

## Acupuncturist and educator Clayton Spivey '70 helps Eastern and Western medicines work together.

By Bridget Meeds '91  
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In 1970, as Clayton Spivey was finishing her Ithaca College degree in speech and drama, she had no idea where her career path would take her. She decided to go for her master's degree in communication theory from Bowling Green University, which led to a teaching appointment at the University of Maryland and, later, various administrative posts at the institution's professional schools. In 1985 Spivey decided it was time to look for something different.



Point of contact: Clayton Spivey '70

She took a job running an intervention program for inner-city high school students at risk. During this time she realized that she needed to find a better way to deal with her depression, with which she had struggled since graduate school. A chance encounter with an acupuncturist at a party in 1987 led her to try that method of treatment.



"Acupuncture for me was like turning the lights on, in terms of finding my own joy," Spivey says. "I remember one day I was riding in the car --- it was a spring day, and I was singing. And I'd never done that before, never! It was as if the world had turned Technicolor."

Spivey's personal experience with acupuncture was so profound that in 1989 she took a leave of absence from teaching to study at the Traditional Acupuncture Institute (TAI) in Baltimore. "I was 40 years old, had a really good job with the school system, was respected, and didn't want to cut it all off without a safety net," says this warm, effusive woman. "But it dawned on me that there were so many people in the world who had lost the light in their eyes. I was looking at them in the classroom. I realized that I could probably do more as an acupuncturist than I could do as a teacher."

The rigorous two-and-a-half-year program culminated in licensing by the state of Maryland. Spivey didn't need that safety net after all. "Turns out," she says, "I 'flew' without falling."

In 1991 Spivey opened her own private practice in Baltimore. She treats patients with a wide variety of ailments, using both acupuncture and Chinese medicine.

Although Spivey understands that some people see Western and Eastern medicine as opposed to one another, she tries to work with both. "I am not anti-Western medicine," she explains. "I look to use it in a complementary fashion. Acupuncture is a fabulous partner to it. Acupuncture makes people more receptive to beneficial drugs and procedures. It reminds the body to be healthy and to take advantage of Western medical treatment the best that it can. I also think that it enables a body to do far more with less. Most of the people that have received acupuncture can do with very small doses of medication, instead of the big cannons that the doctors often drag out."



As an example, she describes a patient who came to her suffering from lupus. This patient was on very high dosages of a steroid that has potentially deadly side effects. After several years of acupuncture the patient has reduced her medication to a very small dosage and feels much better.

Spivey loved her practice from day one, but she still felt a calling to teach. In 1992 her former teachers at TAI invited her to return to "carry tea." She explains: "I needed to get several years of practice and experience under my belt before I was allowed to 'carry tea.' That means, in the Oriental traditions, you assist the senior teachers --- 'carry their tea' --- before being allowed to take on a class by yourself. Within another year I was teaching on my own."

Now, as a senior faculty member, Spivey teaches diagnosis, treatment planning, and advanced theory. She has come full circle. Last year, in her 30th year of teaching, her acupuncture students voted for her to receive the school's Great Esteem Award for excellence in teaching. The former university professor and inner-city schoolteacher says, "It was the highlight of my teaching career!"

**Photos by Christine Schaffer**