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The Babe in the Bunker

By Nick Marnell



Photo Andy Scheck

Simpson earned a master's degree in merchandising at Michigan State. "I always loved fashion," said Simpson, who modeled and won a National Dress Revue in New Jersey. "But I always wanted to get a job at a radio station. So I took radio/TV advertising as a minor."

She landed a job at a small Los Angeles advertising agency, with her goal to work in television. But the media career track does not allow for jumping from a minor ad agency to a major market television station.

"Wanna bet?" said Simpson, who, with the encouragement of a neighbor in the television industry, was hired by Metromedia in Los Angeles. She anchored the evening news and started an investigative news team, along with pulling shifts on KFI Radio. "I was in the right place, at the right time, with the right skills," she said.

Simpson moved to KNXT as a reporter. "Reporting is very hard. You're at the mercy of producers who are usually pretty stupid. It's not as stimulating as I'd like." Neither was anchoring, as she discovered when she moved to the Bay Area and co-anchored the KTVU Ten O'Clock News with Dennis Richmond. "Anchoring is not glamorous and it's generally boring, because you don't have to think."

Her chance to think arrived when she was hired as a talk show host for KSFO Radio. "It took me a while to realize that I could now say the things that I really wanted to," she said. A message from a listener jolted her. "He told me, 'You're a really nice lady, but your show is boring!' That did it. I taped that message on the wall. I wasn't being honest. Being a nice lady is not what the listeners wanted."

In San Francisco she used the nickname Babe in the Bunker, referring to her conservative position in the liberal city. Simpson insists that her conservative political viewpoint is neither contrived nor an act for radio. She noted that she was raised by Democrats. "My mother was a driving force in getting voting machines in our town. The smoke filled room? That was our dining room."

As Simpson worked in the media her thinking changed. "I noticed what we were airing. At the end of my newscasts, I saw that we covered this, we covered that, but look at what we left out. I came to realize how insufficient our newscasts are."

Known as a terrific interviewer, Simpson nearly cried as she discussed an interview that never

Barbara Simpson never looked away from her interviewer. For one hour the Lamorinda resident and Bay Area media personality reflected, she preached, she laughed, she almost cried, she philosophized, her gaze straight ahead as she discussed her life and her career.

"We weren't rich, and I learned the value of hard work," said Simpson, who was born in New York and raised in northern New Jersey. Through her school years she sold cameras at her father's shop, she waited tables, she picked strawberries, and she saved enough money to attend Georgian Court College in Lakewood, N.J., where she experienced her first life-changing event.

"My hardest class was logic," she said. "But I loved it. The nun taught us how to think. She taught the power of deductive reasoning. It was the most valuable lesson I learned in my life."

happened. "Orianna Fallaci," she said, naming the Italian journalist who wrote critically of Islamic extremists. "One day, she called me. I about fainted. She was pre-interviewing me. She was deciding if she wanted to be on my show. And she was going to do it." Simpson never got to interview her because Fallaci died before the scheduled air date. "If I could only be as good in my work as she was in hers," said Simpson.

Simpson has won a staggering number of awards, including Emmy awards at KTVU, and recently the Eagle Forum of California named her Talk Show Host of the Decade. But Simpson never thought in terms of awards. She instead focused on how she has been shunned because of her politics. "I've never been invited to a woman's event in Contra Costa County. I offered to speak at Saint Mary's College, and they wouldn't even respond. Yes, it bothers me, a little bit. But really? It disappoints me, that they could be so petty. And they are teaching our kids."

KSFO cancelled The Barbara Simpson Program in May. But in September the station changed to a conservative talk format, with Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Glenn Beck returning. "I miss it," she said. "Would I go back? I might. I never say no until I know all the details."

Simpson writes a weekly column for the conservative website WorldNetDaily and contributes to thetalkpod.com, an online community of professional broadcasters.

"I want you to think for yourself," she said. "I want you to use your brain. If television news is your only source for what's going on in the world, you're in a lot of trouble."

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