

# *Stanley*

# *Tucci's*

*New*



### **Relishing the Moment**

Tucci, who hosts the CNN food and travel show *Searching for Italy*, inhaled the scent of fresh rosemary at his photo shoot in London on Feb. 23.

*Taste*

AFTER SURVIVING  
CANCER, THE  
ACTOR IS  
CHERISHING  
A NEW CHAPTER  
FILLED WITH  
FAMILY, FRIENDS  
AND FOOD

By **MONIQUE  
JESSEN**

*for Life*

Photographs by **MATT HOLYOAK**

# On a snowy mountain in France last month, Stanley Tucci stopped skiing after making a surprising discovery. “I could smell someone cooking paprika,” says the actor, who then spotted a restaurant off in the distance.

“My wife goes, ‘What are you talking about? I can’t smell anything.’ But I realized my sense of taste and smell are now heightened more than ever.”

For Tucci, this sensory overload is a miracle he couldn’t have imagined a few years ago. The beloved star of the films *The Devil Wears Prada*, *The Hunger Games* and *The Lovely Bones* was diagnosed with cancer at the base of his tongue in 2017 and underwent intensive 35-day radiation treatment and seven sessions of chemotherapy that ravaged his senses and left him unable to eat and dependent on a feeding tube. Now cancer-free, the 61-year-old actor, who lives in London with his wife, literary agent Felicity Blunt (actress Emily Blunt’s older sister), 40, is enjoying a second act and a renewed passion for food and life. “I’m incredibly lucky,” he says.

He recently wrote the memoir *Taste: My Life Through Food* (in which he first revealed his cancer struggle), and he’s the host and creator of the Emmy-winning CNN show *Searching for Italy*, in which he travels through the country tasting

regional cuisine. He also became a social media sensation in 2020 after posting a video of himself making a Negroni cocktail. “I had, like, four Instagram followers, and then I post the video, and it explodes. It changed my life completely,” he says. “All I had to do was be myself.” His casually debonair charm earned him a sex-symbol status that he says he hasn’t quite wrapped his head around. “I feel great about it. Who goes, ‘I feel terrible about that’? People think I’m sexy? How awful. It’s wonderful. I don’t get it, but I’m very glad.”

It’s a stunning turn of events for a man who had feared he’d never be able to fully savor life again. The grueling cancer treatments destroyed his taste buds and temporarily robbed him of his ability to taste and smell the food that was such a central part of his existence. Tucci underwent radiation and chemo at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, five days a week for seven weeks. The process left him so weak he could barely stand. He developed labyrinthitis, an inner ear condition that caused vertigo and nausea. Early in his treatment, food began to taste like “old wet cardboard but slathered with someone’s excrement,” he wrote. Then for almost six months, because of mouth ulcers and damage to his salivary glands, he had to use a feeding tube that went directly into his stomach. He lost more than 30 lbs. “You feel like you want to die because you feel so sick,” he says. “And on

## His Circle of Love



### Savoring Life Together

“She’s so smart,” says Tucci of wife Felicity (in a photo posted last July). At their 2012 wedding, the “cake” was a stack of wheels of cheese.



### Family First

Tucci in 2015 with his three older kids Nicolo, Camilla and Isabel, sister-in-law Emily and wife Felicity. “Even if I hadn’t been sick, I’m a little older now. I want to spend time with my family. I don’t want to go away all the time for work,” he says.



‘I couldn’t be with someone who didn’t care about food. I just wouldn’t be attracted to them’



top of that, you’re not able to interact with the people you love in the way you like to interact with them, which is over a glass of wine and a bowl of pasta.”

Culinary pleasures had always been a key component of Tucci’s life. He grew up in Westchester County, N.Y., the oldest of three children in a family with roots in Calabria, Italy, and the Tuccis shared a passion for both food and film. He combined both while writing, directing and starring in *Big Night*, his breakout 1996 film about two Italian immigrants trying to save a failing restaurant. He returned to his favorite theme in 2009’s *Julie & Julia*, in which he played the husband of legendary TV chef Julia Child. He’s also known for bringing his favorite foods to work. “I remember he would come to the set with gorgeous fried risotto balls and pasta that would leave everyone just abandoning their nibbled-on kale chips and salivating over what he’d brought in,” says Emily Blunt, who

## *Why I Love Stanley*

**EMILY BLUNT** CELEBRATES HER BROTHER-IN-LAW

I love that Stan starts each day walking into the kitchen (always looking immaculate head to toe—never seen him in his socks in my life), going “Ah, Chrissst,” probably from a sleepless night of small children being up or from a night where martinis flowed. He has his espresso. And he’s a changed man. Stanley is a beautiful painter. He’s also a great drummer. And weirdly flexible. A leg lift that rivals Jane Fonda’s. He’s an all-around renaissance man who knows the way to everyone’s hearts. And it’s through having a damn good time. He’s frighteningly bright, quick to laugh, loves to be laughed at, charismatic, warm and energetic. I adore the deep joy and delight he finds in people. No one more so than my sister and his children. He’s authentic and irreverent in the best way ever. He just *gets life*, and I absolutely worship the guy.



costarred with Tucci in *The Devil Wears Prada*.

Before his cancer diagnosis, Tucci had been suffering from extreme jaw pain, but no one could pinpoint the cause. “I can’t even tell you what the pain was like. I lived on ibuprofen for two years,” he says. “I had a scan, but the scan missed it. And of course, when you think that there might be something wrong, you’re also afraid that there *is* something wrong.” His fears were compounded by the fact that he lost his first wife, Kate, the mother of his three older children—twins Nicolo and Isabel, 22, and Camilla, 20—to breast cancer in 2009. “There was this fear and disbelief to think, ‘Oh God, I have to go through that. And my kids have to watch me go through that.’”

A dentist in L.A. suggested he might have oral cancer, but it wasn’t until he went to an oncologist

in the U.K. that he received an accurate diagnosis: a 3-cm. tumor. Despite the high survival rate for his form of cancer (see box), he had a tough road ahead. “They couldn’t do surgery because the tumor was so big,” he says. “It’s a miracle that it didn’t metastasize. It had been in me so long.”

In the middle of his treatments, Tucci’s wife gave birth to their daughter Emilia, now 3, their second child together. (Their son Matteo is 7.) Emilia was born at the hospital where Tucci was being treated, but he was too sick to fully relish the happy moment. “The doctor walked me over, and I went, ‘I’m so happy. I love you. I got to go.’ And I went to bed. You’re so sick, nothing seems real.” The physical toll left him “incredibly depressed,” he says, adding: “I’m a very impatient person anyway, and the doctors kept reassuring me it will get better.

## *Tasteful Performances*



### *Big Night (1996)*

Tucci (with Tony Shalhoub) wrote, directed and starred in the drama about brothers who run a restaurant.

### *The Devil Wears Prada (2006)*

He played a witty art director in the hit comedy with Anne Hathaway.

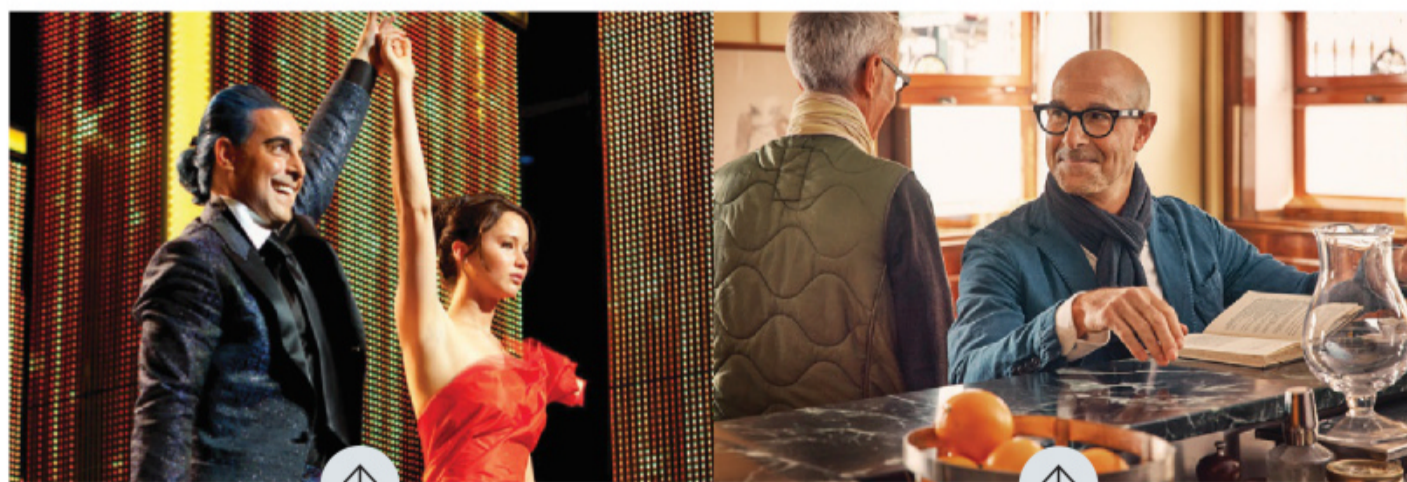


### *The Lovely Bones (2009)*

The actor took on a darker role playing a serial killer in the film based on Alice Sebold’s novel.

### *Julie & Julia (2009)*

In the foodie-beloved film, he played the husband of Julia Child (Meryl Streep).



### *The Hunger Games (2012)*

Tucci stole scenes as a smarmy TV host in the hit Jennifer Lawrence franchise.

### *Searching for Italy (2021-22)*

“I’m thrilled!” Tucci says of his travel and food series’s success. It returns for a second season this spring on CNN.



‘I don’t eat crumpets and I still drink coffee, but I do feel like this is the place where I am supposed to live’

—ON MOVING TO THE U.K.

And obviously they were right.” Several months after his treatment ended in 2018, he slowly began to regain his strength and ability to eat. “You can eat something through your mouth that didn’t hurt you, and you could really taste it, like an egg or something soft. And it was just the most exciting thing in the world,” he says. His senses of smell and taste gradually returned, though a few foods still taste “weird” to him, spicy dishes are inedibly painful, and he has to eat slowly and carefully because of low saliva.

He credits his wife, whom he began dating after they reconnected at Emily and John Krasinski’s 2010 wedding at George Clooney’s Italian villa, with encouraging him to keep going on his toughest days. “Felicity’s undying attention, affection and encouragement got me through it,” Tucci says. He also points to the support of his close friends: His *Supernova* costar Colin Firth drove him to hospital appointments in the U.K., and Ryan Reynolds, who accompanied him to appointments in New York, cried when his pal got the all-clear in late 2018.

Now mostly back to enjoying meals like he used to, Tucci is excited about his upcoming projects,

which include season 2 of *Searching for Italy* and playing Arista Records chief Clive Davis in a Whitney Houston biopic out in December. But he’s most looking forward to more time around the table with family and friends. “A perfect day off for me would be going to the farmer’s market, buy a bunch of food, start cooking, play with the kids,” says Tucci. “And then have people over for dinner. To me, that’s just a great day.” ●

### What to Know About Tongue Cancer

Tongue cancer is “becoming more common,” with roughly 20,000 cases a year in the U.S., says Dr. Adam Jacobson from Perlmutter Cancer Center at NYU Langone Health. Symptoms include trouble swallowing, throat pain and swelling of lymph nodes in the neck. Cancer at the base of the tongue is “very treatable—but the cure is not without its costs,” and patients can struggle with taste, speech and swallowing long after their treatment. The good news is it’s preventable—the majority of cases are caused by HPV, or human papillomavirus, and there’s now an effective vaccine. “The expectation is that as the younger generation is being vaccinated, there will be a decreasing number of HPV-related cancers,” says Jacobson.

— JULIE MAZZIOTTA



### Food for Thought

His bestselling 2021 memoir is filled with stories of his childhood and love of food.