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Issue 1 | DECEMBER 2025

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Gokey**

**Opens up about
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**Daves Highway
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**Lauren Rismiller
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Cotton Candy Celebrations

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Life is As Sweet As Cotton Candy is a family-friendly monthly magazine that covers all the eclectic potpourri Cheyenne and the Front Range has to offer.

We cover a wide range of arts, music and theater while favoring local community and live entertainment. We deeply care about local community action and enriching the day-to-day lives of everyone else.

I'm an award-winning journalist, musician, songwriter, author, dancer, artist and photographer. I'm a member of the Country Music Association. I've been a member of the Wyoming Writer's Inc. and the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators in the past. Hope you enjoy a taste of the sweet and entertaining life and positive news.

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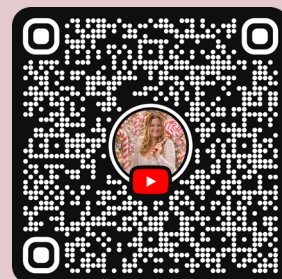
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The Harmony of Fate: A Conversation with...

DAVES & HIGHWAY

BY KAREN COTTON

In an industry often obsessed with manufactured “packages” and strategic branding, Daves Highway is a breath of fresh, unfiltered air. Known for their “blood harmonies” and a chemistry that can’t be taught, siblings Zach, Erika, and Delaney have been navigating the music world since a cover video went viral back in 2009.

I caught up with the trio this past September to discuss their new music, the reality of the independent grind, and why they’re done trying to fit into a pre-made box.

A Happy Accident

Unlike many bands that form through Craigslist ads or college dorm jam sessions, Daves Highway didn’t exactly “choose” to be a group. “I think it kind of just happened,” Delaney says with a shrug.

“There was never a moment where we said, ‘We’re starting a band and doing this for the rest of our lives,’” Erika adds. “It was almost like a fate type of thing.”

The “aha” moment arrived in the most domestic of settings: a middle school pep rally rehearsal. Delaney was practicing the National Anthem for a basketball game while the family looked on. When Erika spontaneously added a high harmony, their mother—convinced that harmony was the hardest feat in music—was floored. Zach soon joined in an octave lower, and a signature sound was born.

“We posted a video and it went viral back when ‘viral’ didn’t mean 100 million views,” Zach laughs. “People started calling us, we started playing shows, and that was that.”

The Independent Path

Fast forward to today, and the band is operating entirely on their own terms. When asked about their label status, Delaney is blunt: “We’re independent. We just do what we want—whatever that means.” That freedom is palpable on their latest self-titled EP, released on August 15.

The project features five original tracks and one poignant cover, representing the culmination of years of songwriting. The selection process was rigorous; the trio whittled down hundreds of songs to 36, then ten, finally landing on the “best of the best” five.

For Delaney, the standout is the opening track, “Astrovan.”

“It’s a real story,” Zach explains, as the others chime “yes” in unison. While they technically toured in a GMC Savannah (the “equivalent” of an Astrovan), the name didn’t quite have the same ring to it. “GMC Savannah didn’t sound as cool,” Zach admits. But the sentiment remains—it’s an ode to the years spent traveling with their parents in a van, chasing a dream.

Doing It “Anyway”

Perhaps the most telling track on the EP is their cover of Martina McBride’s “Anyway.”



For a band that has been in the industry for nearly two decades—Zach turns 30 this December—the song serves as a manifesto.

“We’ve been doing this a long time,” Zach says. “And that comes with a lot of questions from the ‘gatekeepers’ in the industry. They say, ‘We think you’re good, but what are you? We aren’t sure where to put you.’”

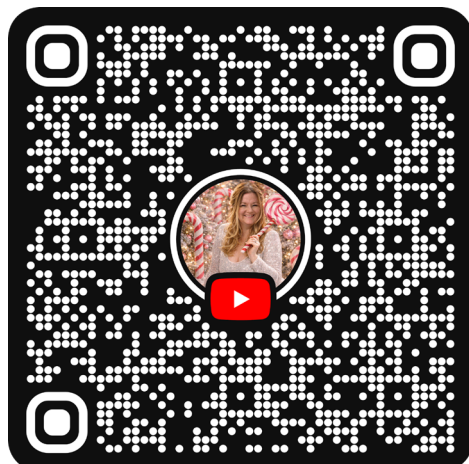
Rather than molding themselves into a shape the industry can easily categorize, the siblings have doubled down on their authenticity.

“The easy thing would be to mold and lend ourselves to what they think they can do something with,” Zach says. “But we want to be us. Even if they don’t know where to put us, we’re just going to do this anyway.”

Delaney points to her favorite lyric as the ultimate takeaway for the band: “You can pour your soul out singing a song that you believe in, and tomorrow they’ll forget you ever sang. Sing it anyway.”

As they continue to pave their own road, one thing is certain: as long as they have each other and those effortless harmonies, Daves Highway will keep singing.

Scan to see
Daves Highway
give a special
musical
performance for
Sweet As Cotton
Candy. >>>>>>



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July 18

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A MOMENT WITH DANNY

Danny Gokey became a household name after rising as a top-three finalist in American Idol's season eight. Since then he has been creating music that can be heard all over.

For those who listen to KLove Radio or Air1 Christian radio, his hits "Rise" and "Haven't Seen It Yet" likely ring a bell. He is now gearing up to release a new Christmas song which arrives just in time for the season. Gokey took time out of his busy schedule to answer some email questions for Sweet as Cotton Candy about some of his new music.

Karen: Can you tell me where you came up with the idea for the lyrics to "Sound of Heaven?"

Gokey: "This world is constantly trying to overwhelm us with distractions and pull us down with the chaos of conflicting voices. It is the joy and hope of Jesus alone that can drown out all the noise, and that's exactly why I wrote this song! My desire is never for my music to be about me, but rather about communicating the messages that God wants to share from heaven through me

and the other musicians I get to work with. This song is about the hopeful messages of heaven for whatever season of life people are in. When the world threatens to overwhelm, there is still joy to be found and strength to overcome what comes our way when we remember that ultimately our home is in heaven. Until then, there's always more to experience, see and look forward to when doing life on earth with God. That's why we can declare "Thank you, Jesus! Can't believe I get to do this life again!"

GOKEY

BY KAREN COTTON

Karen: The music video to “Sound of Heaven” is beautiful! How did you choose the visual elements of the video and what was it like when you filmed it?

Gokey: “The video was filmed in the Dominican Republic, where I’ve also filmed several of my other videos, with Danny Veras who is one of my favorite directors to work with. He’s the one who comes up with all the concepts, and I just love his creative eye and use of bright colors. It was especially important that this video captured the ‘heavenly’ feel and importance of tuning out the noise of this world, but without being cheesy, and I think he did that perfectly!”

Karen: Can you tell me how you came up with the song *Firme Estaré*?

Gokey: “‘Stay Strong’ started out as a lesser-known song from my ‘Jesus People’ album, but then it began really resonating with streaming audiences, not just in America, but around the world! In the midst of dark and uncertain times, people connected with the reminder that they can hold on to their faith because, even though they might not get the answers they long for, God is still working all things for good! That’s why I wanted to release the song in Spanish, so it would be available and accessible to a greater global audience.

My hope is that “*Firme Estaré*” helps the message of encouragement reach even more people!”

Karen: Have you performed in Cheyenne, Wyoming before? Do you ever plan on performing here where my magazine is based?

Gokey: “I don’t know that I’ve ever done a show in Cheyenne. The last time I was in Wyoming was for a show in Casper back in 2020, right before the world shut down from Covid. It’s a beautiful state, though, and I would love to come back if a promoter is ever able to book me there again!”

Karen: What kind of advice would you give to someone who is looking to pursue a career in Christian music?

Gokey: The best advice I have is to just keep being faithful with the gifts God has given you, right where you are. I didn’t set out to pursue a career in music. I led worship at my church, and was most content as a background singer. But people encouraged me to try out for American Idol, and God allowed those doors to open. Maybe you’re ‘only’ singing at your church or in coffee shops right now. Commit yourself to honoring God by putting in the time and effort, and see where He takes you.”



Lauren Rismiller Grinds Her Way

BY JAKE SORICH

When it comes time to pull out your contemporary Christmas music playlists, most people probably turn to songs like Mariah Carey's titular "All I want for Christmas Is You," or "I'll Be Home" by Meghan Trainor, among others.

And while those upbeat Christmas songs have their place, sometimes you might be in the mood for something with a little sadness mixed in, too. A sadness that has sweetness, family, and tradition behind it too with some of that "Hallmark movie" fun for good measure.

Enter Lauren Rismiller, a new up-and-coming artist from Ohio. Rismiller's latest song "Mistletoe Won't," is a modern country Christmas song about breaking up with someone during the holidays, only to find the "true" meaning of Christmas in the process.

"I was going through a breakup myself at the time when I wrote this," Rismiller said in a recent podcast interview, "and you know how that can be something you struggle with but last year I was able to do a Christmas show where we were all performing Christmas songs and a person I

was working with at that time gave me an idea to write a Christmas song."

Rismiller, 20, is a new artist signed to an independent label, and looking to make her name on the industry by finding original ways to express herself in a genre that can sometimes feel hard to do.

"It's exciting because I'm still an independent artist just trying to figure out who I am and what my sound is," Rismiller said, "But I'm entirely self taught and I've been playing for five years now in Ohio. I've been putting out music for just six months now. I recorded my first song called 'I Miss Johnny' which is actually a sequel to 'Mistletoe Won't.'"

Rismiller said the two are related but different, too.

'It's the same person and the same stories but it's a straight heartbreak song where you're just going through stuff. I think on 'Mistletoe Won't' it's a little more personal because it really help me when I was going through a lot around Christmastime.'

Rismiller added that the unique spin 'Mistletoe Won't'

provides regarding heartbreak during the holidays is one of the reasons why she's especially excited to see it released.

'It's not like any other Christmas song out there, and the chorus, 'Mistletoe Won't,' is just different and that's why I'm really proud of it," Rismiller said.

Rismiller's Instagram followers have soundly agreed with her assessment, saying things like ' This ISSSS ABSOLUTELY FIREEEEE," and "SOOOOO PROUDDD OFFF YOUUUU!"

And while Rismiller hasn't been signed to a major label just yet, she's well on her way. According to Spotify wrapped, Rismiller has 20,000 listeners just in 2025 and 133,000 streams of her music.

Her sound can maybe be best described as a young Lainey Wilson mixed with Jennifer Nettles. Rismiller said she's honored by the comparisons.

"A lot of people say I kind of have a voice like Wilson, or a mix between her and Jennifer Nettles," Rismiller said. "I can do those really high notes, and I wrote a lot of songs with that false vibrato, so a lot of my songs I use that. I've taken voice lessons when I was younger and with Nettles, she's just one of my favorite songwriters and I grew up with her. Her lyrics are just amazing, she's a great songwriter. So is Lainey. She's my idol. She's really kicking butt in the industry right now, I think didn't she host the CMA's recently? Yeah. She's amazing."

Rismiller said that while she was first drawn to pop in her youth, singers like Adele in particular, she's always had a soft spot for country and the rich storytelling.

"I'm raised on (country) because being from a small town, you love your country music and if you don't, people say you're crazy. I love the songwriting style of it, and there's so much storytelling to country music. I grew up on Taylor Swift when she first started to get big in Nashville and everyone was singing 'Love Story' It was just beautiful to me."

And while 'Mistletoe Won't' is a sad Christmas song about heartbreak, Rismiller said it's also about family and remembering to appreciate the people who matter the most in your life while they're still around. Rismiller said for her, it's been her grandma, who helped her realize the deeper meaning behind the song.

"My grandma, she's a big part of the song. My mom was the one who told her that it reminded her of HER mom, and that's when I realized it had a deeper meaning. I'm talking about past Christmas traditions because we would always go to her house and open presents and I remember how much I loved singing Christmas carols there," she said.

As for what's next for Rismiller, she said in 2026 she'd like to evolve her guitar style and focus on releasing her music and making a name for herself.

"I know I really have a great story to tell and I love to sing upbeat songs along with sad ones," she said. "I've got upbeat music I really want to put out too, I want to have fun, but I still also want to share those sad songs, too."

Rismiller said she's also looking forward to playing Country Concert on July 8 -11 in Fort Loramie, Ohio. For 2026 it'll be headlined by Jason Aldean, Alabama, and Riley Green, but both big and small artists perform there each year.

"That (Country Concert) is definitely big for me. It's the show where all the country music singers come. I actually saw Lainey Wilson on the main stage two years ago. She was really, really good. I was impressed. I'm playing on the homegrown stage, which is the smaller one, but I'm still real excited to be there."

For the full list of artists playing the Country Concert, go to www.countryconcert.com. To find more of Rismiller's music check out her Instagram page [@laurenrismillermusic](https://www.instagram.com/laurenrismillermusic) or her website at laurenrismiller.com

Graffito

From Loyal Customer to Local Owner: How Graffito is Molding a New Future for DIY Pottery

BY KAREN COTTON

For fifteen years, she was just a regular at Graffito—a customer without a formal artistic background, but with a deep love for the process. When the beloved pottery studio threatened to close its doors, she didn't just watch it happen; she bought the business to keep its pulse thriving in Cheyenne.

"I learned about the process from continuing to go multiple times a year," Amber Dancliff, Graffito owner, explains. "Then I bought it so it wouldn't close."

Today, Graffito is thriving under a vision that aims to span the West and Midwest. But for now, the magic happens right here in the heart of Cheyenne. The studio is currently in the midst of a busy holiday season, offering a massive variety of seasonal canvases. Painters can choose from Halloween lanterns and playful pumpkins to Thanksgiving turkey canisters and leaf dishes. For the winter holidays, the shelves are stocked with unique Father Christmas figurines, light-up trees, and vintage-style lanterns.

The Creative Process For those who have never picked up a brush, the process is surprisingly accessible. It starts with giving the chosen pottery a "bath" to remove dust—ensuring the paint absorbs perfectly—and ends about a week to 10 days later when the piece emerges from the kiln.

"Our more popular items are the party animals," Dancliff stated. "They are the best for beginners and veteran painters alike."

Gathering at Graffito The studio has also

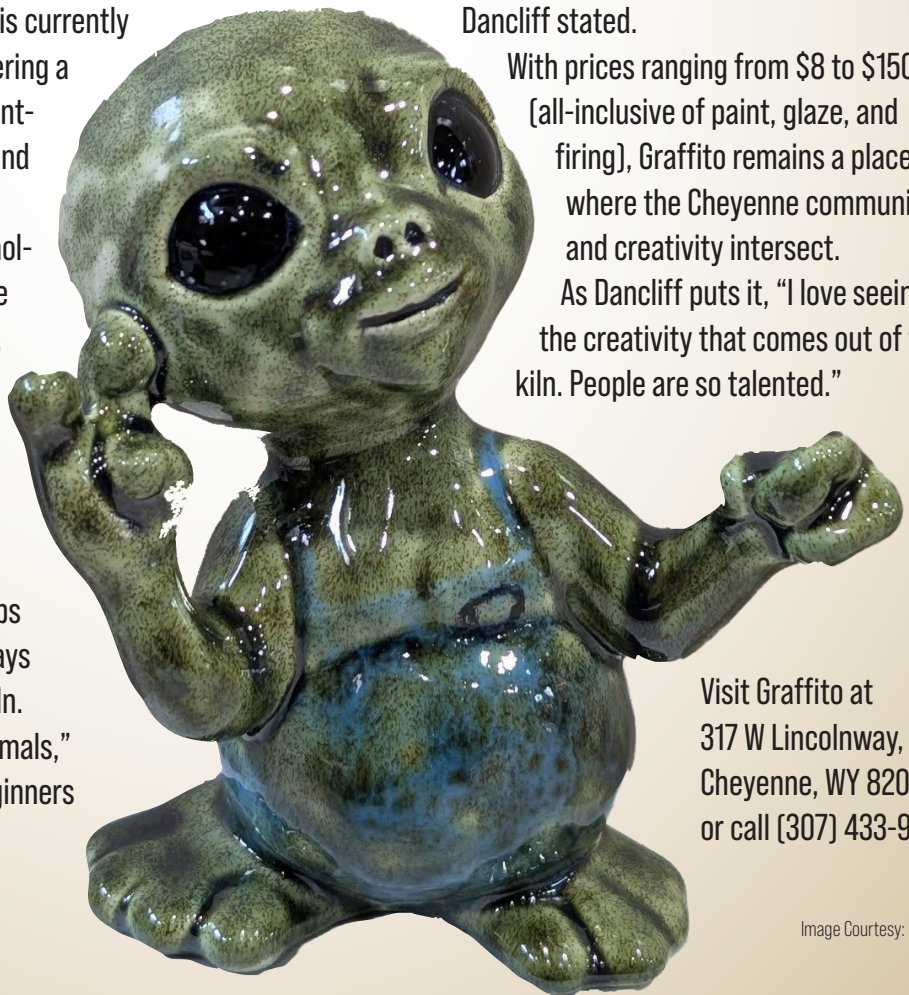
become a hub for connection. Graffito hosts everything from team-building events to weddings. Birthday parties are available in the upstairs party room (\$45 for a two-hour slot plus \$17 per painter), while larger private events can secure the entire building for a \$250 fee.

Looking Ahead The studio is currently evolving. Following the acquisition of molds and supplies from the now-closed Silver Sage Ceramics, Graffito is taking a bold step: manufacturing their own stock.

"We are starting the process of pouring our own pottery to make it a more unique and better experience," Dancliff stated.

With prices ranging from \$8 to \$150 (all-inclusive of paint, glaze, and firing), Graffito remains a place where the Cheyenne community and creativity intersect.

As Dancliff puts it, "I love seeing all the creativity that comes out of the kiln. People are so talented."



Visit Graffito at
317 W Lincolnway,
Cheyenne, WY 82001
or call (307) 433-9563

Image Courtesy: Graffito

Sweet Success: How Cotton Candy Celebrations Spins Joy in Cheyenne

BY KAREN COTTON

What started as a fun venture between a mother and her two daughters blossomed into Cotton Candy Celebrations, a beloved local business in Cheyenne, that proves life is a little sweeter with a puff of spun sugar. Owner Marti Derringer, a long-time educator, shared the story of her unexpectedly delightful journey into the world of entrepreneurial treats. “Cotton Candy Celebrations started as a mom and daughter business,” Marti recalls. The business’s foundation—from its catchy name to the logo and even the innovative, long-lasting packaging—was a collaborative family effort. Their official launch took place in March of 2021 at a local spot, Beach Please Drink Company, and from that day on, the cotton candy adventure began.

Though her daughters have since moved away, their dedication to the company remains strong. Bethany, a talented artist living in Japan, is currently designing a new marketing campaign and mascot. Meanwhile, Kylynn returns home from Minnesota for holidays, always ready to jump in with deliveries, social media marketing, and helping at craft shows.

Cotton Candy Celebrations is not a business that stays still.

“We create new flavors and new products all the time,” Marti notes. While she states it’s become impossible to keep an exact count of all the unique flavors they’ve concocted, the innovation continues.

The process of creating their signature “sugar floss” is a labor of love. While they use an industrial cotton candy machine for the final spin, the flavor creation is more intense.

“We combine sugar, candy flavoring, and food coloring to create our fun flavors,” Marti explains. It takes about 72 hours to prepare a batch of the sugar floss before it can be spun into the fluffy cloud-like confection people know and love.

Among their newest holiday-season items are the popular cotton candy cocoa bombs, which a friend has inspired them to evolve into cinnamon cocoa bombs.

“Expect those to hit our shelves for Christmas!” Marti says.

So, why cotton candy? For Marti, it’s about versatility and dietary inclusivity.

“Cotton candy is an amazingly versatile treat that can be used

for birthday parties, graduations, weddings, gender reveals, and more!” she says. But perhaps the most important selling point is its accessibility. It is naturally gluten free, dairy free, nut free, and soy free. They even make a dye-free Birthday Cake flavor to accommodate those with sensitivities.

“We chose cotton candy because we can create treats for people who have allergies to other treats and adding cotton candy to any celebration just makes life a little sweeter.”

While traditional cotton candy remains a staple, one item has exploded in popularity: the cotton candy glitter bomb.

“Cotton candy glitter bombs are definitely our most popular item,” Marti says. These fun sets, which include a soda, a glitter bomb, candy, and a silly straw, are hard to keep stocked. With different straws and glitter bomb flavors for every holiday and season, they’ve become a must-have for celebrations and gifts.

Cotton Candy Celebrations is deeply rooted in the Cheyenne community. Customers can message them directly on their Facebook and Instagram pages to place orders. They are also a frequent presence at local events, with pop-ups scheduled this December at the mall shows and downtown at Beach Please. Can’t make it to an event? Cotton Candy Celebrations has partnered with several local small businesses, including Frontier Trampoline Park, Rocket Snacks Candy Shop & Beyond in the mall, and Graffito, all of which carry a variety of their flavors throughout the year.

Before launching her business, Marti was primarily focused on education, having taught kindergarten and first grade for nearly 30 years. She credits her success to learning from other small business owners in the community.

Looking ahead to 2026, Marti’s goals are focused less on sales numbers and more on community impact.

“The blessing in owning a small business is the opportunity to be part of something bigger than yourself,” she says.

“There are moments when we get to support someone going through a tough time or come along side other small businesses to make a difference. Our wish for Cotton Candy Celebrations is that we continue to be a part of this amazing community. We are so incredibly blessed by the people of Cheyenne.”

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