



# 2020

## Lifetime Achievement Award Winner ROBERT WILLIAMS

My interest in photography started in the summer of 1967 when a friend's older sister told us about a movie, "Blow-Up," in which a photographer enlarges an image again and again to reveal what appears to be a murder. Her description of the darkroom scene was very compelling. While attending both junior high and high school, I took the only two courses in still photography available and learned the basics of black and white film photography.



I participated in track and field at South Carolina State College, but there were no photo programs or classes and I still had a passion to become a photographer. When a family member who was in the Navy suggested that I try to become a Navy photographer, I joined the service in 1975. I finished the Navy's basic photo school in Pensacola, Fla., and was sent to the Philippines.

The Fleet Air Photo Lab at Cubi Point had me working with all formats of cameras from 35mm to 9-inch and completing a lot of lab work that went with the various types of shooting. The most interesting assignments were in photo recon with various P-3 squadrons tracking Soviet ship and submarine movements in the Indian Ocean. During two tours on the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk, I became a leading petty officer, running both b&w and color film processing and printing for the night shift.

In 1980, I reenlisted and was sent to Japan, where I was first exposed to ENG photography using portable video cameras and the Sony 3/4 in video tape. Seeing the instant playback in color and with synchronized audio was a revelation. I knew what I wanted to do—work as a TV camera person in the field—and for two years in Japan I did just that. The AFRTS Far East Network aired my work.

My first TV mentor, Cmdr. Octavio "Toby" Marquez, secured my spot in the Navy/Marine Cinema Program at the University of Southern California. After completing the yearlong program that dealt with all aspects of film and TV production, I was ordered to Washington to join Cmdr. Marquez' film unit. When the Navy moved to video tape production I was absorbed into the Navy Broadcasting Service and worked on a weekly news show for military personnel. I met many camera people working at various news organizations and decided that I wanted to work in the civilian news media.

After leaving the Navy in 1986, I earned a degree in RTVF at the University of Maryland while working as a freelance camera

operator for small independent news organizations. My second TV mentor, Andy Cassells, hired me at the D.C. bureau of Cox Broadcasting, which owned seven stations coast to coast. I shot, edited and did live shots three times a day for 8 1/2 years. The day I became a member of the WHNPA, in 1989, was one of my proudest.

While working at Cox I covered the 1988 Democratic convention in Atlanta and watched a young

governor from Arkansas give one of the most long-winded speeches I'd ever heard. I also covered the campaign and inauguration of George H.W. Bush and the Senate confirmation hearings for Justice Clarence Thomas.

In 1996 NBC News hired me for its new 24-hour cable network, MSNBC, as an editor/camera person. Two more mentors made it possible: Wolfie Fraser and Tony Capra. Once at NBC I was absorbed into the D.C. bureau field camera operations.

My 22-year career at NBC took me to 40 countries over five continents. I traveled throughout Africa with Presidents Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama. I covered Obama's presidential nomination and subsequent inauguration. I documented the tragic Virginia Tech shootings and the joyous opening of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial. Several WHNPA members, including Rodney Batten, Shelly Fielman, Frank Gibson, George Fridrich and Percy Arrington, helped mentor me during this time to hone my craft.

As of 2008 I became increasingly involved with our union local NABET 31, first as a shop steward, then as vice president and in October 2018 as the locals president. I retired from NBC in February 2019 and became a full-time union locals president. I find this position to be extremely rewarding in that I can advocate and negotiate for better working conditions for my sister and brother technicians. It also allows me to help young folks get a foot in the door of the broadcast industry.

This recognition wouldn't have been possible without the support and love of my family, especially my wife, Vicki, and sons Carlos, Chris and Ryan. I love you guys—and thanks for putting up with my unusual jobs over the years.

Finally, my thanks to the WHNPA for bestowing this great honor on me. I am forever honored and humbled to join an elite group.