



ALUMNI PROFILES

SOPHIE ELGORT '04

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SOPHIE ELGORT '04 THE NATURAL

Fashion photographer **Sophie Elgort, GMVS '04**, may spend her time behind a camera shooting the latest fashion names on the runway—her list of client's reads like a who's who of the designer world, Bloomingdale's, Theory/Helmut Lang, Alice + Olivia, to name just a few—but her personal style is more down-to-earth.

After graduating from GMVS in 2004, Elgort went on to Brown University, where she majored in Comparative Literature, with a concentration in Spanish and French. Upon leaving Brown in 2008, she returned to New York City, her home stomping ground, and interned with the Peggy Siegal Company, filling out an impressive resume of internships, including stints with Vogue, Azzedine Alaia, and Barney's New York, among others. She also became the marketing director of The Gates, an upscale lounge and restaurant, where Elgort says, she made most of her connections and learned how to start a business. "I'm still in touch with 70 percent of the people I met then," she said. In 2009, Elgort established her own studio, Sophie Elgort Photography.

She is also the photographer and PR director of ALOMI, an online boutique inspired by fashion seen on the sidewalks of New York City. Elgort is a photo correspondent at MTV Voices, and is a regular photographer of the backstage and front-of house work for lead designers at New York Fashion Week.

This is a long way from Poundcake and dryland training, but Elgort honed her work ethic at GMVS.

As the daughter of the famous fashion photographer, Arthur Elgort, who is known for his iconic "snapshot" style and emphasis on movement and natural light, Sophie went out on plenty of photo shoots as a child. "My dad's photo shoots in particular are really creative processes," she said. "He works really closely with the editor to create the end product. There are tons of things going on at once during a shoot. They are building sets, styling the outfits, blowing smoke, testing lights, doing hair and makeup. It is really a big production, and there are so many things that I liked to do when I was growing up, like watch the hair and makeup people, or help the stylist steam the clothes or unpack the trunks," she said.

In her own photography, Elgort likes to let things happen naturally, "to capture the real personality" of the people she's photographing rather than posing them. "I don't use a lot of lighting. I like a fresh and natural look," she said.

She is excited about her plans for ALIOMI. "We have realized that people really like ALIOMI, not only for the clothing we sell, but for the brand itself," she

said. They have been courted by different television production companies and networks and are keeping an open mind about doing a show. The group has also collaborated with other young artists and designers to sell their pieces through the site. "Finally, we are considering starting an ALIOMI TV or ALIOMI Magazine (or both!) to further enhance the 'lifestyle' aspect of the company and see where those opportunities could lead us," she said.

Elgort credits GMVS with her ability to stay cool in the face of innumerable tasks. "GMVS forces you to do a million challenging things at once, and you don't really have time to even get stressed out while you're doing them," she said. "I will never forget getting back from fall training in Sölden [Austria], and then building the set for the play, having rehearsals, playing in the Varsity soccer finals, taking the SATs and doing three performances of the play all in one weekend. To this day I do not get flustered when hit with a lot of things at once, and I definitely credit GMVS for that," she said.

She also credits GMVS with teaching her how to deal with rejection. "Starting at a really young age, as a ski racer, you learn how to deal with some really hard

*"To this day I do not get flustered when hit with a lot of things at once, and I definitely credit GMVS for that."
-Sophie Elgort '04*

things, like not doing well in a big race, and therefore not qualifying for a certain trip or upcoming race series," she said, "even when all your best friends and roommates do. These things are crushing, but you had to put everything aside and go out and do the next race," she said.

Elgort is very much involved in community service and donates her time to various charities. "I co-chair a few benefits that support the arts and education," she said. She recently participated in an event for Project Paz, an organization started by a group of young professionals from the Ciudad Juárez, Mexico and El Paso, TX area who live in New York City and promote peace and development to their hometown, Ciudad Juárez. Several high profile artists donated work, including Patti Smith, and the event raised over \$100,000. Elgort took portraits of individuals that sold at the event.

In addition to her charity work, Elgort was recently hired to be the photographer for a new page in the "Luxury 360" section of The Financial Times called "Suits in the City," a photo blog of the best dressed professionals in New York City. "I am excited about this because it's a

JENNIFER SANTINI ‘99

HIGH WIRE ACT

Jen Santini ‘99 is not afraid of a challenge. One of her first memories at GMVS was being asked to zip-line from the third floor of the gym onto the stage as a fairy in the school play Sweet Charity. “I had been on campus for about a month and, of course, I wasn’t going to shy away from this,” she said.

She had to climb onto the shoulders of a PG while he stood atop a tall ladder. They struggled figuring out how to control her speed, and after crashing into the wall and stage several times, they devised a system. During the dress rehearsal her cape got caught in the zip-line, and she came to a dead stop. “I was mid-air above the whole school laughing at me.” Needless to say, any shyness went out the door after that.

Santini hasn’t backed away from a challenge since; in fact, because of her experience at GMVS, she has learned to look at challenges as fun and exciting. “I’ve credited my decisions to take on a lot of commitments to GMVS,” she said. “It is rare that something is put in front of me that I turn away. I just think ‘of course I can do that too’ and I think that stems from all that we would do at GMVS.”

After graduating from Colby College in 2004, Santini traveled abroad, and then moved to Boston, where she worked in the sales and marketing department at Putnam Investments. On top of a full time job, she began attending New England Law as a full time student. “I personally do not think I had a typical law school experience,” she said.

For one brief semester she attended William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul, MN, following her then boyfriend, now husband, Matt Benson, when he was promoted (“I needed to decide if he was a keeper”). She eventually moved to the Twin City area, passed the Minnesota Bar exam in 2009, after which she hung out her own shingle with Jayne Sykora, a fellow student she met at a bar review course.

“I never went to law school expecting or wishing to hang my own shingle,” she said, “but graduating in 2009, and moving to a metro area that is home to four law schools that all funnel into a small market, hanging my own shingle came to be my best option for employment,” she said. The practice focuses on estate planning, probate, and general business law. They utilize a virtual office and have access to conference rooms at four locations throughout the Twin City metro area. “Being my own boss is one of the most rewarding things I have done,” she said.

In the midst of running her own firm, Santini is also actively involved in the State Bar Association, holding an officer’s position in the New Lawyers Section and serving as liaison to two other sections. In 2010, she ran for city council in Woodbury, MN, and while she didn’t win, she now sits on the Business Development Committee.

Santini has also put her law skills to good use by volunteering for Wills for Heroes, an organization that provides free estate planning services to first responders—firemen, policemen and EMTs. Wills for Heroes was started by Anthony Hayes, a partner at Nelson Mullins Riley and Scarborough, LLP, in Columbia, SC, shortly after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

“Volunteering has been a part of me for a long time. I think I could even attribute GMVS to instilling the importance of volunteering in me,” she said. “I truly enjoy my volunteer time with the program because when the clients walk away, I know I have provided them with a valuable service.”

Santini may be a long way from home—she grew up in the small ski town of Hunter, NY, where she first learned of GMVS through her neighbors, the Transues (Josh GMVS ’98, Jeremy, ’01 and Cody ’06), but the GMVS community remains close at heart. Four of her best friends from GMVS attended her wedding in Rockport, MA, and she is the “unofficial” adopted sister of the Transues. “I definitely felt a strong sense of community while at GMVS and still do to this day,” she said.

Although Santini’s current challenges are of a more sedate nature—owning a home with her husband and growing her business—she mentioned that the State Bar Association is working to reactivate their political action committee, and as a trustee, Santini will most



WENDY SCIPIONE ‘93

FINANCIAL MAVERICK

In these times of economic uncertainty, Wendy Scipione ’93 teaches people how to pay off mortgages faster, and save money.

Scipione, who lives in Boulder, Co., is a financial planner at Pay It Forward Strategies, where she equips people with the financial knowledge needed to maneuver the complications of mortgages. Encouraging her clients to plan ahead and take responsibility is at the core of her everyday work. “I am proud of helping my clients save tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest on their mortgage and other debts,” she said. “It’s an amazing feeling to see the light and hope return to people and their financial lives.”

Scipione credits the spirit of her work today with advice she received while attending GMVS. “My roommate helped me to realize the importance of slowing down



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sometimes to help others in times of need, “she said. “The small goals are important, but the bigger picture of helping friends is even more important.

GMVS prepared me to be flexible, think for myself, have the confidence to start my own businesses, take responsibility for my actions, and to take risks that I may have otherwise shied away from,” she said.

After graduating from GMVS in 1993, Scipione set out on a path that focused on two passions—skiing and

entrepreneurship. She spent one year as a PG, and then attended and skied for UVM. Upon graduating from UVM in 1998, with a B.S. in business administration, she moved out west—a decision she credits to her GMVS experience. “After all of my travels with GMVS and racing, I fell in love with the Rocky Mountains of Colorado.” From 1999-2001, Scipione spent two years in Steamboat Springs, CO, coaching J1s and J2s. When she moved back to Boulder, she started her own photography business called SkiPix.com.

When she was planning to purchase a home in 2007, Scipione encountered a conversation about financial strategizing that forever changed her approach to financial planning. “I overheard a woman showing my friend how she could save over \$200,000 in interest on her loan and drop her currently slated 28 more years of payments down to 12. My ears perked up!” she said. “This is exactly what I was looking for.”

After some hard work, Scipione discovered methods of managing money and paying off debt while building wealth. This realization has led to her current profession as a financial strategist at Pay It Forward Strategies. Specifically, Scipione shows people how to gain more equity, save money on interest, and cancel debt. “Our systems create a win-win for all!”

Ultimately, Scipione has applied flexibility and a strong social conscience to both her life and business. Running her own business

during a recession has demanded an open mind and commitment to helping people. And while much work still lies ahead, the sense of community and work ethic she gained at GMVS is helping Scipione do her piece by sharing knowledge and encouragement, one client at a time.

Amanda Lanser doesn’t waste time. As a graduate student at Harvard University, working toward her PhD in immunology, she juggles her commitments between the lab and her own research, her duties as a T.A. in an introductory immunology course, exercising, meeting with and planning future experiments with her mentor, maintaining a mouse colony, which involves breeding, determining the genotype, and keeping an up to date inventory of the mice, and still manages to get to bed by 11 p.m.

She is already a published author. Her research appeared in the April 6 edition of Nature, titled “Dampening of Death Pathways by Schnurri-2 is Essential to T-Cell Development.” “I conducted this work with the first author, Dr. Tracy Staton, during the summer before my senior year of college,” Lanser said. Another article, where she helped identify unique markers of disease in the blood of human ALS

AMANDA LANSER ‘06

HARD WORK IS KEY

(Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or Lou Gehrig’s disease) patients, is already being reviewed for another issue of Nature.

Lanser graduated from Colby in 2010, where she received a BA in Neuroscience with a minor in Chemistry and Math, after starting out on a pre-med track. She is a board member of the mentoring program, Harvard Graduate Women in Science and Engineering (HGWISE), and recently traveled to Montreal to meet with a professor at McGill, with whom she conducted research.

Lanser credits GMVS with her ability to manage time and work hard. “I have learned that you can make up for a lot with just hard work and focus,” she said. “My time at GMVS also taught me to keep events in perspective, be optimistic, and to keep looking toward your future goals,” she said.

Lanser acknowledges that GMVS provides the right environment to teach students how to set goals. “I always have short-term goals, but deadlines also make that relatively easy. I think that GMVS helped me learn how to set goals, but it comes naturally to me as well,” she said.

On her short list is to finish her PhD program, which takes an average time of six years. She has considered becoming a professor at a college similar to Colby, “However, I will need more experience before making that decision.”

For the moment, she is motivated by her research. “Ten percent of ALS cases are genetically inherited. Since the average age of onset is between 40-60 years of age, we believe there are aging and environmental components to this disease, especially in cases which are not genetically inherited,” she said. “There may be some environmental trigger to which we only become vulnerable after a certain age. After a certain threshold

“GMVS prepared me to be flexible, think for myself, have the confidence to start my own businesses, take responsibility for my actions, and to take risks that I may have otherwise shied away from.”

-Wendy Scipione, ‘93

“The important qualities I gained from my experience at GMVS are the ability to time manage and to work hard.” -Amanda Lanser '06.



American young adults, and facilitate awareness of Israel in the greater Boston area.

Her involvement with these organizations stems in part from the strong sense of community that is part of GMVS. “There is a remarkable sense of community at GMVS,” she said. “I don’t think this would be possible if not for the strong one-on-one relationships that lay the foundation for a strong community.” She credits her mentoring role in HGWISE as a direct link to this sense of community. “By being involved in this organization, I do try to make a difference on the larger scale,” she said.

In the meantime, Lanser remains focused on her academic and research pursuits. Her advice to current GMVS students, “Don’t be afraid of hard work,” she said. “Realize how fortunate you are to be at GMVS, and take advantage of every opportunity you have there.”

Kim Reynolds is a freelance editor and writer who lives with her husband and three children in Warren, VT. She currently has two children attending GMVS, Gabriel '14 and Katy '15 Rosen.

is passed, our immune system can no longer protect us from the environmental insult and we get disease,” she said.

In addition to her schedule and school affiliations, Lanser is also involved in the Boston Jewish Community. She is part of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies - Boston’s Jewish Young Leadership Division as well as a member of BIG, Boston Israel Group, whose mission is connect Jewish Israeli and