

Alumnus Profile

2014 Alumni Achievement Award Recipient

Alfred P. Spivack, MD '54

Fine Art, Good Medicine

Little did he know it then, but one of the first visits Alfred P. Spivack, MD '54, made to Jefferson's campus 65 years ago would shape his 50-plus-year career in medicine.

In the office of Dean William Harvey Perkins, MD, in 1949, Spivack was told the upcoming first-year class was full, but there was a strong likelihood he would be admitted the following year.

"Dean Perkins said, 'You get good grades, and you're a swimmer. I'm a father and a grandfather, and I'm going to teach my grandchildren to swim this week. If you were in my position, how would you teach them the backstroke?'"

Spivack went on to describe the swimming stroke, something he knew well as a member of the Temple University swim team. Perkins wasn't only interested in passing along this lesson to his grandchildren. Spivack later realized the dean wanted to observe how well he could teach, as the mixture of practicing and teaching medicine was at the core of his education at Jefferson and career.

"To this day, my meeting with Dean Perkins was one of the best interviews I've ever had," he says. "All of my professors at Jefferson were teacher-practitioners, and that is very much how I've patterned my medical career."

Spivack received Jefferson's 2014 Alumni Achievement Award in recognition of his lifelong desire to care for patients and to teach the next generation of clinicians.

A True Pioneer

Spivack began his career in cardiology at Stanford University Medical Center, Palo Alto, Calif., in 1959. Five years later, he was asked to serve as founding director of Stanford Hospital and Medical School's coronary care unit, one of the first of its kind in the country.

"We were pioneers," Spivack says. "Bedside defibrillation was developed in the early 1960s, and physicians and nurses had to be trained in this life-saving procedure."

Always primed to find opportunities to educate, Spivack wanted to create a way to teach other physicians and nurses to use defibrillation at the bedside. He met with Bill Hewlett of Hewlett-Packard about his idea and developed for the company the Arrhythmia Trainer, a patented defibrillator-teaching device.

Spivack was director of the coronary care unit at Stanford through 1975, when he returned to private practice. His love of learning led him to train with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in diving medicine, or hyperbarics. While there, he realized something was missing from Stanford's curriculum.

"I spoke with the chairman of the department of medicine about why hyperbarics wasn't in the medical school program. We both agreed if there were a sports medicine program, that would be one course where it would fit. I found

myself volunteering to start the sports medicine program."

He stayed on to teach in the sports medicine program through 1995, when he retired from Stanford. His work in medicine, though, continued when he joined VIVUS Inc. as director of medical services. He still consults for the drug-development company.

Artist at Heart

The stresses and challenges of medical practice led Spivack in new meditative and creative directions — underwater photography, then ceramics. Many of his underwater images were later translated to ceramics and ceramics/glassworks.

With his passion for innovation, Spivack developed a new artistic technique in 2007 — fusing clay and dichroic glass (glass coated with a thin film of metallic oxides, which have been vaporized by an electronic beam). His work has appeared in many galleries and exhibitions in the United States and Asia.

"Creating art is a very meditative process and allows me to be alone and let my thoughts flow," he says. "It helped me to be a better listener and observer and to understand my patients better. I practiced in a glorious era — there was more time to observe a patient than a computer screen."

Throughout his life, whether it's in medicine or art, Spivack has always wanted to contribute, to add something new and not

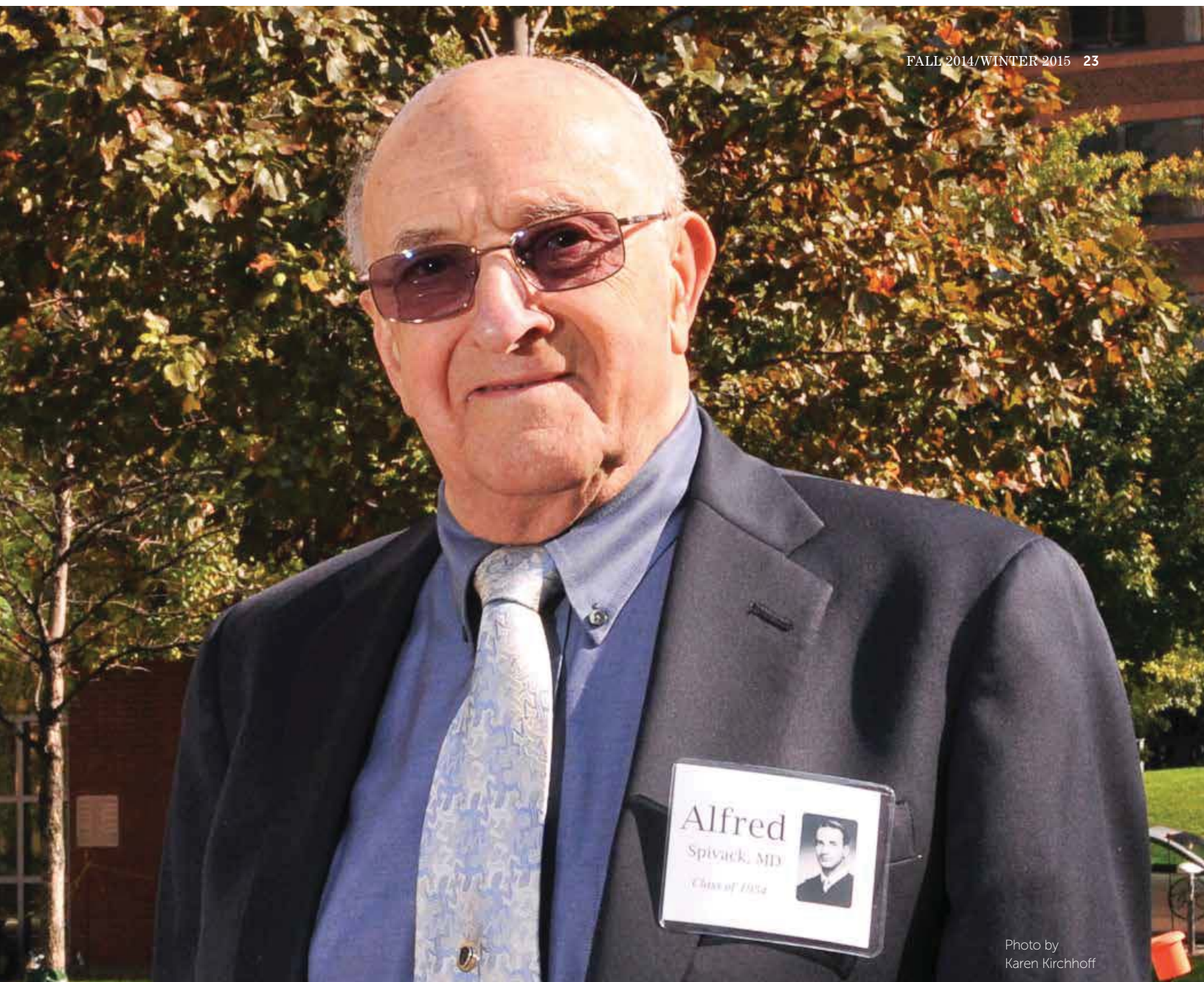


Photo by
Karen Kirchoff

live off someone else's successes.

"I feel like that was the lesson Jefferson taught me; it's what I tell my grandchildren. 'When you go somewhere, leave it better than you found it.' It was something I have tried to follow through with all of my life."

— *Stacey Miller*



Examples of Spivack's artwork