



Dr. Danielle Spencer

June 24, 1965 - August 11, 2025

Dr. Danielle Luise Spencer, 60, of Bon Air, Virginia, passed away peacefully on August 11, 2025, at Chippenham Hospital in Richmond, VA, with her devoted mother, Cheryl Pelt, and beloved brother, jazz musician Jeremy Pelt, by her side.

Born on June 24, 1965, in the Bronx, New York, Dr. Spencer was Cheryl Pelt's first born child. She attended Malibu Junior High School, International School Of The Ivory Coast, and Beverly Hills High School.

At just 10 years old, Dr. Spencer was cast in the iconic role of “Dee Thomas” on the hit sitcom *What’s Happening!!* (1976–1979). As “Dee,” she was the personification of the typical bratty yet lovable little sister on ABC’s hit show, which centered around teenagers and their antics while growing up in the inner city of Los Angeles. The role of “Dee Thomas” became an American household name, and her character was most notably remembered for her sharp wit and wisecracking banter — especially her unforgettable line, “Oooh, I’m gonna tell Mama.”

Dr. Spencer has the historic distinction of being the first Black female child to star regularly in a network television series. Her groundbreaking role is honored and exhibited at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., where her legacy is

preserved for future generations.

Her career in entertainment extended beyond What's Happening!! and its spinoff What's Happening Now!! (1985–1988). She appeared in numerous television programs and films, including The Brady Bunch Special (1977), Christmas at Walt Disney World (1978), The Tap Dance Kid (1978), Soul Train (1987), Days of Our Lives (2001), As Good As It Gets (1997), and Peter Rabbit and the Crucifix (2001). She was also honored at the TV Land Awards in 2006 as television's "brattiest kid," a distinction she embraced with joy.

In 1977, Dr. Spencer was critically injured in a tragic car accident that claimed the life of her stepfather actor, Tim Pelt. Though she endured a three-week coma and extensive injuries, she demonstrated remarkable strength and resilience throughout her recovery. Despite lifelong health challenges stemming from the accident, she refused to let adversity define her.

In 1979, Dr. Spencer's family moved to the Ivory Coast for healing.

Encouraged by her late stepfather's support and driven to achieve her lifelong dream of becoming a veterinarian, the family moved back to the United States. Dr. Spencer began her studies at the University of California, UC Davis, completing part of her pre-veterinary coursework. She later transferred to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Marine Biology and became a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. She went on to Tuskegee University College of Veterinary Medicine in Alabama, where she earned her Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine degree in 1993. For more than 25 years, Dr. Spencer dedicated herself to caring for animals as a licensed veterinarian, fulfilling the dream her stepfather had inspired.

Her story of perseverance was chronicled in her 2011 autobiography, Through

the Fire... Journal of a Child Star, which she co-authored with her mother, Cheryl Pelt. The book candidly shared her journey of survival, resilience, and hope, offering readers a powerful glimpse into her determination and faith. She also faced and overcame breast cancer in 2014, continuing to inspire countless others with her optimism and courage.

Beyond her acting and veterinary work, Dr. Spencer supported Young People for Young People, a nonprofit organization co-founded by her mother, Cheryl Pelt and her brother Jeremy Pelt. The organization produced a cable-TV program for youth called Listen Up! which aired between 1988 and 1990. The program fostered teen discussions on pressing social issues such as racial tension, gangs, and drugs, while also raising funds for self-esteem seminars and academic enrichment programs.

In recent years, Dr. Spencer expanded her creative legacy by launching "Forever Danielle," a line of scented candles, and by starring in Jeremy Cormier's stage play Even A Good Man Is Tempted.

Dr. Spencer will be remembered as an icon who overcame extraordinary challenges with grace and determination. Her legacy as a child star, accomplished veterinarian, author, humanitarian, and survivor will live on in history and in the hearts of many.

She is survived by her devoted mother, Cheryl Pelt; her brother, world renowned internationally acclaimed jazz musician Jeremy Pelt; treasured nephew, Milo Pelt, her cherished nieces, Charlie Pelt and Amma Pelt, her aunt Audrey Gaul, her god mother Rosalind Mphalele, cousins, Karen Jones, Gordon Kenney, Krystal Kim, George and Pat Haskins, Johnny and Delores McQuinn, and a host of beloved cousins in New York and Virginia. She also leaves behind countless family members, friends, colleagues, and admirers

whose lives were enriched by her warmth, humor, and resilience. We honor the ancestors that preceded in death before her. They include her grandparents Hayward and Marion Smith and Aunt June Kim.

“I’ve been through the fire, but I came out stronger. Every challenge I faced was a step toward the woman I was meant to be.” – Dr. Danielle Luise Spencer

Memorial service arrangements are under the direction of March Funeral Home, Laburnum Chapel.

For those interested in sending flowers, please do so at:

March Funeral Home, 2110 E. Laburnum Avenue, Richmond, VA 23222.

In lieu of flowers, the family will accept donations supporting cancer research and animal welfare. Checks can be made payable to March Funeral Home c/o "Marlow Waller" and mailed to: March Funeral Home, 2110 E. Laburnum Avenue, Richmond, VA 23222

Previous Events

Acceptance of Flower Deliveries

AUG **20**. 12:00 PM - 4:00 PM (ET)

March Funeral Home-Laburnum Chapel
Richmond, VA 23222

At the family's request, please send all floral arrangements to March Funeral Home.

Tribute Wall



“ *View and Download the Funeral Program*

March Funeral Homes - August 22, 2025 at 05:06 PM

CG

Thank You So Much!

Crystal Grose - August 25, 2025 at 08:46 AM

VJ

“ *Heartfelt Condolences to the family, friends and fans! Gone too soon and you will be missed!*

VJohnson - August 24, 2025 at 10:22 AM

DS

“ *My deepest sincere sympathy to the family of Dr. Danielle Spencer. I am so very sorry for your loss. I remember watching her on the TV sitcom "What's Happening" and "What's Happening Now." I always laughed at the way she would tell her TV Brother "Ooh I'm telling Mama!" She will be missed very much by everyone who knew her and loved her. May God Bless you all. Special greetings to Delores McQuinn from me. Sincerely, David Shaw Richmond, Virginia.*

David Wayne Shaw - August 23, 2025 at 03:03 PM

WS

My condolences to the family Dee was my favorite character she will be deeply missed rip Danielle Spencer


William earl Smith - September 11, 2025 at 06:55 AM

WS

She will always be my Dee

William earl Smith - October 06, 2025 at 06:51 PM

AL

Dee may the god of all comfort your family during these painful times my deepest condolences to your family and friends may her soul rip


Alice - October 25, 2025 at 04:24 PM

WS

Rest in peace Dee love you

William Smith - March 30 at 11:50 AM

RS

“*Dr. Danielle Spencer. She was definitely a SHERO! Throughout all the health challenges that she endured. An inspiration to us all. My condolences to the Pelt family. Her mother, her brother and husband. The cast of "What's Happening"/"What's Happening Now". Ernest and Haywood, ya'll are true brothers. I am the same age as Dr. Danielle. Born in 1965, and growing up, she was my TV crush. I knew about her earning her veterinarian degree, but I didn't know about her health conditions. I was wondering why I didn't see her on television in the later years until I saw the video she made on the Oprah Network. It made me very sad as I am now. She doesn't have to suffer anymore. She's in the hands of the Lord. No more wheelchair, no more crutches. Rest in Peace Queen, Rest in Peace!!*

Robert Stubbs - August 21, 2025 at 07:34 PM

MW

“ Dear Dr. Dee

God knows your works : He knows all your love for Him, and your love for His people. These are the truths which I embrace; knowing, because of you, the world is a better place.

Thanking God for every remembrance of you.

Somehow, of all the episodes of, What's Happening, the one I treasure most is the scene in which you visited an elderly man (sports legend) in the hospital. After learning of his passing, with much conviction as a grown-up, you gently declared, He can not get hurt, sliding into a cloud.

Never shall I forget the times my family and I spent watching you and your TV family in What's Happening! Regretfully, we never saw you evolving and coming into your own as an adult.

Thank You, for being you. Since I know where you are ,I say , You are alright now and forever. You will never suffer again. For, you can not get hurt sliding into a cloud...

We will meet in heaven, when I first see our Savior face to face. Until then, rest in peace.

Love, M. Fay Wilson

M. Fay Wilson - August 20, 2025 at 05:29 PM

CS

“ *I grew up watching her on the What's Happening tv show. She will be missed.*

Cheryl Spurlock - August 20, 2025 at 04:37 PM

BB

“ Dear Brother Jeremy Pelt and Family, On behalf of Richmond Jazz Society please accept our sincerest condolences on the passing of Dr. Danielle Spencer. May your sweet memories give you comfort and may God grant you Peace. To Brighter Moments, Robert Payne, President and (Ms.) B. J. Brown, Executive Director Richmond Jazz Society Incorporated 🎵❤️

B. J. Brown - August 20, 2025 at 02:58 PM

BH

“ I am also a huge fan of "What's Happening and "What's Happening Now". Dr. Danielle "Dee" reminded me of my little sister Kim when she was her age, telling our Mom on us when we did something. Danielle was a fantastic actress and I hope she was awarded for her talents. She's like me, I love dogs, and I have 2 a Chihuahua and a labradoodle and they are my children. Sending prayers and condolences to her mom and brother. From another huge fan of "Dee". My heaven smile on your family because heaven has gotten a pure jewel!!
Beverly A. Harris, Mt. Gilead, NC



Beverly A. Harris - August 20, 2025 at 12:07 AM

VE

I love love love Dee... her famous saying and she would give Roger, Dwayne and Rerun a fit...im sorry to hear of her passing

Valerie Ebron - August 21, 2025 at 04:10 PM

LD

“ Dear Danielle It was an honor and a lifelong childhood dream of mine to meet you and I did in 2011 at your book signing at booksoup I had brought along my then 6 year old son John -Michael and he kept asking questions and you answered all of them and just loved him. Later I met Ernest Thomas and he is a family friend and I met you again the next year at a play Ernest was in and my son was there and you were soo glad to see him. I was diagnosed with spinal stenosis in 2020 and the book that you wrote has helped me to navigate the pain I go through. I know you walked through the gates of heaven with no cane and in no more pain and are free. You will live on in tv reruns forever until we meet again sis I will see you again real soon say hello to all our ancestors. To the family stay strong, Dee is not dead, she's just sleeping. I love you Danielle Thank you for your kindness and being a Facebook friend as well. Rest well sis you earned your wings now your an ANGEL!!

Lactrice Delton - August 19, 2025 at 04:11 PM



“ I had you as a friend on Facebook and you saw my statuses about the spinal cord stimulator, and next thing I know you reached out to me about the stimulator what does it do and how does it help with pain you and I had several conversations about it after that I will say you're not suffering anymore. God is wrapped his arms around you and taking you under his wings my prayers for your family rest well.



Twania Daniels - August 18, 2025 at 08:41 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Dr. Danielle Spencer.*



August 18, 2025 at 07:27 PM



“ *Sending prayers and comfort to the family of Doctor Danielle Spencer during this difficult time. I grew up watching What's Happening and fell in love with her "spunk" She will truly be missed. May she find rest and comfort with our Lord*



Melanie Walker - August 18, 2025 at 01:17 PM



My name is Michael Jackson I met Mrs Danielle Spencer 30-50 years ago in nyc her aunt live around the corner from me I was so shock that her families was living around the corner from me I "am so glad I got a chance to see her in person may she rest in peace in heaven Mj Also to (RERUN) (SHIRLEY) (MABLE KING)

michael - August 18, 2025 at 05:56 PM



“ *I send my deepest condolences to the family of Dr. Spencer. I grew up watching "Dee" and I still watch reruns of What's Happening." May God continue to watch over the family during this difficult time.*

Virginia Pulliam

Virginia Pulliam - August 18, 2025 at 10:45 AM

CG

“ To the Family of Danielle Spencer:

Sending love, prayers, and sincere condolences on the passing of a beautiful human being. On behalf of Generation X, I would like to thank Danielle for playing a huge part in our upbringing during the 70's and 80's. There will never be another Dee Thomas. I have even nicknamed her as the "Little Sister of Generation X." As I represent my generation in saying this, we are also extremely proud of Danielle on her accomplishments outside of the entertainment industry. We applaud her work in the medical field as a veterinarian as well as her humanitarian efforts. She will be dearly missed, remembered, and forever loved.



Crystal Grose - August 18, 2025 at 08:41 AM

ME

“ I grew up watching Danielle Spencer (her character Dee) on the television show "Whats Happening". May she Rest in Peace"!!! 🙏🙏
🙏❤️❤️❤️

Merita Edwards - August 18, 2025 at 07:53 AM

BD

“ Bridgette D. Damon lit a candle in memory of Dr. Danielle Spencer



Bridgette D. Damon - August 18, 2025 at 02:13 AM

RB

“ I grew up watching *What's Happening* where Dee sassed her brother Roge and charged him for it. That team kept me laughing. Rest well Sis.

Rochelle Bohler - August 17, 2025 at 07:35 PM

MG

“ I am a fan of Danielle Spencer she has always made me laugh in tough times and for that I thank her. I hope she is at peace now and she knows how much she is loved thank you Dee for being a true gift

michael garrison - August 17, 2025 at 03:02 PM

CG

“ rest in peace my friend your spirit will live on until we meet again love G

Coach Anthony Grigsby - August 17, 2025 at 12:49 AM

SS

“ I grew up watching *what's happening* and Dee and Roge reminded me of my sister growing up. Take your Rest sweet Lady.



Sharon Green Stevens - August 16, 2025 at 09:57 AM

SF

“ I am a huge fan of her from, " What's Happening Now." She was brilliant on that show and she was such an inspiration. She was beautiful,smart and strong. Although I never met her personally,her gift and humor from acting brought me so much joy and I am praying for her family, friends and other fans like myself. She will be missed but never forgotten.. God has her in his loving arms now.
R.I. P Danielle Spencer.

Sasha Foster - August 15, 2025 at 08:16 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



March Funeral Homes - August 15, 2025 at 06:13 PM

CB

Never knew you personally but I enjoyed watching you on what happening , you was a great actress and you made me cry laughing so many times. You may be gone but you will live on in all the rerun shows forever for many generation to enjoy. Thank you Dee. You will always be missed but your presents in thus earth will live on forever sis, say hi in heaven to you play ma ms. Thomas, rerun and Shirley. Rest easy sis

Christopher brown - August 17, 2025 at 08:30 PM



“ We the March Family and Staff wish to extend our deepest and heartfelt sympathy in the passing of your loved one. Our prayers go out to you and your family in your time of loss. We know and understand that you have received many expressions of love and we will continue to lift you up in prayer. May the memories you cherish of brighter and happier days help to ease your sorrow and comfort you always.

March Funeral Homes - August 15, 2025 at 05:52 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Dr. Danielle Spencer.



August 15, 2025 at 03:32 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Danielle Spencer.

August 15, 2025 at 03:32 PM