe in his office at the back of the shop. He spun the combination, keeping his eyes on the man through a two-way mirror, which to customers looks like a regular mirror on the wall behind the counter. He opened the safe and took out three different chains, one for \$1,700, one for \$2,500 and one which cost \$4,500. He brought them over to the glass display counter and laid them out. The man didn't seem too picky and immediately chose the first one he was shown, for \$1,700.

"This is good enough; it's long enough for him," he commented. "Can I come back tomorrow with the money?"



The entrance to Simon and Mazal Abraham's jewelry store, King Solomon's Treasures, in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Simon Abraham in his jewelry store, King Solomon's Treasures.