

SEATTLE EDITION

LOCAL NEWS

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Unreadable fingerprints stymie citizens-to-be

FBI, INS say pattern too fine to approve

BY ARTHUR SANTANA
Seattle Times Snohomish County bureau

This much is clear: Pushp Grover desperately wants to become a U.S. citizen.

Less clear are the tiny whorls and ridges that make up her fingerprint patterns.

That, in the eyes of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), has been grounds for not granting citizenship over the past year.

The INS says it needs the prints for its files. The FBI, which examines the prints, says they're unreadable despite repeated attempts.

Meanwhile, Grover, 53, who has lived in the United States for 27 years, including the past six in Everett, has become increasingly frustrated with the process.

"I passed my test. I passed my interview. I took the oath, and I was told I'd get the citizenship, but I didn't get it because of my fingerprints," she said. "I've never heard of such a thing."

Grover is a native of India who immigrated to the U.S. from England with her husband, Kumar. She is one of a small fraction of immigrants that the INS says are denied citizenship because of their fingerprints.

The INS, however, will start a policy next Monday that will allow those with fingerprints deemed unreadable to still gain citizenship if they can prove they have had a clean police record for the past five years.

That wouldn't appear to be a big problem for Grover and other law-abiding immigrants.

Immigrants must live in the United States at least five years before applying for citizenship, so they would need to contact police agencies only in the places they have lived in the U.S. Cost for copying the needed documents should be minimal, local authorities said.

But Grover is skeptical. She learned of the new policy only this past week when told of it by a reporter. The INS, she said, had told her nothing about it.



PEDRO PEREZ/SEATTLE TIMES

Zenaida Prodigalidad, 58, has been unable to become a citizen because her fingerprints are considered unreadable.

And the new policy allows that route only if people already have had their fingerprints checked and rejected two times and then have been told to get the police check.

"I'm not optimistic about it at all," Grover said. "So far, everything

they've told me hasn't happened. They've always kept us in the dark."

She has asked for help from the office of U.S. Rep. Jack Metcalf, R-Langley. Metcalf aide Fairalee Markusen became involved in Graver's case in October and said she, too, is

frustrated with the process.

Recently, Markusen set up a fingerprinting session for Grover at the INS headquarters in Seattle, requesting that the prints be specially delivered to the FBI office in Clarksburg, W.Va., where prints of all citizenship applicants are sent. They are waiting for a response.

Graver's fingertips, upon close inspection, clearly have prints. The ridges are just very fine and, according to the INS, have an "insufficient pattern area."

It's a similar story for Bothell resident Zenaida Prodigalidad, 58, who immigrated to the U.S. from the Philippines 30 years ago and began seeking citizenship last October.

Both women say they don't do anything out of the ordinary with their hands, and neither has scleroderma, a skin disease that can render fingertips unreadable.

Abnormal fingerprint development, which is rare, typically happens early in a person's life, said Bellevue dermatologist Julie Francis.

"We have fingerprints due to the development of our sweat glands in

PLEASE SEE *Fingerprints* ON B 2

Want to sound smart?

● Write down the names of programs you think the following people would watch: your parents, an 8-year-old, a grandparent, a teenager, a single woman in her 20s, a single man in his 20s.

● Because there's a pretty woman or handsome man in an automobile, does that mean the car will run better or sell at a reasonable price?

● Log a weekend's worth of beer commercials. What are the settings?

spanics or Asian-Americans; more professionals (doctors, lawyers) than blue-collar workers," the curriculum says.

Men outnumber women 3-to-1 on TV, and male voices narrate 81 percent of commercials, the Singers write. Working women on TV are glamorous and manage perfect

'It's changed the way I look at commercials. I'm more skeptical now.'

ELEANOR CLAGGET, 11

households, the curriculum says.

Characters are often shown snacking, yet less than 6 percent of males and 2 percent of females on TV are overweight, compared with 25 to 45 percent of Americans, the Singers write.

The harm of media depictions — from lavish lifestyles to perfect bodies — is that children look at their world and are left wanting, Cohen

said.

From their portable classroom at Washington Middle School, about 25 of Beverly Zanetti's students have spent a month studying how media images ultimately affect their self images. The walls are decorated with advertisements hawking imaginary products, an assignment to help students understand the process behind designing persuasive messages.

Zanetti is one of the first of Seattle's teachers to use the new curriculum. It's a topic most children can relate to, she said.

"It's something they're very knowledgeable about," she said. "They feel connected with it."

The students say they now notice the effects of advertisements — the Nike T-shirts, Guess jeans and trails of CK1 cologne in the air.

"It's changed the way I look at commercials," said Eleanor Clagget, 11. "I'm more skeptical now." She said she now detests car commercials that flash financing details in small print.

"We already knew they were trying to get us to buy stuff, we just never really thought about it this much," said Michael T. Bridy, 12.

just so elated the girl is unhurt, and we got him."

Jorgensen said deputies are looking at similarities with other abductions. "We're working with other law enforcement. There are some similarities, I can tell you that, especially with the ones down south, (in) King County and Pierce County."

Police have been looking for a white man in his 20s or 30s with a white car in the attempted abductions of young girls in Tacoma April 3 and Tukwila April 4. Jorgensen said another unsolved case involved the abduction and release of a boy.

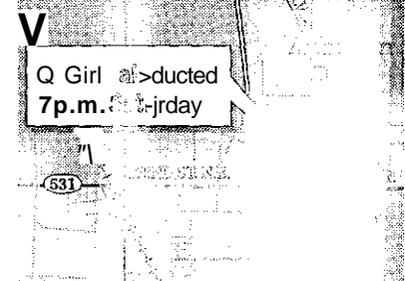
"We are in touch with those other agencies, and I think more

she saw her daughter walking toward the car. She screamed and the car sped off.

The following day in Tukwila, a man in a white car pulled up alongside a girl and exposed himself before she ran away. The girl later described him as having a mustache and a pockmarked face.

Jorgensen said the man arrested Saturday apparently had a prior felony conviction for first-degree assault. Though his sentence included sexual-deviancy counseling, he was not registered as a sex offender because his conviction occurred before the registration law, Jorgensen said.

She said he moved to Marysville



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from Seattle two weeks ago. Jorgensen described him as white, 5 feet 2, 130 to 140 pounds, and looking much younger than his 36 years.

He was scheduled to make a court appearance later this afternoon.

Woman applied 10 times

FINGERTIPS

CONTINUED FROM B 1

our fingerpads early in life. If someone has abnormal sweat glands, which can occur, they might not have clear fingerprints," she said.

Last year, Grover, a customer-service representative at a Seattle insurance company, signed up for a 10-week citizenship class at Edmonds Community College and submitted her fingerprints to the FBI.

But a week before her swearing-

in ceremony, she received a letter saying her fingerprints had been rejected. Over the next nine months, she submitted her prints nine more times — each time costing \$15.

Prodigalidad, who works as a cashier in Lynnwood, decided last year she wanted to vote and applied for citizenship. On Feb. 4, she learned her prints were rejected.

Twice more she submitted prints, and twice more she was rejected.

"The only people that are being rejected are the undesirables, and this has made me feel like I'm one of those people," Prodigalidad said.

Prodigalidad, like Grover, said she was told nothing of the new INS policy and still feels helpless facing what she sees as an insincere, bureaucratic agency.

Greg Gourley, who taught both women the citizenship class at the community college, also is wary of the new INS policy because, he said, the agency has done little to let anyone know about it.

INS spokeswoman Irene Mortensen said, "We can't just arbitrarily give our citizenship to just anyone."