

# PSH PEOPLE

## Sary Garcia-- Puerto Rico

*Jon Fleck  
Capital Times Staff*

During the summer of 1988, Sary Garcia, a 26 year-old graduate student in training and development received a visit from a family friend, Harrisburg Area Community College Counselor Yolanda Perez-Rivera, at her home in Puerto Rico. Perez-Rivera convinced Sary Garcia to visit Penn State Harrisburg.

"I fell in love with the campus, the Lion, and the building," Garcia said. "I was really fascinated with the education program. It was exactly what I was looking for."

Garcia, a 1987 graduate of the University of Puerto Rico, appreciated that nobody, not even University Park, had a training and development program like the one at PSH--a program oriented toward the workplace.

Another reason she gave for choosing PSH over University Park was that she didn't want to become just another minority statistic.

"At U.P. I would become just another Puerto Rican," she said. "The person is overlooked a lot of times."

The stereotypes surrounding Hispanics bother Garcia, who is the vice president of the International Affairs Association.

"Americans expect a certain behavior, and I'm not it," she said. "Back home I'm Sary Garcia. Here I am labeled a Hispanic woman."

Because of its relationship with the U.S., Puerto Rico has the highest standard living among Caribbean nations.

"People would ask me 'What do you think of Burger King?'" she said. "We have Burger King, McDonald's, and Kentucky Fried Chicken. We even have cable TV," she said sarcastically.

One of her goals is to change the American attitudes towards Hispanics by adapting and developing training programs for Hispanics in industry and business.

"Different people learn in different ways," she said. "That is so in any language."

Garcia ran into this problem while working with the American Red Cross in Puerto Rico.

**"Americans expect a certain behavior, and I'm not it," she said.**

"I had to laugh at some of the ridiculous translations," she said. "But no one would tell them."

Although Garcia seems to be at ease with the English language now, that was not the case when she came to PSH for the Fall 1989 semester.

"In the beginning, I would just smile and nod," she said. "But it didn't take long for me to start stopping people when I didn't understand something."

Garcia learned English throughout her schooling, but here, she had to learn the slang.

"When my roommate first said we have dustbunnies, I pictured dirty rabbits running around the living room," she said.

Besides the slang, Garcia has a problem with the directness of

Americans compared to Hispanics who tend to move nicely around a touchy subject.

"An American would say that dress looks awful whereas I'd say something like you look better in blue," she said.

"The Spanish language is much more poetic," she added. "Even the nastiest thing sounds so cute."

Coming from the warm year-round weather in Puerto Rico, Garcia expressed amazement at the Pennsylvania climate. She called the Pennsylvania autumns beautiful, but the winters were quite a change from Puerto Rico where the temperature rarely falls below 50 degrees.

She also said that Americans don't travel as much as other people. Garcia herself has been all over the Western Hemisphere. Venezuela, Mexico, Canada, and New York make up part of the extensive list of places she has visited, but there is one place she enjoys more than any other.

"Every place has its own magic," she said. "But I love home the most."

## Gideon Mudacumura-- Rwanda

*Robin Price  
Capital Times Staff*

Gideon Mudacumura doesn't just dream of change for his country Rwanda.

He is studying at Penn State Harrisburg to prepare himself to return and improve conditions in his impoverished but beloved country.

Currently in his first semester here, the 38-year-old public policy major said he will return to his government job with the department of statistics and run for parliament.

Rwanda, he explained, is a democratic country with a capitalist economy largely dependent on agriculture. Mudacumura lovingly calls it the "land of a thousand hills."

But the beauty of the landscape conceals a problem for agriculture. The mountainous terrain leads to soil erosion and over-cultivation of small pieces of property.

The country, located in central Africa, is also suffering from a population explosion. About the size of the state of Maryland, Mudacumura said, Rwanda holds 7.5 million people. (Maryland has 4.2 million.)

Mudacumura cites dramatic differences between the U.S. and Rwanda. Rwanda is among the 25 poorest nations in the world, he said. The average income for village farmers is the equivalent of \$75 a month, and for a civil servant about \$200 a month. Mudacumura was a civil servant in the capital city of Kigali.

The most difficult obstacle Mudacumura faces in his education is separation from his wife and three small daughters. "In the beginning I couldn't sleep," he says in his French accent. "It is very, very hard, but since we have an agreement that I will do this for our

interest I must do this."

**His wife and children were forced to live for several weeks as virtual prisoners in their home and could not safely leave even to buy food.**

There has lately been threat of a coup in Rwanda. The minority party which was ousted in 1959 had invaded the capital in hopes of regaining rule. Here in the U.S. Mudacumura lived in fear for his family's safety and well-being.

His fears were not unwarranted. His wife and children were forced to live for several weeks as virtual prisoners in their home and could not safely leave even to buy food.

Thankfully things have settled down again, Mudacumura says. He now feels more comfortable about their safety, and hopes that they will be able to join him here after the necessary paperwork is completed.

Another difficulty for Mudacumura is the lack of a car here in Harrisburg, as he has to depend on the kindness of others even for a ride to the grocery store. He doesn't complain however, being grateful for this opportunity to improve the future of his family and nation.

When not cracking the books, Mudacumura enjoys meeting new people, and says everyone he has met has been extremely kind and helpful.

Any advice for other foreign students? Mudacumura says, "Learn by observation, and don't hesitate to ask for help. Sometimes Americans are so busy, but if you ask them, they will always be glad to help."

## Takeshi Sato-- Japan

*Robert Fellman  
Capital Times Contributor*

Takeshi Sato, a twenty-five-year old native of Akita, Japan, doesn't fit the American stereotype of a Japanese student. He's majoring in American Studies, not engineering. He thinks American university studies are tougher than Japanese courses. And he takes sugar in his English tea.

As a graduate student here at PSH, Sato is interested in learning more about American music, movies, and culture in general. During his six years in Tokyo, Sato majored in English at Dokkyo University. His work there and the fact that most Japanese students start to learn English when they are ten or twelve explain his excellent command of the language.

After teaching at Dokkyo for two years, Sato came to the U.S. to get a real feel for American culture.

"We don't know much about the United States," Sato said about most Japanese. "The population of Japan is very homogenous, 95 percent of the people are [native] Japanese."

America's commonplace diversity has led to some problems for Sato. "Here," he said, "everyone thinks I am an

immigrant and treats me as if I know everything." Strangers here aren't offered as much help as in Japan, he says.

That's not the only difference, however. Sato said although entrance to a Japanese university is highly competitive, the course work is not as difficult as it is in American universities. "Here I write a lot of papers," he said, rolling his eyes.

His biggest problem, Sato said, has been transportation--a familiar concern to any PSH student who doesn't own a car. He spent his first six weeks in the U.S. in Philadelphia where, like Tokyo, he could take the subway or a bus to just about anywhere. Now that he lives in Middletown, where public transportation is very limited, Sato said he understands better why America is known as a "country of cars."

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But some of Sato's American experiences are surprisingly similar to those of his homeland. Even though Japan is basically a Shinto and Buddhist country, "We're very familiar with the commercial side of Christmas," he said. "In Tokyo, as well as in the smaller cities, there are Christmas trees and Christmas music everywhere," Sato said.

Asked to correct American misconceptions about Japan, Sato mentioned the imperialistic image that the press tends to project. Using the example of the recent merger of MCA and the Matsushita Corporation, Sato said that MCA asked for help but the press presents it as another example of Japanese businessmen gobbling up American companies.

Whether working in private industry or teaching English, this kind of cultural misunderstanding is what Sato hopes to correct when he returns to Japan to help spread his knowledge of American culture. His experience living and studying in the U.S. will make him a valuable employee to Japanese firms trying to better understand America, he said.

## Khalid Battal-- Saudi Arabia

*Karen Putt  
Capital Times Staff*

For many of us, the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia is a source of great anxiety. For Khalid Battal, a 26-year-old graduate student at Penn State Harrisburg, it is comforting. The Saudi Arabian student said the invasion has been "like a bad nightmare. Sometimes I wake up and hope I've been dreaming."

A graduate student of Public Administration, Battal came to the United States to pursue his master's degree in April of 1988. He spent his