

Growth Industry

Terry Gips '73 seeks sustainability on the personal, organizational, and planetary levels

BY STEPHEN SCHENKENBERG

The year was 1980, and Terry Gips '73—who already had steered a Checker cab through the streets of Boston and consulted on energy policy with President Carter—was talking with Frances Moore Lappé, author of *Diet for a Small Planet*. Lappé contended that there was enough food to feed everyone on the planet, if only political and economic systems didn't obstruct the process. "That's great," Gips remembers saying, "but is it also possible to grow the food we need without destroying the planet?" Gips recalls Lappé's response: "You know, Terry, I don't know. Why don't you find out?"

Fifteen months and 45 countries later, Gips returned to the States, having observed and documented how others around the globe managed organic and sustainable agriculture. "What I found was life-changing," he says. It was possible, through organic and sustainable practices, to produce food for everyone while maintaining healthy ecosystems. On the exhaustive trip, Gips was charged by Lappé's challenge: his mission, he now knew, was to help make the planet more sustainable. This calling drove him to found the non-profit Alliance for Sustainability and, more

recently, Sustainability Associates, his environmental consulting business, both of which are notable stops along a notably green career path.

It wasn't always so. While Gips was raised with a strong ethical foundation—his mother was a social worker, his rabbi, Arnold Jacob Wolf, an innovative leader on social issues—he found himself drawn not to environmental concerns but those of peace and justice. Gips recalls a day during his first year at Claremont, when he walked to his dorm room in Appleby Hall and saw a large banner promoting the first Earth Day. "I thought, 'Why are people thinking about the planet when we're in the middle of trying to stop a war?'"

After college, however, the newly vegetarian Gips became increasingly interested in agriculture. After co-founding the U.C. Cooperative Extension Sacramento Community Garden Program for low-income groups and senior citizens, he completed a master's program in agricultural and applied economics at UC Davis, studying with visionary thinkers like community-development innovator Isao Fujimoto. Following a second master's degree—this one in public and private management at Yale, focusing on the international grain

trade—Gips worked in the Carter White House under Larry Gilson '70 and served on the Emergency Energy Task Force. He says that it was "extraordinary how patriotic Americans were, how much energy they conserved in their homes, workplaces, and communities."

While Gips would move on to positions with agricultural giant Cargill and plant-based personal care products pioneer Aveda, where he was director of ecological affairs and sustainability, he also has seen great success with smaller, more personal initiatives. In addition to his books, *Breaking the Pesticide Habit* (1987), and *The Humane Consumer and Producer Guide* (1993), he also spent 11 years leading the Alliance for Sustainability, which began in the 1980s with an agricultural focus but has since broadened its vision. "Our goal was to bring about sustainability, which we defined as having four parts: it had to be ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, and humane."

In his work for the Alliance, www.allianceforsustainability.net, Gips served as a delegate to the 1992 U.N. Earth Summit, where 170 countries accepted sustainable agriculture as a goal. Through his work he met Inga Kallender, head of Sweden's Organic



Gips, here at the Cowles Conservatory at The Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, lives in Minneapolis with his wife, Annalee, and two children, Gloriana and Adam.

Farmers, who told Gips how a Swedish environmental nonprofit called The Natural Step had unified her country's organic and conventional farmers to reduce pesticide use by 75 percent in less than a decade.

In 1996, Gips left Aveda to be part of the first 20-person class of U.S. Natural Step instructors. "I then had a tool I could use—with businesses, government agencies, communities, hospitals, architects—to bring about sustainability," he says. "It was at that point, with that confidence, that I created Sustainability Associates."

Now in its 10th year, the company helps a wide range of businesses, organizations, and communities save money, improve performance and become socially and environmentally responsible. Implementing the Natural Step framework and other cutting-edge sustainability thinking, design, and visioning, Gips provides services such as eco-auditing, organizational

and policy development, marketing, personal sustainability training, and even capital formation for green business.

While Gips acknowledges that it's often difficult for groups to take time out for the one-day workshops, he says the cost-effective investment will more than pay for itself and provide many other benefits. "It helps inspire people, build aligned teams, and create strategic advantage and breakthrough thinking."

The company has grown to involve other associates in response to what Gips says is a "growing international consciousness and awareness of sustainability is now spreading to the United States." This includes CMC's campus, where the Roberts Environmental Center's Pacific Sustainability Index continues to analyze corporations' environmental and sustainability reports. (See story, page 14.) "I stuck my head in the door when I was there for a reunion," he

says. "It seems like they're doing great work."

Whether on-campus or traveling the world, Gips continues to be grateful for his CMC experience. "I had so many outstanding professors who taught me to think, write, and analyze," he says, recalling his days on the downhill ski team, hearing speakers such as McDonald's founder Ray Kroc, being an R.A., and serving on the Board of Trustees committee that first discussed the idea of going co-ed. "I'm a deep, deep believer in the importance of a liberal arts education. And I think Claremont did it in such an extraordinary way, with fabulous faculty who challenged me to think and grow."

For Gips, this is indeed the best type of growth: sustainable.

For more information or to contact Gips, visit www.sustainabilityassociates.us.

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