

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE3801

Haussegger, Virginia

(1964 -)

Born 1 March, 1964, Melbourne Victoria Australia

Occupation Journalist, Print journalist, Radio Journalist, Television Journalist

Summary

Virginia Haussegger is an award-winning television journalist, writer and commentator, whose extensive media career spans more than 25 years. She began work as a cadet journalist with the ABC in 1986 and began presenting ABC Canberra News in 2001. She won the United Nations Association of Australia Media Peace Prize for her coverage of Indigenous Affairs in 1996.

In late 2016 Virginia was appointed to head a new gender equality initiative, the 50/50 by 2030 Foundation, at the University of Canberra's Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (IGPA), where she is an Adjunct Professor. With a singular focus on improving the representation of women in leadership and key decision making roles across all levels of government and public administration, the Foundation is the first of its kind in Australia.

In 2014 Virginia was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for service to the community, as an advocate for women's rights and gender equity, and to the media.

Details

Virginia Haussegger is the daughter of Kálmán Haussegger, an engineer whose own father migrated to Australia from Germany in 1901. Her parents met and married in Melbourne. Virginia was educated in Burwood, then Bulleen, and finally Eltham, at the Catholic Ladies' College. She spent a year on exchange in Mexico in 1981, where she developed a fascination with Pre-Columbian art. She undertook tertiary studies at the University of Melbourne, majoring in English and Fine Arts.

In 1986, Haussegger successfully applied for a cadetship with the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), and began in television news. At that time, she remembers, there were no more than five senior women in senior reporting or presenting positions on television. After a term in the Victorian Press Gallery as a political reporter for ABC News, Haussegger joined the *7.30 Report* in Melbourne. By 1987 she was presenting the program's Darwin edition, but returned to Melbourne two years later to be with her husband. A brief stint on Channel 7 with Steve Vizard ended in conflict and a legal battle, and she returned to the ABC.

In 1992, Haussegger joined Channel 9 as a reporter on *A Current Affair*, working with Mike Willesee, Jana Wendt and Ray Martin. In this role, she broke a story on The Children of God, a sect now referred to as The Family. The story resulted in a raid on sect houses by Victoria Police, after which 60 children were taken into protective custody.

Haussegger left Channel 9 in 1994 and moved to Adelaide the following year, where she presented the South Australian edition of the *7.30 Report*. When the program was centralised, Haussegger joined the new team in Sydney as national 'social affairs' reporter. In 1996, one of her stories – documenting the work of Magistrate Stephen Scarlett at the Bidura Children's Court in Glebe, as he attempted to curb high rates of incarceration of Indigenous juvenile offenders – won the United Nations Association's Media Peace Prize.

In 1996, Haussegger was poached by Channel 7's *Witness* program. She travelled widely, reporting from Iraq in the lead-up to war, and from Washington during the Clinton/Lewinsky sex scandal. As a reporter for *Witness*, Haussegger spent just four months per year at home in Sydney. The relentless pace continued until the show was axed in 1998.

For a time, Haussegger worked as a freelance print journalist, and later, a consultant in financial communications. By 2001, she was ready for a return to the news world, and joined the ABC once again, this time as presenter of ABC TV News in Canberra.

In 2002, Haussegger learned that she had problems with age-related infertility, and would be unable to have children. Her opinion piece in the *Age*, expressing her disappointment with the feminist claim that women could 'have it all', sparked enormous controversy. The result was the publication of Haussegger's book, *Wonder Woman: The Myth of 'Having It All'* in 2005. It was launched by Julia Gillard at the National Press Club.

Virginia Haussegger married Mark Kenny, political editor for the *Adelaide Advertiser*, in October 2005. Since 2006, she has been writing a weekly column for the *Canberra Times*. She is an active member of the journalists' union, the MEAA (Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance) and the National Press Club, and has been a judge for the Walkley Awards several times.

Interviewed in 2008, Haussegger remarked that 'I am fearful for the future of TV reporting in Australia. Quality television journalism takes time and time is money. It seems Australia just doesn't have a big enough audience market to justify big expenditures. I am very worried that we are taking an increasing amount of international news and current affairs product'.

Speaking to 200 members of the Golden Key International Society at the Australian National University, though, Haussegger 'came away feeling tremendously uplifted and energized about this young generation of Australians':

'One of the themes in my speech to them', she said, 'was about confronting failure. I wanted to impress upon them an understanding that all successful careers must – and will – involve moments or periods of what feels like failure. I wanted them to know that what matters most is how they handle it. And I wanted them to know that no matter how hard they work, they will occasionally stumble and maybe even fall over. But it's all about the getting up.'

Events

1986 -

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Book

Wonder Woman: The Myth of 'Having It All', Haussegger, Virginia, 2005

Site Exhibition

The Women's Pages: Australian Women and Journalism since 1850, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cal/cal-home.html>

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg>

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