

COVER STORY

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ALTER EGOS

What Thai celebs did before they became famous

If you're our target reader, then you're probably still trying to figure out what you really want to do with your life. But don't worry, since many famous figures in Thai society did something unrelated before establishing the roles they are now known for. Judging from the journeys of these individuals we've selected, it's OK to go through a period of doing different things and/or getting out of your comfort zone in order to pursue your true calling. The most important thing is that you keep pushing on. Here are five stories to inspire.

FUNNY GIRL



▲ Tuky might not think she's the prettiest but she's the funniest

You know her as: Sudarat "Tuky" Butprom. She's one of the most successful comedy actresses in Thailand today who has appeared in numerous TV shows and starred in many films. But the story of her climb to the top isn't as funny as the jokes she delivers. Tuky gave up a good job for a low-paid one and incurred huge debt before the spotlight turned to her.

Her journey: Thinking that her looks and short stature (147cm) aren't favoured by Thai show business, Tuky first decided to work for Phuket Fantasea, a nighttime cultural theme park, as a performer after she graduated with a fine arts degree in Thai dance from Mahasarakham University. She made B30,000 a month there and sent money back to her parents every month, like a good Thai child.

However, long before that, she harboured a dream to work with Workpoint Entertainment, a company known for making many popular TV shows in Thailand. Before her graduation, Tuky had already applied for a job at the

company five times to no avail. When she heard of a job opening as a costume girl there, it didn't take long for her to apply even though it meant she would receive only one-third of what she made at Phuket Fantasea.

Despite the drastic pay cut, Tuky didn't want her parents to worry so she applied for different credit cards so she could continue sending back her monthly contribution. This resulted in B300,000 in credit card debt over a period of three years.

Luckily, she received her first break in show biz accidentally when she got to act in comedy plays on TV show *Ching Roi Ching Lan* when an extra was absent.

Her performance got noticed and she started to make a name for herself for her hilarity and outrageous dress sense. Fame brought Tuky bigger and more roles and she eventually paid off all her debt. Not only has she now made enough to build a house for her parents but also to buy a collection of Blythe dolls.



Toon also co-designed some clothing items with CPS Chaps. What can't he do?

ROCK THE TROLLEY

You know him as: Atiwara "Toon Bodyslam" Kongmalai is the front man of Bodyslam, one of the most successful rock bands in Thailand. He moves the crowd with his energetic performances. Guys want to look cool in skinny jeans like him, while girls want to have his baby. With a goatee, ear piercing, tattoo and ongoing shirtless-ness, you probably wouldn't believe that Toon used to sing "tea or coffee?" as a clean-cut male flight attendant.

His journey: Toon has proved to be a man of many talents. He first formed a band with friends while studying at Suan-kularb Wittayalai School and won first place in the Hot Wave Music competition for students in 1996. His band, then called La-On, even released two albums on an indie label called Music Bugs. However, they disbanded after its members went on to study at different places. Toon put his rocker persona on hold while studying at Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of

Law. However, he realised he didn't like it but stuck it out for the sake of his parents who worked hard for him to get an education. He also treated the degree as a safety net in case he couldn't make his musical dream come true.

After graduation, he resumed pursuing his dream and sang at nighttime establishments but the paychecks weren't enough. A Chula senior suggested that he should get a job as a male flight attendant to avoid the starving artist syndrome. Toon applied to Orient Thai Airlines and he got the job. While travelling with work, he carried his guitar with him and strummed songs in his spare time. He worked as a flight attendant for six months before his band found mainstream success with the release of their self-titled album *Bodyslam* by Genie Records under GMM Grammy in 2002. The music gene must run in his family since his uncle is Ad Carabao, whose twin brother is also a musician.



◀ His band's biopic *Young 'Bao: Carabao the Movie* is one of the most anticipated films of this year

ROCKY ROAD TO STARDOM

You know him as: Yeunyong "Ad Carabao" Opakul, the front man of the legendary Thai rock band that also has fans outside the country. They are known for their *phleng phuea chiwit*, or "songs for life". However, with the anti-establishment sentiment in the songs he wrote for Carabao, you probably wouldn't believe Ad used to hold down a nine-to-five job.

His journey: After moving to Manila to study architecture at Mapua Institute of

Technology, he met other Thai students there who introduced him to music by Led Zeppelin, John Denver and The Eagles. Ad formed Carabao to perform at the institute's fair with two Thai students. The word "carabao" is Tagalog for buffalo and represents a fighting spirit.

Ad returned to Thailand and got a job as an architect at a private firm. He then reunited with the other two founding members of the band and continued to pursue music, performing at hotels. In 1980, he started

his job as an architect at The National Housing Authority.

Ad's road to rock stardom wasn't lined with roses or women throwing their underwear at him. Carabao's first four albums didn't make him famous. The group went on a tour, performing at movie theatres nationwide to small audiences. The real turning point for Ad and his band came in 1984 with the release of their fifth album, *Made In Thailand*, which made history, selling five million copies.

NOTED NOSE

You know him as: Udom "Nose" Taepanich is credited as Thailand's first stand-up comedian. He went from a college dropout to become one of the most celebrated and marketable comedians in Thailand. The 80,000 tickets to his latest *Diew 10* show sold out like freshly-chopped *som tam*. And although Nose doesn't have a Mario or Nadech face, he has starred in many TV commercials for brands such as Samsung and Scotch.

His journey: He studied com-



mercial art at Pohchang College but didn't finish. His first job was as a cartoonist for a magazine which he quit after two months. After reading the first issue of humorous magazine *Paiyanyai* and being impressed by it, he joined the magazine as the art director. There he also discovered his knack for writing and became a columnist for the magazine until its end.

With some experience in acting in plays, he started to appear on TV shows. His real breakthrough came when he joined the cast of a comedy variety show called *Yuthakarn Kayup-ngeuak* (Operation to Move Your Gums), which launched the careers of many Thai comedians over its nine years of running.

As his fame grew, Nose finally decided to quit the show to go solo. His first stand-up gig took place in 1995, pushing Nose to the forefront of Thai comedy. He also has exhibited his artworks at venues in Bangkok and Chiang Mai and written almost 20 best-selling titles, some of which have been reprinted many times.

▶ Being funny sells

GLAM GENE

You know him as: Kasidit "Gene" Samniang is the reigning gender-bending diva of the Thai music scene. He's known as the former singer of English-language electroclash band Futon. With his ability to sing in English and passion for fashion, you probably think Gene came from some kind of avant-garde background. He actually came from an ordinary one, born and raised in Phrae. He also used to work at a music store for a living.

His journey: In a recent interview with *GM* magazine, Gene credited his ever-changing transformation to him always being open to different cultures. In 1994, his brother who was living in Bangkok at the time sent him Portishead's debut album *Dummy*, which he found cool. He then formed a band, playing songs of Modern Dog, Radiohead and Nirvana. A love for Britpop sparked a dream to become a singer. He also studied the lyrics of English songs.

After moving to Bangkok, Gene decided not to enroll in a university as he couldn't bear the prospect of wearing a uniform for the next four years. He decided to work instead and his first job was at Tower Records, arranging CDs on the shelf in alphabetical order. The job gave Gene a perk of learning more music and he also made new friends. He then became a columnist for *Metro* magazine, writing about music and other topics. After back-packing in England, he came back and wrote for *BK Magazine* and later became the vocalist for Futon in 2003.

After six years with the band and performing in and out of Thailand, "GK" went solo, and is currently signed to Smallroom music label. The third single from his upcoming second album *BLONDE* was released at the end of April. **G**



▶ Gene proves blondes have more fun in his second album *BLONDE*