

Danny Gokey rose to national fame with his participation in the eighth season of American Idol. On August 8th, 2008, he auditioned in Kansas City, Missouri, along with his friend Jamar Rogers who are both from Milwaukee. Both made it through to Hollywood but Jamar was eliminated from the competition prior to the semi finals when he lost to Chad James, a local Christian artist in April 2009 during his run on Idol. He, along with runner up, Adam Lambert, were judged favourites throughout the season, consistently earning high praise from all four judges. Approximately a month before the final, judge Simon Cowell said that he expected Danny would make the final, going head to head with Adam Lambert but Kris Allen went on to win the season.

Daniel Jay Gokey was born in 1980 and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Rhonda & Charles Gokey. His parents were music fans and introduced their family of five children to a variety of sounds including jazz, motown and Country. 'My first cd was by Wynonna Judd and I loved it, I love her', Danny gushed. 'She had this soul that went into it and you just felt the music when it played. The first single that I bought in my life was Tim McGraw's Don't Take The Girl. I listened to that song and it made me want to cry. Vince Gill is another one of my favourites.'

On May 15th, 2004 Danny got married to the love of his life, Sophia Martinez. They had been high school sweethearts and had been together since 1997. Sophia was born with a heart condition that she previously had corrective surgeries for as a child. It was during surgery again in 2008 that she sadly passed away unexpectedly on July 9th, 2008. Danny was devastated and found some solace and healing in his music. 'Music was the key place where I would go, I would let the sorrow come out and let the tears just roll. Some music I would listen to had a determination in it and I resolved that this is not going to be the thing that destroys me for the rest of my life. It can be turned into a building block and I can become a better person for it. Music brought healing. That's how I got through and still get through it today.'

Since her death, the journey has not been easy for Danny but his faith in God has brought him this far. He carries her legacy on through a non-profit organisation for children he founded in her honour called Sophia's Heart Foundation. With his wife's encouragement, he auditioned for American Idol Season 8. Despite the intense grief, Danny impressed the judges with a soulful rendition of Marvin Gaye's I Heard It Through The Grapevine and gave the judges knuckle punches with an explosion!

From his days of long hours as a truck driver to his third place on Season 8 of American Idol it has been a rollercoaster journey. With an artist's eye for detail and an inquisitive spirit eager to learn from every situation, Danny has soaked up more life experience than most people

# DANNY

by  
Marilyn Davis

# GOKEY

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**American Idol is a American reality tv show which debuted on June 11th, 2002 and has since become one of the most popular shows on American television. The programme seeks to discover the best singer in the country through a series of nationwide auditions. The outcomes of the later stages of this competition are determined by public voting by telephone. During the last eight years the show has unveiled a variety of musical stars from different genres, Danny Gokey is one of those stars.**



twice his age.

His debut album, My Best Days is a collection of songs that resonate honest emotion and tap into the collective hopes and dreams that define life. After listening to the album, it is obvious that Danny has a strong sense of who he is as an artist and what he wants to say to his fans. 'It's Country but it has a little different edge', he says. 'I want to create my own fingerprint and I want my music to say something. I want to have an emotional connection but at the same time, I want to make people just have a good time, make them want to dance, have fun and party. I wanted to throw all those emotions into the cd and I feel like I accomplished that.'

During his time on American Idol, it was clear to the judges of his versatility whilst singing songs by the Temptations, Michael Jackson, Carrie Underwood, Rascal Flatts and others. As he continued to rise through the ranks, it became clear that he was blessed with a voice that could sing any style of music and turn any song into a compelling moment. So why did he choose a career as a Country artist?

'I felt like I could be myself', he says matter of factly and admits he was given some

career advice from someone he respected. 'Randy Travis was a mentor on Idol and asked me 'have you thought about Country? You really need to, because people would love you and the amount of soul that you could bring to Country. You could bring a uniqueness to it.'

Danny is still surprised and humbled by the encouragement he received from one of his musical idols and says the overall American Idol experience helped him define who he was as an artist. 'As the show progressed, I started to find myself and started to hone in on who I wanted to be, what I wanted to be and what I want to represent', he says. 'The thing that I identified with the most was the message that when I sing something passionately, I want to sing something that has a lot of meaning to me. I always found that in Country. I want to be known as a Country singer for the rest of my life.'

Danny Gokey's life before American Idol embodies the themes that populate the Country music lexicon, from his humble roots in a poor but loving family, to his hard working days as a truck driver, to the loss of the person most dear to him, his wife Sophia. Life has prepared Danny Gokey to sing Country music.