

FELBERG REAL LIFE STORIES

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A close-up, high-contrast portrait of Tom Cruise. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a serious, intense expression. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of his skin and the intensity of his gaze. He is wearing a dark, possibly black, leather jacket.

*Tom  
Cruise*

**A SHORT BIOGRAPHY**

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Felberg SJA

EWA WOLAŃSKA  
ADAM WOLAŃSKI

*Tom*  *Cruise*

A short biography

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## **INTRODUCTION**

His childhood and youth were not easy. He was forced to get a part-time job at the age of twelve. He was too poor to go to university when most of his friends did. But he never gave up and decided to set his own, ambitious goals instead.

His first movie roles were those of good-looking young men. His rebel image made him an idol of the younger generation. For millions of teenage girls he had the face of the boy they would most like to date.

Most people thought that his fame would pass just as his youthful looks would go one day. Yet somehow he is still very much around. In fact, he gets more and more refined in his portrayal of screen characters.

Millions come to see him. The movies he has been in so far boast forty Oscar nominations and over four billion dollars in takings. He is a star in the good old meaning of the word: adored, admired, copied. At the same time he is a truly modern artist: one who keeps looking for new challenges, one who is not afraid to take risks.

There is youthful enthusiasm and freshness in his acting, but also a hint of the bitterness of a man who grew up too soon.

## On the move

His real name is Thomas Cruise Mapother IV. The Roman numeral means he is the fourth bearer of the same name in his family. Born on July 3, 1962 in Syracuse, New York, he was the third of four children of Thomas Mapother III and Mary Lee. Tom has three sisters. Lee Anne, born in 1955, is a journalist. Marian, a year older than Tom, is a school teacher. Cass, born in 1963, owns a restaurant in New Jersey.

Tom's father was an electrical engineer. In search of work, he often moved from place to place with the whole family. Tom's childhood was constant travel across America. The family finally settled down near Gloucester in Canada.

For Tom, who was shy and reserved, changing schools was a nightmare. He went to as many as ten different schools before he was 14! He had problems getting along with boys his own age, especially since he was always "the new kid." He was beaten up several times as he didn't belong to any of the school gangs.

His difficulties were not helped by still another problem that Tom—as well as his sisters—suffered from. He was dyslexic. Dyslexia is a medical condition in which a person has serious trouble with proper reading and writing. "Instead of Z, D and B, I wrote their mirror reflections. I had to take special writing classes," Tom admits. These difficulties were mocked by his classmates. "They always laughed at me in the school yard."

In 1974, his parents divorced. Tom's mother left Canada with her children and returned to the USA. Since Tom's father didn't pay any alimony, Mary Lee did all kinds of odd jobs to feed her children. She taught at school, worked in an amateur theater, did people's laundry . . . And again, she moved from place to place with the children. "Those were hard times," says Tom. "Even when mom had three jobs at once, she was paid so little that we were just poor."

In 1976, Tom was sent to St. Francis Seminary in Cincinnati. He didn't really want to become a priest. He

went there because the school provided its students with free clothes, books and food. When Tom was 16, his mother remarried. They moved house again, this time to New Jersey. Tom left the seminary. In the early mornings, the teenager did the paper rounds in the neighborhood. In the afternoon, he mowed lawns. He worked because he had to pay for his new school, Glen Ridge High. He dreamed about a career in sports, but a knee injury soon stopped these plans. So Tom turned to acting. His debut in the school theater was as Nathan Detroit in the musical *Guys and Dolls*.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Rebel with a smile

The school production of *Guys and Dolls* was such a success that Tom decided to become an actor. “I felt I needed acting just like lungs need air,” he says. Tom wasn’t even 18 when he borrowed 850 dollars from his stepfather, Jack South, quit school and went to New York. He was determined to make acting his profession. He gave himself ten years to achieve this aim. He underestimated his own abilities . . .

The beginnings in New York were not too promising, though. To pay for his acting classes, Tom worked as a waiter, washed dishes in restaurants and ran errands as an office boy. He went to all kinds of television and theater auditions when time allowed. His first bit parts in soap operas went completely unnoticed.

Finally, Cruise got a larger part in a theater production of *Godspell*. He was noticed and given a role in *Endless Love*, a film directed by Franco Zeffirelli. In that movie, starring Brooke Shields and Martin Hewitt, Tom played Billie Harris. It wasn’t a significant part. A bigger one came from director Harold Becker. In his low-budget drama *Taps*, Tom Cruise was cast as one of the rebellious cadets occupying their school in protest against plans to sell it. The picture was an unexpected box office hit.