

Dastoom family takes theft of delivery car philosophically

When Mohsen Dastoom had his 1986 Toyota Tercel stolen almost from under his eyes while at work last Monday night, he was able to view the violation a little more

philosophically than your average auto theft victim.

That's because for Mohsen, the crime represented the act of one misguided thug, rather than just

another example of intimidation by a bullying state government.

It wasn't always that way for Mohsen, who along with his wife Farzaneh runs the 2-4-1 Pizza out-

let on Stouffville's Main St.

Up until the time he slipped out of his native Iran six years ago, he was the victim of a repressive regime which, while it had loosened its grip in recent years, was still depriving him of his basic rights. A teacher by trade, Mohsen's career was cut short in the early 1980's when he joined a movement promoting better education and a more enlightened democracy for Iran's citizens.

He soon found himself arrested, and after spending a week locked in a holding cell the size of a small closet, was imprisoned for three years along with other perceived threats to Iranian national security. As it turned out, he was one of the lucky ones, as many he

knew are still languishing in jail. Upon his release, he had to return on a weekly basis to check in with authorities. Meanwhile, he was forbidden from returning to the classroom, or even driving a taxi out of a concern he would "brainwash" those he came in contact with.

Eventually, Mohsen heeded the advice of a brother who said he should try to leave the country. He caught a break when he realized that because prison authorities had forgotten to take his fingerprints, he could apply for a passport. He took off, and was joined two weeks later by his wife and the couple's two children, then aged eight and a mere four months. With the assistance of a special United Nations immigration program, the Dastooms arrived in Canada with nothing more than one suitcase. But Mohsen found work as a pizza maker in Toronto, and a little over two years ago, they borrowed money from family members now resettled in Europe to open their own pizza operation.

Today, the couple work seven days a week at the pizza shop, with their three year old son Shahin accompanying them during the day while his sisters are at school. The days are long and the work is different from what they were once used to back home. Their Iranian teaching credentials are not recognized here, and it would take considerable retraining to become qualified to teach here. Farzaneh envisions the day when she'll be able to offer her services as a part time volunteer at the local schools her children attend.

But you won't hear them complain, even when their car was stolen from out front of the store while Mohsen worked inside last week. This time, the authorities were on their side, and police found the vehicle out of gas and abandoned three days later.

And as they think back about their old life in Iran where bodies lying in the streets and human rights violations were common place, the Dastooms sing the praises of their current circumstances. Farzaneh smiles and explains that the strategy is to keep up the current endless pace for a few years until they can have a house of their own and a good life. Then they'll take a few days off to rest. "We are working here, we have a good living," she concludes. "That's all we want. In some countries, you can't do this."



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