Beautiful!
Dawn Song, 2010 MacArthur Fellow

By Elizabeth Shestak

It's not important to Dawn Song what she was doing when she received the phone call. If you press her, she'll recall having lunch at the time, nothing overly dramatic. What she excitedly talks about is her computer science research. "I think there's a lot of beauty in science and engineering, even though this may be beyond what people normally associate beauty with, such as art," says Song (CS'99), who also taught at Carnegie Mellon from 2002 to 2007.Today, she researches how to make computer systems more secure as an associate professor at the University of California, Berkeley's Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences. Through her work, she is developing technologies to combat security threats, such as malicious code, and is working on new technologies for protecting the privacy of individuals, corporations, and governments—safeguarding everything from medical records to financial information. And that might be why the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation surprised her with a life-changing phone call last fall. In a matter of a few minutes, over a typical lunch, Song learned she was one of 22 innovators to receive a "no strings attached" $500,000 fellowship that the foundation awards annually. There are no stipulations, no conditional reporting. Based on anonymous nominations, the foundation chose Song because she is an explorer and risk taker, contributing to her field and to society in innovative, impactful ways.

—Elizabeth Shestak

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Dawn Song is a computer security specialist who applies rigorous theoretical methods to understand the deep interactions of software, hardware, and networks that make computer systems vulnerable to attack or interference.

Dawn Song received a B.S. (1996) from Tsinghua University, an M.S. (1999) from Carnegie Mellon University, and a Ph.D. (2002) from the University of California, Berkeley. She was an assistant professor at Carnegie Mellon University (2002–2007) prior to her appointment to the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the University of California, Berkeley, where she is currently an associate professor.