

# Happy 110th birthday, Professor Alyea

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Raymond Chen

Professor Hubert Alyea would be 110 years old today, if he were still among us. (He passed away in 1996 at the ripe age of 93.) *LIFE* magazine called him the science teacher you wish you had for his engaging (and often explosive) chemistry demonstrations. He was called an “international grand master of lecture demonstrations” by Bassam Shakhashiri, noted chemist and author of several books on chemical demonstrations. I had the immense good fortune to attend one of his lectures. As he prepared his equipment, he casually popped a piece of dry ice in his mouth. (DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME.) You can see a demonstration at the start of this video:

Somebody asked, “Professor Alyea, how can you handle dry ice like that?” He spit out the dry ice and replied, “Oh, I’m not handling it. I’m putting it in my mouth.”

Here is a VHS recording of his lecture *Lucky Accidents, Great Discoveries and the Prepared Mind*.

The lecture concludes at 25:15 with a series of reactions, culminating in his signature demonstration. The colors don’t show up well in the video, so you’ll have to trust that they are what he says they are.

[Raymond Chen](#)

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