

Go Thai, Be Free

Woody Milintachinda in conversation with Eugene Yiga

Eugene Yiga has written about travel, leisure, food, drinks, marketing, media, television, film, music, theatre, art, books, business, personal development, and more for over 100 different websites, newspapers, and magazines across the globe. One of his top travel features won an annual Excellence in Journalism Award for 2017.

www.eugeneyiga.com/

Vuthithorn “Woody” Milintachinda is a leading figure on the frontline of the Thai entertainment industry. Woody recently hosted 'Woody Show' which is the first licensed format show of 'The Ellen DeGeneres Show' in Asia.

As a TV personality, chat show host, content creator, and entertainment producer, he made headlines when he married his same-sex partner back in 2014.

Eugene Yiga spoke to him to learn more about his life, his work, and his love for Thailand.



Did you always know you were gay growing up?

Oh yeah, of course. I watched porn when I was about 12 or 13. I thought about looking at the women because obviously guys are taught to like girls. But I would watch every day and ask, “Wait, why am I not staring at the girl? Why am I staring at the guy?” And I would think, “No, no, no. This isn’t me.” I didn’t feel right. I felt like it wasn’t my thing. I dated a Japanese model when I was in junior high school because I thought I had to date girls. But when I kissed her I didn’t feel right. And so I finally dated my first boyfriend in New York. But when I came back to Thailand, he called me to say ask how I was and I told him not to call me anymore because I was no longer gay. I hung up the phone. And I told myself that now I was back at home with my family that I was going to be straight. But that’s not the way the world works. So after two years in Thailand, I became myself.

Have there been any hate messages since you came out?

A few but not too much. But I message everyone back and I ask them why they said what they did. The thing with me is that I’m willing and able to reach out to them to have a conversation. And they tell me straight out that it’s because their parents or the place they grew up told them that it’s not okay to be gay. We live in a religious country but Buddhism never mentions that being gay is not okay. So you know right away that it’s about not understanding. But it’s not a widespread thing, especially with the generation we’re living in now. Young adults are not concerned because the media content that’s been going out for the past ten years has caused the culture and understanding of the community to change. But twenty years ago it was quite difficult. The perception was that because Thais are soft-spoken and non-aggressive – and because we have a lot of transsexuals and crossdressers in the media – that being gay was just about having long hair or singing and dancing in a cabaret. Twenty years ago, they didn’t understand what it means to be gay. But now they do. And yet we’ve got so much work to do because a lot of people still don’t understand us.

What do you love about the LGBT+ community in Thailand?

While LGBT+ tourism is new for the world it’s not new for us. And I think that it’s not just about being LGBT+; it’s about living with happiness and seeing the possibility that you can be anywhere in Thailand or travel to any parts of the country and feel like you belong in our family... Being beautiful everywhere makes my mind, my thoughts, and my emotions become beautiful too. And I think the beauty of the country creates the beauty in the hearts of the people.

How long before Thailand has marriage equality?

There’s more work to be done. People also assume that the government isn’t okay with this but I think they’re just not talking about it. They’re talking about poverty and GDP but not about equality. And that’s where we come in. We need to tell them that there should be more conversations about this and bring in examples of Taiwan and so many other cultures that have gone through this already... But in whichever way shape or form, it will happen.

What are your highlights in Bangkok?

I love the new hotel openings. When the Park Hyatt opened, I went to stay there with my partner and I brought my whole family. We went shopping at Central Embassy, which we normally don't do. And The Siam is another amazing hotel. I stayed there once to staycation as well. Growing up, every day after college classes, I would walk around Bangkok in search of new gems. And I would jot them down in my little booklet of cafés, restaurants, or even museums that are unheard of. I have my own little list. And I would love to take guys around on a tour because I want to tell my story as well.

What would you do differently if you could go back in time?

I was born in Thailand but grew up mostly in Singapore and New York. I wanted to study economics and I did [but if I could go back in time] I wouldn't mind applying to a cabaret show; going all flamboyant and having fun. But I sometimes imagine that I wouldn't be able to do as many things back then. So for now I realise that I have to live in reality and I realise that things happened for a reason back then. If they didn't happen I wouldn't be here and I wouldn't be able to feel so happy right now. Every day I wake up I feel so happy with my life and that I'm able to be me 100%, off air on air. Everywhere I go with every single conversation I feel like I am me.

So if I die today or tomorrow, I'm okay.

What would you say to a younger version of yourself?

The most challenging part about being who you are is when you are about to open up yourself to the world. You're going to have critics but that will be a lesson. You'll get to learn so much from that. And at the end of the day, no matter how difficult or how hard it may be, people will eventually accept you for who you are. It'll be tough but you'll make it through. As long as you have hope, you'll make it.

What do you feel about your bigger role as celebrity?

I don't think about it too much because it would stress me out. I'm not an activist. My job is to show Thais that there are a lot more options than what we see every day. My job is to present to the world who I am.



Woody and his husband, c. 2014