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Lawyer can 'strike a pose'

Sperling's 1992 bar mitzvah dance goes viral and puts him in national limelight

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At his bar mitzvah in 1992, then-13-year-old Shaun D. Sperling strut onto the dance floor, tore off his suit coat to reveal his Madonna shirt underneath and moved to the music of "Vogue."

Though a videographer recorded Sperling's performance, the VHS tape of his dance remained in his mother's basement for nearly two decades — as Sperling grew up, attended law school and became an attorney in Chicago.

But earlier this year, Sperling, now 33, unearthed the video so he could use the footage for a monologue performance in August about his lifelong love of Madonna.

He posted the video on YouTube and within days it reached celebrity blogger Perez Hilton. It immediately went viral with about 1.1 million views as of today.

"It's been so unexpected," said

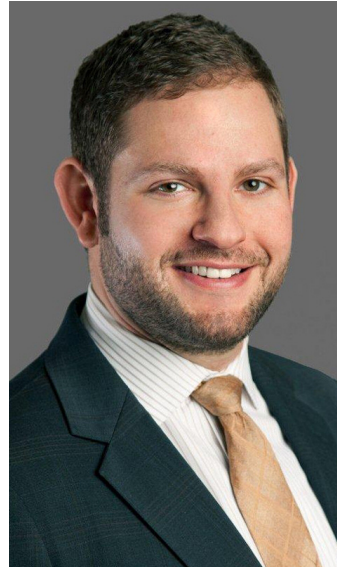
Sperling, an associate at Aronberg, Goldgehn, Davis & Garmisa. "What's amazed me the most is the impact it's making. It's more than just a funny YouTube video, I think on a deeper and more meaningful level, it's making a big impact on kids and parents watching someone at 13 who is just so free and uninhibited to be himself."

In recent weeks, Sperling appeared on the "Today" show and "Jimmy Kimmel Live" to talk about his bar mitzvah dancing.

"I know the video has touched kids who are going through a similar thing that I did — feeling insecure, and to parents who want to support their kids," Sperling said.

Last week, Sperling flew to Los Angeles to appear on an episode of "The Ellen DeGeneres Show," scheduled to air Oct. 29. The show's producers surprised him with an opportunity to meet Madonna, he said.

"When they first announced she was there, I lost it," he said. "I probably look like a hysterical person.



Shaun D. Sperling

When I was talking to her, I felt like I had so much I wanted to say."

Sperling said he has adored Madonna since age 11, when he watched a news segment about a performance she gave in Chicago as part of her "Blonde Ambition" world tour.

Sperling's love for her never waned as he grew up and faced bullying in school for being different. At age 15, he admitted openly to being gay.

"I saw this person representing everything I was looking for — self-expression, uninhibited, beautiful," he said about Madonna. "She really became a guide, a light of what I wanted in my life — not to be Madonna, but to be myself."

Sperling grew up in Buffalo Grove with a family who accepted his eccentricities, he said. His mother and sister helped him practice his "Vogue" dance every day after school in the weeks before his bar mitzvah.

When he took off his suit coat during the performance, he revealed a white dress shirt underneath with an airbrushed, color sketch of Madonna's face on the back.

Throughout the video, the crowd cheered him on as he mirrored the dance moves in the "Vogue" music video, including one part where he puts his right knee on the floor and extends his left leg to the side.

"I came out a couple years later, but at the time, it was just about celebrating me at my bar mitzvah and just being myself," Sperling said.

Sperling's mother, Lynn Feinstein, said in her eyes, Sperling always seemed famous.

"He's wonderful and we always knew that he was," she said. "He has a really shiny soul and people see it and they love it."

Sperling's positivity stood out to Aronberg, Goldgehn's Co-Managing Partner John M. Riccione, when the firm hired Sperling last November.

Riccione said the firm saw its website page views soar to 30,000 during the week of Aug. 15 — when Sperling posted the video online.

"We weren't really concerned because we know Shaun, and if our clients and others would get to know Shaun like we know Shaun, we have no qualms about what he's doing," Riccione said. "It's all positive. He's a fantastic guy."

Sperling said he hopes to use his fame to send a message to students, families and law firms about acceptance.

"I'm different from what people consider to be the stereotypical attorney," he said. "It's a testament to the fact that the legal field has changed. Not everybody is a stiff white man who golfs on the weekends."

Sperling decided to go to law school a few years after college when he witnessed negative police behavior toward homosexuals, he said. He decided becoming an attorney would give him a voice to defend against homophobia. He enrolled in The John Marshall Law School, graduating in January 2010.

He worked as an immigration attorney at AzulaySeiden Law Group before joining his current firm.

Brianna M. Sansone, an associate at Aronberg, Goldgehn who met Sperling at John Marshall, said Sperling brings personality to his work as a commercial litigator.

She said several attorneys at the firm plan to watch "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" together on Oct. 29 to see their colleague on air.

"There's so many stigmas about attorneys, that we take ourselves so seriously, and this just goes to show we have a life outside our office and that we are not stern, serious people all the time," Sansone said. "I was hoping people would pick up on that."

Sperling said many of his clients saw the video and he received positive feedback.

"They love it," he said. "If you really think about it, if I needed an attorney, I would want someone with personality, someone who is not afraid to be themselves. This shows some strength of character."

View the video on chicagolawbulletin.com.



This screen-grab shows a then-13-year-old Shaun D. Sperling dancing at his bar mitzvah in 1992 to a choreographed performance of Madonna's "Vogue."