



I WAS A TEEN REBEL

TV host Pornsak purposely failed his exams to try and get out of S'pore

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WHEN he was a schoolboy, his parents told him he was coming to Singapore on a holiday, but he ended up moving here permanently.

He initially rebelled against this foreign land, flunked his exams and was even chased out from his guardians' homes.

Yet, Pornsak Prajakwit, 27, has overcome his rough childhood to become a Mandarin radio DJ and now, a television host.

No small task considering that he learnt Chinese only after he moved to Singapore from Thailand.

Now, he is one of the fastest-rising TV hosts on the Chinese entertainment scene.

With Lee Teng, he has co-hosted the programmes Go Green, Campus SuperStar Season 3 and the upcoming variety show Go Live.

While Pornsak was crowned the Best Newcomer at the Star Awards in 2007, Lee Teng, 25, has been nominated for Best Variety Show Host in Star Awards this year.

But while he has made his name here, Pornsak said the journey was hardly smooth.

When he was 10, his parents brought him to Singapore for a Christmas holiday.

The festive period came and went, and he was puzzled why they did not return to Bangkok.

Then his parents took him to buy a school uniform and textbooks.

"The next thing I knew, I was in a classroom attending lessons," he said.

He didn't speak Mandarin or English, and no one in South View Primary School spoke Thai.

"I've been chased out of my guardians' homes because I was so playful. And I would forget to turn off the taps or the lights. Whatever I touch would most probably break too!"

— Pornsak Prajakwit (left)

"For months, I ate only hotdogs and char siew buns in school because the Thai word for 'hotdog' is the same as English," he added.

Pornsak thought that if his grades got bad enough, his father would move him back to Thailand. So he deliberately scored only 9 out of 100 in all his subjects.

Somehow, Pornsak managed to finish his studies, and moved on to Clementi Town Secondary School, where he would hang out at playgrounds and fast-food restaurants after classes.

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He went on to Jurong Junior College and then Singapore Management University (SMU).

"I have a very blessed life. At every important stage in my life, I've had someone come rendering help."

His mentor and "fairy godmother" there was SMU professor Margaret Chan — the former Masters Of The Sea actress.

"She told me to 'open my big fat mouth' and got me to host a lot of campus events," Pornsak said.

It was then that Pornsak came out of his shell and discovered an interest in hosting.

Off-campus, Dr Chan took care of Pornsak like he was her son. She would buy him dinner when she was out with her family and swing by his place to drop it off.

Radio

Pornsak later won a DJ competition organised by Radio 100.3 and joined the station full-time.

At the station, he got help from fellow deejay Anna Lim, who helped him overcome his "Thai-accented Mandarin" by correcting his pronunciation "word by word".

His next mentor was a guest speaker at the station, Dr Tan Bee Gawh, a Chinese physician who impressed upon him how fickle the entertainment industry can be and encouraged him to take a degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

In three years' time, Pornsak will become a TCM physician.

In front of the camera, he flashes his trademark grin and cracks jokes effortlessly.

But off-camera, and during this interview, he sometimes digresses into a more sombre mood.

He said: "I'm a typical paid extrovert. My job as a TV host is to be loud and funny, and hosting is a great way to express the extrovert side of me."