Seda Tarzian (BS ’48, Bio): A pioneer in pharmaceutical research

As a retired pharmaceutical research medical program director, Tarzian knows personally how hard it can be for students to finance their education. She enrolled at Temple after her stepfather agreed to pay for her education, but after a semester that source of funding dried up. Tarzian struggled mightly.

“At times, I had no place to live and no money,” recalls Tarzian, who is now a member of CST’s Board of Visitors. She arranged a payment plan that required her to pay $60 every six weeks and got a job as a supermarket cashier. She also spent a summer as a General Electric draftsperson, where one of her assignments included work for the Manhattan Project.

Following graduation, Tarzian discovered it was not easy being a woman in what at the time was a department dominated by male science professors. “I experienced a lot of prejudice,” she acknowledges. Over the course of the next four decades, Tarzian worked her way up from being a Jeanes Hospital medical technologist to Merck’s first female medical program coordinator. She also was a histologist in the Anatomy Department of the Temple University School of Medicine, as well as a lecturer and instructor in the medical technical training program.

Her pharmaceutical career included doing preclinical in vivo testing of new pharmacological compounds and serving as a literature reviewer and clinical research associate responsible for new drug applications at the National Drug Company, a division of Richardson-Merrell Inc. At Merck she coordinated the clinical trials of several anti-inflammatory, ophthalmological and gastrointestinal drugs that received FDA approval, including Prilosec, the widely prescribed acid reflux drug.

Tarzian is also an accomplished artist—her watercolors have illustrated the college’s holiday greeting cards—and a soloist with the St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church choir in Philadelphia’s Roxborough neighborhood.

Eight years ago she established the Seda Tarzian Scholarship, presented to talented CST students with preference given to those who have experienced socioeconomic or education disadvantages. Her motivation: Make sure CST students don’t have to struggle financially. “I want to make sure no one goes through what I did,” she says.

—Bruce Beans

Jody-Ann Forrester-Small (BS ’13, CIS): Sky’s the limit

When she arrived on campus in 2011, Forrester-Small felt out of place. Coming from the Community College of Philadelphia, where she earned an associate degree with honors, she says, “I felt overwhelmed. The students were so much more directed here, and I was an older student.”

Just 14 months later—more than a semester before she graduated with a 3.51 GPA—she was offered and accepted a consulting position with Protiviti, a California-based risk, audit and business consulting firm with an office in Philadelphia.

After starting as an information technology audit consultant, this year she has been tackling IT security projects. “I feel like the sky’s the limit because I get to work with a bunch of great people and with clients in healthcare, retail, banking and education,” she says. “I get to learn about different industries, and each project represents a new challenge.”

Forrester-Small, who moved from Jamaica to Philadelphia in 2005, gives a lot of credit for her success to three CIS faculty: Wendy Urban, her faculty advisor; Claudia Pine-Simon, the Association for Computer Machinery (ACM) faculty advisor; and Rose McGinnis, director of Student Professional Development at CST.

“I take my hat off to those ladies,” says Forrester-Small, whose husband, Ainsworth Small, graduated from Temple in 2008 with a degree in architecture. “They were like mother figures to me. They encouraged me to get involved in the [Computer and Information Sciences] Department and introduced me to areas beyond Temple.”

In 2012, she earned a scholarship, funded by Vanguard, to attend the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing Conference in Baltimore. “I met 3,600 women from all over the world who are heavily involved in technology,” says Forrester-Small, who also earned a scholarship from the Philadelphia chapter of the Society for Information Management.

Forrester-Small made the most of her time at CST. She interned as a business systems analyst at PNC Bank—thanks to a resume session with Urban and McGinnis and to a CST job fair she attended just two months after coming to Temple. She served as public relations officer for Temple’s ACM student chapter and, during her last semester and through the ensuing summer, as a CIS grader and course assistant.

“I loved my experience at Temple, and I’d still like to be there now,” she says, “but my job is even more fun.”

—Bruce Beans
Stephen P. Peterson (BS ’11; MS ’14, Geo): Keeping Philadelphia’s soil safe

Older industrial cities such as Philadelphia tend to have high lead and heavy-metals concentrations in their soil. With the growth of urban agriculture—where people use vacant lots, parks and even recreation centers to grow fruits and vegetables—concerns have arisen about whether people are slowly poisoning themselves by eating what they grow in urban gardens.

Stephen P. Peterson decided to explore whether or not such dangers lurk in Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park, the largest inner-city park system in the U.S. and the site of some urban agriculture. For a year and a half, he examined the presence of lead and other potentially harmful heavy metals in the soil there.

“Everywhere I went—no matter how old the area or how dense the woods—the levels of lead and other metals were well above Philadelphia’s normal level, which is already above the national average,” he says. All but one of the urban gardens he tested were in raised planting beds where the soil is brought in from elsewhere, so heavy-metals levels were low. “Fairmount Park people are doing it right bringing in fresh topsoil,” he explains.

Peterson shared his research with city officials. “This research provides the city with the necessary information and tools to better assess the locations of these materials concentrations, test the park’s soils more efficiently and do what is necessary to make the park healthier for Philadelphia’s inhabitants,” he says.

His research has won numerous awards at national and international conferences and helped earn him a prestigious yearlong fellowship from the U.S. Forest Service’s Northern Research Station in Philadelphia. “They’re interested in the urban forestry landscape and getting the urban tree canopy back to what it once was, and they believed this research could impact that,” says Peterson.

Improving the environment fulfills a dream that began when Peterson enrolled in and loved an environmental science class in high school. “I wanted to be a tree hugger and change the world,” he says. “I came to Temple because it was one of the few schools at that time that offered environmental science.”

Peterson is now with GEI Consultants, an engineering and scientific consulting firm in Mount Laurel, New Jersey.

—Preston Moretz, SMC ’82