

## Top teacher

### Parham Aarabi has found success as a teacher in Canada

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Photo by Hans Derky

Parham Aarabi, one of the world's top 35 young innovators according to MIT's *Technology Review* magazine, was just 11 years old when he came with his family to Canada from Iran. He watched his parents, both civil engineers, struggle in finding jobs and getting settled in the new country. Those are among his earliest memories of living in Canada and motivated his desire to succeed in his own career.

Parham Aarabi is considered one of the most brilliant engineering minds in the world recently winning an MIT prize for best scientists under the age of 35.

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"I observed the pressure placed on my parents when they immigrated. It was something unsaid, but I felt it indirectly and therefore it became part of my upbringing," says Aarabi, who earned a PhD from Stanford University in California.

He was only 24 years old when he was hired at the University of Toronto as an electrical engineering professor — the youngest instructor in U of T history. He now also holds a Canada Research Chair as a result of his groundbreaking research into computer sound localization and image recognition.

At the age of 29, he was given the *Technology Review* recognition for his innovation on "sharpening computers' listening skills" to human orders such as enhancing voice control in cars.

Despite his many achievements and awards, Aarabi likes to focus more on his future than his past accomplishments.

"Getting to become a professor at a young age was a goal, but when I got there, I was thinking 'What comes next?'"

Aarabi is currently doing research on image recognition by computers with his team of graduate students. "In research I am currently working on image processing and am actually starting a company with some of my students called ViewGenie, enabling computers to find images that are not previously labelled and allow them to understand what the images contain. The next stage of my life is going to make ViewGenie successful," says Aarabi who describes himself in three words: average, passionate and hopeful.

"Immigration made me more responsible and more aware of myself. [It] affects many different aspects of who I am and how I live," he says. "Immigration is a combination of hard and easy moments. Freedom, choices and opportunities are one side of the coin, and cultural adjustment and getting settled ... are the other side of the coin."

He adds that immigrants, like his parents, are willing to take the risk and flip that coin for their children's sake. "My parents had secure jobs and an established life in Iran," he says. "Younger generations should see how many sacrifices parents have to go through to actually make these opportunities available for [us]."

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