



## Tightening the ties with China

A one-time Territorian and now resident of China, Brendan Worrell couldn't imagine a life better than the one he's living: between two sisters – cities, that is.

**TEXT**  
Robyn McDougall

**PHOTOGRAPHS**  
Courtesy Brendan Worrell

As the Worrell family hurtled across the Nullarbor on Boxing Day 1975 toward a bright new life in Perth, the influences that shape the future man were taking root in the youngest of the four brothers aboard.

Cocooned in the dusty brown Ford Fairlane that blended with its surrounds for much of the trip from Melbourne, young Brendan Worrell relished three days of big mysterious landscapes against a soundtrack of the ABC through the car radio. Vast remote landscapes and the media, already two of his three grand passions were in place.

Fast forward more than 30 years which included a lengthy stopover in Darwin, and Brendan Worrell can be found living on China's southern-most island province of Hainan, working as a journalist and continuing to cultivate large and small relationships with the Top End and West Australia.

The CDU graduate is one of more than 800,000 residents of Hainan's capital, Haikou, coincidentally a Sister City of Darwin and a location Brendan describes as a "bigger Chinese version" of the NT capital.

His interest in China has been slow-burning, sparked by another random childhood experience:

"It dates back to ABC TV which used to run a show, *Monkey*, loosely based on the classic *Journey to the West* (the Chinese mythological novel by Cheng'en Wu).

"This was popular among my brothers. We all wanted to fly on a cloud and beat up demons. Alas, as the youngest, I was usually the demon, getting beaten up."

Years later while he was studying at Charles Darwin University and working in various ways with international students, Brendan developed a deep affection for the Chinese students, in particular.

"I tutored on a weekly basis many Chinese students who imparted, through their character and commitment, some of the essential 'Chinese spirit' which I've increasingly learnt to appreciate and savour," Brendan said.

He followed that fledgling interest and took his first step into the vast communities of Asia while he continued to work toward a Master in Community Development and Management at CDU and edit the student newspaper. Brendan spent a university break as a journalism intern at the *Bangkok Post*, after which there was no turning back. His fate was sealed. "I had ink on my hands," he said.

He didn't know how he was going to do it, but he knew he had to work in Asia, preferably in China, and he had to work in the media. Armed with his new qualification, Brendan moved to China in 2004 and waited patiently for a highly prized position to open at the *China Daily* in Beijing. In the three years between leaving the Top End and finding work in the mainstream media in China, the aspiring journalist took a job teaching at a Chinese university, met and married his wife who is also a teacher, and relocated to Hainan Island, just off the southeast mainland and surrounded by the South China Sea. He could hardly be accused of putting his life on hold while he waited for his break into journalism.



On top of that, Brendan also works as an unofficial ambassador for Haikou / Top End relations.

"I'd love to see more Darwinites getting a taste of what China and Haikou have to offer and, likewise, to get more Chinese and Haikou folk into the Top End for tourism, study or industry purposes," he said.

Brendan regularly welcomes visitors from Darwin to his new home city and supports exchanges in both directions. But the China / Top End links run even closer to home. His wife, Geng Ning Wei, works in the Foreign Affairs Department in Haikou and visits Darwin as part of her work assisting Darwin Sister City visitors.

"There is a dedicated core of decent people in both locations," he said, clearly enthusiastic about the relationship between the cities.

"Haikou is blessed with beaches, coconut trees, frangipanis, parks, cycle ways, lakes and a relaxed, down-to-earth culture.

"It's ideal for young families and there's an unassuming nature among the local population. This means, as in Darwin, you can meet the local mayor or chief minister and talk personally to them – a privilege often denied to citizens in more built-up areas.

"Societal gateways are less fixed and ideas are more readily exchanged. Plus the weather. I love thunderstorms, and the biodiversity the tropics support. The steam as it rises off the hot asphalt, the dragonflies and butterflies and geckos that tongue-slap mosquitoes. In some respects, Haikou is just a bigger Chinese version of Darwin."

Brendan gained a job in journalism in 2007 when he joined the website division of the *China Daily*. There he edits a news service that feeds about 140,000 mobile phone subscribers, he reads audio news for Chinese English language learners, writes a regular column for Chinese English language

learners and anchors the weekly video news. He also writes Op'Ed pieces with a China focus that feature in the *Daily's* website opinion section.

Now he's looking to combine all his interests by establishing an education-oriented business that operates from both Darwin and Haikou. "I intend to set up an agency that facilitates exchange between Haikou and Darwin students, initially, and later expand to the greater China / Australia markets," he said.

Evidence of his private interest in education is confirmed by his Bachelor of Arts (Social Sciences), Post Graduate Diploma (Social Welfare) and Masters (Community Development and Management). And his dedication to setting up a business? That's also evident.

"I have just completed my certification to be a qualified education agent counsellor and have just bought an apartment in Haikou where we plan to relocate and set up shop.

"Hopefully, in the near future, I will buy a home in Darwin and spend the rest of my days traversing back and forth between Darwin and Haikou. It's my goal."

Sounds like a plan...



#### WEB BYTE

View Brendan Worrell's Op'Ed columns for the *China Daily's* website at [www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/brendan.html](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/brendan.html).

## Disaster's tremours

The Sichuan (earthquake on May 12) disaster was a horrid event that is still being digested. Many colleagues went to report and came back changed people. Old students who came from Sichuan were distraught.

Here in Beijing and within the state media, we were totally absorbed in the response effort and the ongoing relief work.

People pulled together and in-house donations and appeals were conducted.

I think the immensity of the situation where about 70,000 people lost their

lives, over a million made homeless – the death toll was almost the total size of the Darwin population – is really difficult to comprehend.

The human impact of the lives taken, those left living who lost loved ones and the deeper questions that had to be asked regarding construction ethics, investment in remote rural areas. This will last well into the future.

It was the last thing China needed after suffering a terrible winter, after experiencing disturbances in Tibet and then suffering international

disruptions to the torch relay – nevertheless the Chinese people have pulled together.

A week after the 'quake, there was a three-minute silence across the nation. We went out on the street to film and the whole of Beijing shut down... everyone bowed in solemn respect.

It was truly eerie. I realised the depth and strength of the Chinese nation.

– Brendan Worrell

