

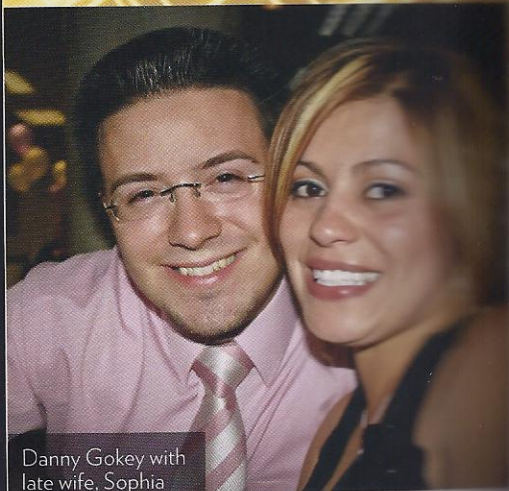


2011
PHILANTHROPIC
AWARD

Danny Gokey

MUSICIAN, FOUNDER—
SOPHIA'S HEART FOUNDATION

CCN is pleased to honor Mr. Danny Gokey for the award in the category of Philanthropic. The advisory committee has chosen Mr. Gokey as the recipient based on his work in establishing Sophia's Heart Foundation, which helps children and families who have fallen on hard times. The music and arts programs as well as scholarship opportunities that Sophia's Heart Foundation has implemented have bettered the lives of many children throughout the community. Mr. Gokey has also made a positive impact across the globe through his music and sharing his story of strength.



Danny Gokey with
late wife, Sophia

Overcoming Hardships and Giving Back

BY JAMIE TRUDELL

Catapulted into fame during Season Eight of *American Idol*, Danny Gokey has hardly had a moment to breathe in the past couple of years. With a 2010 debut album, *My Best Days*, which boasted the best opening-week sales of any debut country male in 18 years, this charismatic Milwaukee native has a lot to be thankful for. And now, he has the ideal platform to share his empowering story and give back to those in need.

It hasn't always been a charmed life for Gokey. Growing up, his parents didn't have a lot of money, but what they did have was an abundance of love and encouragement to offer their children. When Danny was in high school, he met Sophia, who would one day be his wife and the guiding force behind his success. Born with a congenital heart defect, her life abruptly came to an end in 2008, after what was supposed to be a routine heart surgery. The loss dev-

astated Gokey, but he still pursued his dreams because he knew that's what Sophia would've wanted. He credits his late wife as the inspiration behind his *American Idol* tryout, which took place just one month after her death.

Keeping positive and throwing his emotions into music kept Danny from sinking into a hole after such a great loss. "I think what you have to keep in mind, in times when you're walking through something you don't want

to walk through is that it gets better," contends Gokey. "And it's so hard to see that when you're in the storm, so to speak, but you have to understand that if you remain strong and keep your attitude right, keep thinking on good things when you're going through it, it eases it up."

Gokey's single, "I Will Not Say Goodbye," perfectly expresses the whirlwind of emotions one experiences after being dealt a sharp blow.



Although Danny didn't pen the ballad himself, he says that he definitely could've, since it so aptly embodies how he felt after the death of Sophia. The gut-wrenching chorus says it all: *I don't want to feel better/I don't want to not remember/I will always see your face in the shadows of this haunted place/I will laugh, I will cry, shake my fist at the sky, but I will not say goodbye.*" The video for the single features three real-life stories of individuals who've lost loved ones and worked to let go and overcome those trials.

Creating a foundation in his late wife's name is one way Gokey kept positive and turned a tragedy into an opportunity to change the lives of countless individuals. The mission of Sophia's Heart Foundation, established in 2008, is "to help mend and heal the hearts of children and families who have been touched by poverty, sickness, disease, broken homes and broken dreams." Music and arts programs as well as scholarship opportunities are just a couple of the ways in which the foundation reaches out to children who could use a loving hand.

Sophia's Heart Foundation is currently in the midst of several philanthropic endeavors. The One Heart... Touching Many \$1 Million Fundraising Campaign is an online venture running from November 4, 2010 through April 4, 2011. Fans of Danny can go to firstgiving.com/sophiasheart to make a donation that benefits children and families in the Milwaukee area and beyond. According to the site, Gokey says that the reason he launched the campaign is because, "At every show, my fans ask me how they can raise money for Sophia's Heart," and this is the perfect way for them to do just that.

Another fun way that the foundation is raising funds is through a cruise with Gokey. The First Annual Danny Gokey Cruise for Sophia's Heart kicked off on February 3 out of Tampa Bay, Florida. The annual cruise includes concerts by Danny and friends, auctions, and meet and greet opportunities with the Idol. The weekend trip, departing on a Thursday and arriving back on a Monday, is a great way for fans to connect with Danny while giving back at the same time.

When it comes to Danny Gokey, one thing is clear: this 30-year-old country star is showing no signs

of slowing down. He continues to give back generously to his fans and to those who've come across hard times. Danny notes, "This is just the beginning and I can't wait to see what else transpires from it." ♣

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