



Rain Byars, Highland Hall class of '93, has been on the forefront of renewable energy since 1997

## Alumni Profile: Rain Byars

After graduating from Carnegie Mellon University with a degree in mechanical engineering Rain Byars, (class of '93), knew her real interest lay in renewable energy. Rain set her sights on moving to San Francisco with the intention of landing a job with one of the burgeoning wind turbine companies there. "But when I got there, I realized that most of the companies were going out of business or had already gone bankrupt." With a fair amount of luck Rain landed a job at Zond in Tehachapi, California, the only wind turbine manufacturer left in the U.S. At the time, wind energy was still relatively unheard of in the U.S, and Zond was an energetic company with "people who were passionate about their work."

Rain's first job at Zond was to try to make their wind turbine product more cost effective. She interfaced with suppliers' engineers to try and create more efficient design components. Before long, Zond's product proved to be successful and also a good money maker. Customers included utility companies across the U.S. and private energy companies who recognized the potential for profit in wind energy. Zond's success eventually led to a buyout by Enron, which was followed by the energy giant's public downfall. In the aftermath, Zond was acquired by GE and now operates as GE Wind.

Through her work Rain met her husband, Bill Miller, a wind turbine designer who is a huge advocate of renewable energy. "There is no reason that anyone in California should have an electrical bill," he says. Due to the state's forward thinking in terms of tax incentives and rebates, "going green makes good financial sense for California homeowners." Bill adds, "depending on your energy use, you can make a substantial return on your investment in a few years."

Feeling smothered by working for a large corporation, Rain and Bill decided to form their own company, Rain or Shine, which focused primarily on residential energy installations. The couple designed custom renewable energy installations utilizing both wind and solar energy systems. "Every installation is unique because of the customer's energy needs, the design of their house and the geographical setting." They also guided their customers through the complex rebate and tax credit process which often became the most challenging part of their job.

In 2006, Rain and Bill moved to Germany where wind energy is much more established and "the demand is outstripping supply." Rain and Bill now work with WindForce, a global wind energy consulting company, and consult with manufacturers around the world who are scrambling to build wind turbines. "The Europeans are years ahead of the US," Rain says. "Plus they're on target to reach their goal of 20% renewable energy production by the year 2020."

When asked about the US, both Rain and Bill sigh, "We're in the Stone Age. There is not even a national renewable energy target." As for the future of wind energy in the U.S., Rain and William agree that it's got a bright future, "because it makes money." It may, however, be a while before we see other renewable energy sources take off in the U.S. "because our government is still focusing on fossil fuels." In the meantime, "Our hope is that next administration will see the benefits both from an ecological and financial standpoint of renewable energy sources."



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