

# Gabrielle's Angel

An Interview with Denise Rich, Cofounder,  
Gabrielle's Angel Foundation for Cancer Research



Denise Rich

**EDITORS' NOTE** Grammy-nominated songwriter Denise Rich has created a body of work that embraces several musical genres. Her songs have been recorded by artists from Celine Dion to Aretha Franklin and are in soundtracks for films such as *The First Wives Club* and *Runaway Bride*. Rich is recognized internationally as a serious philanthropist and entrepreneur, and she recently announced the launch of NY-based independent record label 785 Records. Rich wrote "Love Will Set You Free," raising more than \$200,000 for the T.J. Martell Foundation and Gabrielle's Angel Foundation for Cancer Research. She was recently appointed to the board of the Clive Davis Department of Recorded Music program at Tisch School of the Arts at New York University and also serves on the boards of LIFEbeat, the Interfaith Center of New York, and the International Director's Council of the Guggenheim Museum. A member of the New York City Host committee for the Grammy Awards, Rich has raised and donated money for amfAR, Music Cares, the American Cancer Society, Gay Men's Health Crisis, Citymeals-on-Wheels, the Elton John AIDS Foundation, Nile Rodgers's We Are Family Foundation, and other such charities.

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** The purpose of Gabrielle's Angel Foundation for Cancer Research ([www.gabriellesangels.org](http://www.gabriellesangels.org); formerly the G&P Foundation for Cancer Research) is to encourage the development of more effective therapies for patients with leukemia, lymphoma,

and related cancers. Since its inception, the foundation has awarded 41 grants totaling more than \$10 million dollars to promising young researchers in the fields of leukemia and blood-related cancers at many of this country's leading institutions. Denise Rich created Gabrielle's Angel Foundation for Cancer Research in 1996 in memory of her daughter Gabrielle, who died at age 27 from acute myelogenous leukemia.

**You are known as one of the great fundraisers. What facilitated your interest in this particular cause?**

It was inspired by Gabrielle, my daughter and Daniella's and Ilona's sister, who passed away at the age of 27 from Hodgkin's disease, which turned into leukemia. Before she died, she was always on the computer working, and she asked me to promise that I would start a foundation and continue her work. I asked her if the world really needed another foundation, and she said, "Promise me, and I'll help you from the other side." So that's what happened. She passed away, and we continue her work. She believed in research, because she said research is how a cure will finally be found. And she does help from the other side, with her energy, love, and commitment. It energizes us, and we've accomplished amazing things.

**There are various cancer foundations in need of money. What makes your particular organization special?**

First of all, it's the way we do our research. We're one of the largest sources of nongovernmental funding for research in leukemia and blood-related disorders. We support junior researchers who might otherwise not get funded and help them get to the next level, which then helps them get supported by the National Institutes of Health. The money goes much further that way. And because government funding has been cut back, what we're doing is more important than ever. We also offer grants of \$225,000 over a period of three years. Recipients have to go through peer review, and if they meet those protocols and are successful, then we keep funding them. To date, we have given more than \$10 million to 41 junior investigators. These researchers are pioneers now, but they're the future. They have the potential to find a cure for cancer.

**Who supervises these junior investigators to make certain the funds are being utilized properly?**

We have a great medical board of doctors from all around the country, from the best universities and the best hospitals. The Chairman of the Board is Dr. Stephen D. Nimer, from Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. We have many projects submitted to us, and the board meets and chooses which ones we will support.

**Many people faced with losing a child might withdraw. What motivates you to continue working for this very emotional cause?**

Losing my daughter and having the desire to prevent anyone else from going through this motivate me. Before she died, Gabrielle said she wanted a cure found so nobody would ever have to suffer the way she did. I can't handle seeing the suffering and loss of life from this disease. It's a very emotional thing for us, and our events transmit these feelings to other people. These aren't events that you come to, hear a lot of speeches, and leave. There is so much heart and a lot of music, because my daughter Gabrielle believed that the joy of life comes through music and laughter.

**Apart from your charity work, what are you passionate about?**

My two passions are writing music and my family. I love being with my daughters, my grandchildren, and my sons-in-law. I love being with the family best. I also love skiing, going on the boat, and going for walks surrounded by nature.

**Of all the people you have met through the years, which person impressed you the most?**

I had a lot of joy meeting the Dalai Lama. We just giggled away. But the person who impressed me the most was Nelson Mandela. I had 45 minutes alone with Nelson Mandela, and it was an incredible experience. His eyes are like windows to his soul and everything that he has been through. He inspired me so much because despite everything that he's been through, he's so positive. He's very inspiring.

**What is your number one priority in life?**

My number one priority in life is really to do as much as I can to help to effect positive change in the world. The loss of my mother, sister, and daughter made me realize how important it is to do everything we can to make a difference. At the same time, I am a very social person, and I try to have as much fun as possible in accomplishing these tasks. ●