

Blythe Danner Fought Same Oral Cancer That Killed Husband Bruce Paltrow

After three surgeries, chemo and radiation, Blythe Danner—mom to Gwyneth Paltrow and known for roles in “Meet the Parents” and “Will & Grace”—says, “I’m fine and dandy now.”

November 30, 2022 By Laura Schmidt

Award-winning actress Blythe Danner, 79, revealed that she is in remission after battling the same [oral cancer](#) that killed her husband, Bruce Paltrow, 20 years ago.

Danner, mother to Gwyneth Paltrow, 50, and Jake Paltrow, 47, was diagnosed in 2018 with adenoid cystic carcinoma, a rare form of oral cancer that forms in the salivary glands.

“Everyone is touched by cancer in some way, but it’s unusual for a couple to have the same cancer,” she said in [a People article](#). “I remember I looked up at heaven and said to Bruce, ‘Are you lonely up there?’” Danner said.

The Emmy and Tony winner is likely best known for playing Will Truman’s mother, Marilyn, on the TV series Will & Grace and Robert De Niro’s wife, Dina Byrnes, in Meet the Parents (2000) and its 2010 sequel, Little Fockers.

Danner admitted that she didn’t tell her children about her diagnosis because she “wanted to forge ahead as a mother, and I didn’t want them to worry.”

Gwyneth said she was “obviously very shocked” and that “it felt really eerie because it was so similar [to my dad’s].” She added that her mother fought cancer “with so much grace” and she “was amazed at how strong she was able to be.”

After undergoing two surgeries, radiation and chemotherapy and exploring alternative treatments for several years, Danner had a third surgery in 2020 that successfully removed the cancerous tissue. “It’s a sneaky disease. But I’m fine and dandy now. And I’m lucky to be alive,” she said to People.

Throughout her journey, Danner fearlessly faced uncertainty and the possibility of death. She credits her outlook on death to the shock of losing her beloved husband of 33 years. “You never

get over that kind of loss,” she said. “Bruce was the heart of our family. And life is so much paler without him around. But grief is the price we pay for love.”

Danner advocates for the Oral Cancer Foundation, which raises awareness of oral and oropharyngeal cancers and encourages regular screenings by dental professionals. It is estimated that about 54,000 Americans are diagnosed with oral and oropharyngeal cancers annually.

When reflecting on her own battle and Bruce’s death, Danner said “I think we’ve all become somehow stronger. It’s a bit of a crapshoot — this disease and this life. But I’ve had a career, great kids and a loving husband. I’m very grateful.”

To learn more, read Cancer Health’s [Oral Cancer Basics](#), or click [#Oral Cancer](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Secondhand Smoke Increases Risk of Oral Cancer](#),” “[Oral Sex Increases Oral Cancer Risk by 80%](#)” and “[I Wish I’d Had the Vaccine](#).”