



Suzanne Geha Merpi

Born: 1952?

Death: N/A

Suzanne Geha was born in Detroit, MI. Her parents were the first to be born in America. Her grandparents were immigrants from Lebanon. Suzanne had five older brothers and one younger sister. A brother, her sister, and she all “went into journalism.” As children, according to Suzanne, the family “watched the news all the time.” Their parents read many newspapers and magazines. “We were just surrounded by [the news], and we discussed it,” said Suzanne.

Another influence for her choice of journalism as a career was her aunt, Helen Thomas, whom Suzanne called “the dean of all White House correspondents.” At the time of this interview, Ms. Thomas had been a journalist for over 50 years, according to Suzanne, and the bureau chief for United Press International. “To have a woman as your [role] model growing up in the 50s and 60s, that’s remarkable,” said Suzanne. When she was a teenager, Suzanne also remembered seeing journalist Nancy Dickerson on NBC.

Suzanne’s parents encouraged her to go to college. “We have to raise [girls] for a college education, to believe they have a lifetime of learning . . .” said Suzanne. “And my parents always instilled that [belief] in [me and my brothers and sister].” She recalled never being “pressured” to get married or have children. “We were expected to do well in school and to go on to college,” she said.

Yet, when she was growing up, Suzanne’s mother worried about her daughter choosing broadcasting or acting as a career. “She was afraid. She knew how hard it was going to be. . . . She always said, ‘Suz, will you get a teaching degree while you’re in college, so you’ll have something to fall back on?’” Yet, Suzanne ignored her mother’s advice, and it turned out all right for her “because there was such a glut of teachers when I was graduating.”

Suzanne also said that when she was growing up, her mother and she would argue over only one thing—Suzanne watching too much TV. Later, as Suzanne’s career took off, her mother tried to apologize for keeping her from watching TV. Suzanne assured her mother that she was right. When the siblings were young, her mother took them to the library, museums, and the Detroit Art Institute. “Mom wanted to make sure we were well rounded,” she concluded. Her dad also

encouraged her “to envision [herself] reaching beyond traditional women’s jobs and having any job she wanted . . . . He built me up . . . .”

For college, Suzanne chose Western Michigan University as she preferred a “smaller” school with fewer students in her classes. She planned to be an actress and wanted less “competition.” In January 1971, Suzanne was showing a transfer student, Rick Merpi, around campus. He wanted to visit the campus radio station to apply as a volunteer DJ. While there, Suzanne decided to also volunteer, and thus she became the first of two women to do the news on the air. Few people heard the closed-circuit broadcast, but someone, while visiting one of the dorms, did hear her. He was an assistant manager at a Battle Creek Top 40 radio station. He asked her to apply for a position at the station and eventually hired her. It was her first paying job, and the \$6,000 a year helped to put her through college. At the time, five members of the Geha family were all going to school, so Suzanne’s ability to pay her own way was very important to them.

As a radio personality, Suzanne said her “worst critics” were women. They accused her of working for “pin” or spending money. She would try to explain to them that she was working to pay for her college education. She would also say that she loved “[the broadcasting] industry. . . . [She loved her] job and . . . [was] privileged to have it, but that [she thought] women [had] a right to this employment.”

Suzanne believed that she was successful in this position for two reasons. One the station’s ratings increased. Two, “the industry started to say it’s time [to] diversify. And that’s why Suzanne Geha was helped along. . . . The women’s movement was taking momentum and heightening the awareness that women had something to offer. . . . Either we were delaying marriage, or in my case I married early, 22, for my [Baby Boomer] generation, but [delayed] having children and [worked] toward a career,” she said.

The radio station job led to a cable TV job in Battle Creek. This second job had no pay, except gas reimbursement for driving back and forth from Kalamazoo to the Cereal City. But on graduation day 1973, Suzanne was offered a job a WOOD-TV as a dispatch coordinator (i.e., assignment editor). She said the job was too much for someone fresh out of college, but she did the best she could. When she arrived at the station, there were 25 people in the newsroom; only one was a woman, a secretary. At the time of this interview, that number had doubled.

Within 2 months of her arrival, Suzanne became a reporter, and within 10 months, she was an anchor for the 12 noon newscast. On the day she was supposed to be going home to get married to Rick Merpi, Suzanne was instead auditioning for that anchor position. She was hired on the day she returned from her honeymoon in 1974.

Again, Suzanne said her worst critics were women. She thought there were several reasons for their criticism: they were not used to seeing a woman on air; they were not used to hearing a woman on the air; they objected to women working and taking money away from children or spending money on themselves. “It could be a combination of a lot of things, but mostly women had to get used to seeing other women, and women had to learn to support other women in their endeavors,” she concluded. On the other hand, for the most part, Suzanne said that men had always supported her career.

In 1978, Suzanne and Rick moved to Detroit, where Suzanne worked at a TV station in a top news market (at the time of this interview, it was the fifth in the country). However, in 1981, pregnant with their first child, they came back to Grand Rapids, and Suzanne returned to WOOD-TV8. “I came back, and I was of more value to the station because I was known, because I could help get the ratings back up. . . . And when you’re of value, you’re in a little better negotiating position, and that is what has enabled me to negotiate this deal, which is so important to me,” she said.

That important deal was to be able to have a “split shift with WOTV . . . to come and go, come and go a couple times a day, so [she] could be with [her] children.” Suzanne explained:

My husband and I know that the investing of our time and energy and our love in these children will pay off . . . with the community. If we can contribute four well-adjusted, happy, God-loving, God-fearing individuals to our community, [then] we have made the best contribution we can ever make. . . . So corporate America has to see the need and help pave the way for us to be productive on the job, to be able to work smart and work fast without having to spend 14, 16 hours a day . . . away from spouses and . . . children.

Furthermore, Suzanne said, “Once I became a mom, I determined for myself that motherhood was going to be as great of an importance, or greater, than that of my career. But if I could have the ability to blend the two and enjoy my motherhood . . . and still have this fabulous career, then I’m going to continue along this track.” About the perennial question of whether women broadcasters could age “beautifully and gracefully” and “look decent,” she said, “Well, yes, we will . . . I’m planning on continuing as long as they’ll have me.” (See Other Resources for articles about her sudden departure from WOTV in 2011.)

Suzanne also had the following to say about the role of journalists—broadcast or print—especially in regard to political news:

[Journalists] are guided mostly, our whole premise for operating is the public’s right to know, and we feel that [the public has] a right to know a lot and we don’t want somebody dictating how much or what it is. . . . You have to be a free and informed public, and you only are if you have a free and informed press.

For young people who are interested in journalism as a career, Suzanne advised them to “have a nose for news . . . have an insatiable curiosity . . . want to be a witness with a ringside seat to history . . . [and be] fair-minded and objective. . . . These are the reasons you get interested in this profession because you love it and you’re willing to work hard.”

Finally, she recommended that future journalists read and watch the news a lot and take classes such as speech, acting, broadcast journalism, communications, English, and history. Finally, Suzanne emphasized the importance of volunteer work at radio and TV stations and newspapers while still in school. In this way, upon graduation, they will already have work experience on their resumes. She concluded, “I have seen in this industry in the 25 years that I have been in it, women moving up as producers, executive producers, besides reporting and anchoring on the air, shooting cameras, and editing. . . . Women can do any job, any job.”

Other Resources:

During her long and distinguished career, Suzanne has received several awards. In recognition of her more than 25 years in broadcasting, she was presented the Silver Circle Award from the Michigan Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. In 2006, both Suzanne and her husband, Rick Merpi, were inducted into the Western Michigan University School of Communications Alumni Academy.

Suzanne's community work included the following:

- Founder of American Women in Radio and Television in West Michigan
- Founder of AERO, the broadcasting fraternity at West Michigan University
- Board member of Coffee Dunkers of Grand Rapids
- Vice President of the former Press Club of Grand Rapids
- Trustee of the WMU Alumni Board
- Treasurer of the Board of St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church
- Contributor to the Dunkers Club, Salvation Army, Kidney Foundation, Liz's House, Athena, Junior Achievement, and Meijer Gardens

<http://www.zoominfo.com/p/Suzanne-Geha/1394291>

<https://www.facebook.com/suzannegeha>

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[http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2011/04/details\\_of\\_anchor\\_suzanne\\_geha.html](http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2011/04/details_of_anchor_suzanne_geha.html)

[http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2011/04/tom\\_van\\_howe\\_simply\\_shocked\\_at.html](http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2011/04/tom_van_howe_simply_shocked_at.html)

<http://www.wmich.edu/wmu/news/2011/10/063.html>

[http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2011/04/suzanne\\_geha\\_speaks\\_up\\_on\\_face.html](http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2011/04/suzanne_geha_speaks_up_on_face.html)

<http://www.c-span.org/person/?suzannegeha>

