

## **Neal E. Robbins - A brief biography**

I was born in 1954 and brought up in the suburbs of Chicago. I studied Chinese and Asian studies at Washington University in St Louis, before I headed off to Taiwan to immerse myself in the language. After two years there, I went in 1978 to New York to Columbia University Journalism school. Imbued there with the ethos of journalism, I see being a journalist as a proud profession (though I am very disappointed by much of the industry).

On graduating, I won a grant for budding foreign correspondents that paid for an apprenticeship at the United Press International Hong Kong bureau. These three years were my boot camp, but I survived, even met my wife-to-be, Susan Daruvala. In 1983 I joined the UPI bureau in New Delhi, a set of rooms in the then fading Ambassador Hotel. As we could order room service, I often ate chicken tikka massala and naan over the typewriters (and later computers) on which we wrote about those turbulent years for India.

After the birth of our son, I took a move back to the UPI headquarters in Washington, in part because he had Down's Syndrome. I worked on the foreign desk, later transferring to the Chicago bureau, while Susan studied at the University of Chicago. I later became an assistant professor of journalism at Roosevelt University on the South Side. I loved teaching and set up a center to encourage minority students to go into journalism.

But Asia called. Frederick Yu, who had been my professor at Columbia, asked me to teach at the new journalism institute at Taiwan University. It was set up just after the end of martial law to educate a new generation as the country was feeling its way towards democracy.

In 1993, I came to London as a foreign correspondent for Taiwan's mass-circulation China Times newspaper to cover Europe from the Taiwan perspective. When later Susan got a job teaching Chinese literature at the University of Cambridge, we moved to Cambridge, and with an unexpected family windfall, I decided to go into publishing myself. It turned out to be the greatest challenge of my life. In 1997 I launched a city magazine and later city and restaurant guides. Riding the waves of the growing digital revolution, I soon launched online. But, alas, in 2017, the company succumbed to the social media competition.

We live in Cambridge, England, and now Susan and I have two grandchildren.