
MY FATHER
INSIDE GILLETTE
Ferdinando Frega

MY FATHER INSIDE GILLETTE

"*Three blades. One recognition.*"

FERDINANDO FREGA

— NANDO THE SCRIBE —

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Everything I would have wanted to tell you, you already had.

I had the fortune of being your son, your colleague, your friend, and your confidant —

and this represents my everything. I could not have taken more.

But I leave you something you would not expect: eternity inside a story.

Whoever reads will know who you were.

Whoever knows will understand what you did.

Everyone will know who the Frega family is.

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STATEMENT

This volume is born from a simple truth:

Gillette never sold razors. It built men.

Men who could not go back, because a system — made of discipline, ritual, precision, belonging — had already chosen them.

The blade is a symbol.

The gesture is a language.

The system is a culture.

And the man is the final product.

These pages do not celebrate a brand — they decode it.

They do not recount a company — they reveal its cognitive architecture.

They do not describe a market — they describe an inheritance.

This is the narrative of the most complex product ever created: the Gillette man.

ABSTRACT

MY FATHER INSIDE GILLETTE is not the story of a razor. It is the story of the man the razor created.

The book moves across three layers:

the primitive gesture, where shaving emerges as an identity boundary;

the Gillette system, which transforms a product into a moral discipline;

the Frega genealogy, showing how a brand can shape lives, families, languages, and destinies.

The volume demonstrates that a brand is not an object — it is a cognitive organism. It does not sell blades — it builds behavior. It does not distribute products — it distributes belonging.

In these pages, shaving becomes a cultural code, the salesman becomes a custodian, and the man — the real man — becomes the final product.

NARRATIVE COLOPHON

This book was written in motion: across cities, memories, systems, and mirrors that never return the same face twice. It was composed the way a blade is sharpened: by removing, not adding. Every page comes from an ancient gesture — the gesture of a man who looks at himself, decides, cuts, and becomes something else.

Its digital architecture belongs to the NAPLESPOST ecosystem, where stories are not archived — they are oriented. Its voice is that of Ferdinando Frega, heir and witness of a system that turned a brand into a culture and a culture into a code.

Published in 2026, in a time when products speak too much and men too little. This volume attempts the opposite.

INTRO

There is no product without the man who uses it. And there is no man who is not shaped by the gestures he repeats every day.

Shaving is one of those gestures: minimal, almost invisible, yet capable of defining boundaries, roles, and belonging. Gillette did not invent the blade. It invented the way a man recognizes himself in the mirror.

This book does not tell the story of a brand. It tells the story of a system that shaped generations, families, languages, identities. And it tells the story of the man who crossed that system, served it, represented it, inherited it.

The product is a pretext. The man is the true center. The rest is gesture, memory, code.

THE FIRST BORDER

Hair is a detail people pretend to understand. They call it hygiene, aesthetics, identity, culture, ritual. But hair is none of that. It is a border: between what you show and what you hide.

Some trust barbers, some trust beauticians, some trust modern machines that promise autonomy and perfection. But hair stays there, stubborn, a biological reminder: you were an animal long before you became a citizen.

And it is not an enemy. It is an uncomfortable friend, a witness of origin. It spreads across the body, carries the color assigned by your genetic map, and holds a story you cannot erase. Even those with alopecia are not without it — they have only lost it for a time no one can measure.

To understand hair, you must go back to the beginning — the primitive human, the place where all your narratives return.

I see it as prehistoric noir. Two figures behind a wall of grass, talking. A third arrives and cannot tell who the man is and who is the woman. The face is not enough. The face lies.

So the woman decides to rewrite her identity. She walks to the river, looks at herself in the water, and sees a beard. It does not belong to her. It does not define her. It does not distinguish her.

She finds a sharp stone and starts removing hair, one piece at a time. She discovers regrowth is slow — a small advantage: the ritual does not demand daily sacrifice. And she discovers something stronger: the man looks at her differently. Difference becomes attraction. Difference becomes language.

From that moment, the culture of hair begins: first symbolic, then social, then hygienic, then scientific, then ideological. Until modern extremes arrive — those who say hair protects and must stay, those

who say it must disappear to be accepted, those who sculpt it to be desired.

But the truth is simple: hair is born, grows, curves… and at the curve, it dies. The root stays alive, stubborn, like certain ideas you cannot remove even with willpower.

And there is one last rule — the one only the storyteller knows: never turn a hair into a pole. The difference is a single vowel. But it changes everything.

"EVERY SYSTEM IS BORN FROM A BORDER. OURS WAS THIS ONE."

That woman at the river did not know she was starting something. She thought she was solving a problem. Instead, she was writing the first line of a story that would take ten thousand years to find its protagonist.

THE HISTORY OF SHAVING

After primitive man and the first sharp stone, things found their natural evolution. But the author is not a historian — so we will not conduct a radical analysis of human behavior. We will tell only the story of

someone you would not expect: the story of the Frega family.

Over millennia — and the discovery of metals confirms it — knives came into use, sharpened first on stones, then on leather strops. The figure of the barber had not yet been categorized, but the habit was always the same: a chair in the middle of the street — or wherever space allowed — someone who put their hands on your face.

Soap, mud, creams, oil. As seen in films from the Thirties, some would spit directly in your face — but the important thing was to slide the knife across the surface where hair needed cutting. Often, other kinds of cuts would emerge uninvited: moles, warts, ingrown hairs, pimples. The operator was improvised, like certain marketing people who reinvent themselves as salesmen.

The result was nonetheless an elegant — certified — way of approaching women with delicate, soft skin, who appreciated cleanliness. And who never said: "*get away from me with that damn beard, you're scratching me.*"

KING KAMP GILLETTE

Grandfather Kamp changed history — not by selling a product, because beards had always existed and people had always cut them with something. He changed it by creating a system.

The result was one and only one: people no longer walked into shops asking for a razor blade. They

said: "can I have a Gillette?" Even today, in many parts of the world, it is still the same.

THE BLADE

Many people still do not know this: the first real fortune was not the blades alone, but the invention of the first safety razor — the one Italy continued to sell well into the 2000s.

The secret lay in simplicity: disassembled into three pieces — the handle, the blade-positioning head, and the containment zone — the razor allowed a complete shave, not a superficial one. The hair, enemy and friend number one, had nowhere to go.

The blades had a tempered steel edge at both ends, guaranteeing a continuous cutting line. Water constantly improved the quality of the shave.

The real secret was this: the blade worked better the more it was used. But people replaced it anyway — not because it stopped working, but out of pure consumer perception. After a couple of uses, it had to go. Exactly the way some men think they need to replace their wives after a few months of marriage.

THE ITALY SALE'S STRUCTURE

Between the Fifties and Sixties, the propaganda activity began — a targeted form of advertising where the salesman worked inside the shop:

applying window stickers, arranging cardboard display boxes, leaving blades on consignment.

The shops that represented the ideal multi-location points were primarily neighborhood grocery stores, tobacconists, haberdasheries, drugstores, perfumeries, and barbers.

Every salesman had a client list to visit, a territory, fixed itineraries filed with headquarters. A company car — the Fiat 600 — expense reimbursements, and one precise obligation: eighteen visits per day, Monday through Friday. If the weekly cycle of ninety visits was not completed, Saturday was for recovery.

At any time of day, you could know exactly where the salesman was and in which area. Certainly not at his wife's place.

During each visit, a named sales ledger was filled in: sales figures, meeting notes, comments, complaints. Everything written. Everything tracked.

In the evening, the inspector would telephone the salesman — at the best hotel in the area, because on that there was never any saving — to learn the day's results. But many times, he would call at home as well. And when the salesman claimed to have just returned from work, certain inspectors would be found downstairs checking whether the car bonnet was warm or cold.

This was the school: no lies, always the truth.

For significant orders, purchase proposals were issued with a named commission copy pre-printed by the Company, then dispatched to headquarters

for fulfilment. On image, there was never any saving. Everything was known: how many visits had failed, how many had succeeded, the number of blades delivered piece by piece.

This was the emerging structure. The best salesmen stayed for forty years.

The others became inspectors, then area managers, then sales directors, then managing directors.

But no one wanted to leave this Company. And the salary was at the highest levels of the market — so much so that everyone called them: colleagues, acquaintances, friends, clients.

They were called.

THE GENTLEMEN OF GILLETTE

THE HIRING

My father had recently been discharged from the army with the rank of Captain. His mother had forced him not to re-enlist she had already lost a brother — my father's uncle, a colonel, in Russia in 1945 — and the fear of other wars had never left her. She did not want to lose him too.

That afternoon he was sitting in a bar in Castrovillari, in the province of Cosenza. He had been an insurance agent, then the director of a

beach club, pushed by his sister to find something. But nothing that truly suited him. His real passion remained the local kind: cards, banter, cinema.

On a small table he saw an advertisement. He replied on a loose sheet of paper, even greasy with fingerprints.

Three weeks passed. A telegram arrived, summoning him for an interview. In the room there were one hundred and twenty-five candidates for a single position — and no one yet knew who the company was.

He went home. Three days later, another telegram: he had ranked third among all candidates. They wanted him back.

For the position covering Reggio Calabria, the top two had tried to negotiate upward. But blackmail had never worked in this company. The offer was 80,000 lire — it was 1962 — and it was not negotiable. A postal worker in those years earned 16,000 lire a month.

When it was my father's turn, he accepted.

And that was the fortune of the Frega family.

After three months of work — results, dedication, seriousness, reliability, checks day and night — his salary rose first to 120,000 lire, then to 150,000. Within a single month.

No one believed it. Not even him.

Later, over the years, it emerged that they had conducted stock audits on him. There were never any shortfalls — neither in product nor in money.

He was a man certified by God and by the men of Gillette.

THE FAMILY

One of the secrets that almost no one has ever been able to articulate, understand, intuit, or identify: it lies in the attention a company can give its people through knowledge of every family detail.

The idea was simple. If the person has a stable family, a good relationship with his wife, no debts, care for his children, and a proper budget for clothing — the first true source of image — then the conditions are optimal for working and giving only the best.

Today it seems obvious. Rhythms and cultures have changed. But it never was obvious and still is not — one need only observe the damage that turnover inflicts on time and business, capable of derailing even the most ambitious objective.

A simple act of attention generates a strong sense of belonging. The Carabinieri in Italy are the greatest expression of this — alongside the mafia, whose members swear loyalty with deeds and not with words, and do not know the concept of turning state's evidence.

And so, at regular intervals, a casual meeting would be arranged with the family — perhaps over lunch. It was the sales director's favorite task, the only person delegated to that role. He conducted silent evaluations to understand the state of health, without being a doctor or prescribing medicine.

He had noted the wedding anniversaries, the births of children. Every occasion was good for Gillette's mother to enter the home without making a sound. Sometimes a crib was delivered. Other times gold sovereigns for the wife. Other times still, a photograph in the company newsletter.

Mine was one of those times.

ADVANCEMENT

Throughout the sales cycles, prize competitions were established. They almost always offered three types of choice: money, gold sovereigns, prizes. And then something that was never written down anywhere.

Your car would be upgraded — a higher class, brand new. And the color was always chosen by the wife.

The Fiat dealership in Spotorno, in those years, became very wealthy managing the entire company fleet — until a new management arrived and shifted the procurement axis toward international leasing systems like Avis.

But it was not only that. A good salesman was the reference point for the entire informational axis of the company. He mentored new managers, trained new salesmen, and often gave a binding opinion on the appointment of new inspectors.

Those who arrived at the company were the same ones who retired from it.

THE FIRST CASE STUDY

The law of numbers is the only one that can never be disproved. And for my father, being first at something was not just pride or character — it was a matter of style, inherited from a family raised in military environments.

Work represented something very serious to him. It was never tied to money, but always to that capacity for generating results and creating a showcase where others would look and say: that is him, the first.

In his years at Gillette, he never fell short of his objective. First in Italy for number of clients visited, for number of orders, for product distribution, for merchandise visibility. The quantities were strictly tied to consumption — and the population of his territory, in those years, did not exceed one million people.

Market share data, usually requested by Nielsen area, was split onto his territory multiple times. The result was extraordinary: ninety-nine-point five

percent. The competition — Wilkinson, Schick, Bic — lived within that remaining half point. Those were the clients he chose not to serve, because they created payment problems. And money has always been the only existential measure for the life of a company.

And it must be said: no one would ever have disrespected someone called Frega who worked for Gillette. For one simple reason: there was none.

THE LAW OF NUMBERS

The Milan headquarters read his numbers and could not explain them. Within a three-month sales canvas — thirteen weeks, eighty-four working days — he would present with an average of four hundred and fifty to five hundred and fifty orders. Never duplicated on the same client on the same day. One hundred percent fulfilled.

It was not a sporadic occurrence. The confirmation lies in his forty years of activity.

One morning the UK managing director set off together with the Italy sales director toward his territory. Incredulous. Suspicious. Certain that somewhere there had to be a trick. Instead, they found the method.

VISITS AND BACK VISITS

They arrived at 7:45 on a Friday evening. Waiting for him, reading the itinerary he had filed with headquarters four weeks earlier, in a town a hundred kilometers from home, on a winter evening with no lights in the street.

The Englishman kept saying it was not possible, that it was implausible. The sales director — the one who had hired him — stood there waiting, quietly, behind his smiles.

And there he came, leaving a client. Fresh as a daisy. He did not expect the surprise. He walked in, did his work, and at the exit found the two managers in front of him.

He took them to the bar. He immediately presented the visit plans for the day — perfectly on track. The English MD, Mr. De Wikied, asked him one single question: "*Do you always work like this?*"

He smiled and replied: "*I don't know any other way. But if you are not happy and satisfied, I will sign my resignation on the spot, right now.*"

They said goodbye and left.

THE SHADOWING

The communication arrived: on May 28th at 7:45 pm a company guest would present himself for a few days of shadowing. Be present at the hotel in the evening for scheduling.

He met him. A tall, elegant young man, with the kind of voice that captures you. Strongly empathic. His name was Piero — he was the head of Gillette's propaganda office, and he wanted to see how the market moved in the field.

My father arrived at 8:05 pm. The fifteen-minute delay was not justified. Only later he would say: "*Clients always take priority over colleagues. They are the ones who pay our salaries.*"

The appointment for the following morning was at 7:00 am.

He arrived on time at the hotel. No sign of Piero. After five minutes he had the room called. The boy was asleep. He left a message: he would return at 10:30.

He returned at the second time and said to Piero: "*If you came here to play games, you are in the wrong place. I suggest you take a plane and go back where you came from. At 7:05 I have my first client — and to him go my attentions. It is simply a question of seriousness.*"

That dressing-down remained written in history. Five days later, Piero returned to headquarters. Six months later, he became the new Gillette Italy managing director. For twenty-five years.

NEW PRODUCT LAUNCHES

ATTAK GLUE

In those years, Gillette Italy headquarters also acted as a commercial platform for launching third-party products. The company Loctite arrived — a manufacturer of fast-setting glue — and asked to conduct a sales test to evaluate a possible distribution partnership.

My father was one of the three selected for the test. The product was called Attak Glue.

His report was unequivocal: the product had to be taken on and distributed. It would generate significant profit margins and open a new market. The other two testers — one in Rome, one in Milan — said exactly the opposite.

The partnership did not conclude. Gillette management rejected the offer.

Six months later, Henkel took on that distribution. In the first year it turned over the equivalent of two hundred billion lire. It was a success. And it was the beginning of the company's errors.

GILLETTE SHAVING FOAM +1

The market was shifting from the traditional — brush, cream in a tube, all the time in the world — where the undisputed leader was Colgate Palmolive, to a new system: a pressurized can with product and gas that made shaving fast, practical, accessible. Gillette had changed the world. Again.

I was five years old and I often went out with him. In our conversations as a child there were numbers, percentages, mental calculations, the arithmetic of what things cost and how much was to be paid.

It was there that he explained to me the 1+1 promotion — buy one, get one free. Someone had invented it. He had made it real by applying the company discount: thirty-five percent plus ten percent off the list price.

Those two percentages amounted to only thirty-eight-point five percent — not fifty, as the client believed. But the client perceived it as 1+1.

It was not a trick. It was called selling.

This proved two things: that not everyone had studied the numbers. And that not everyone was born to be a merchant.

GILLETTE CREAM

My father was at an ice cream parlor in town when he saw a man pour the contents of a Gillette shaving foam can onto his ice cream cup. He laughed until he cried. He thought of a madman, or someone who had made a mistake.

Then he saw others doing the same thing. Curious, he went to investigate.

He walked into the ice cream parlor and introduced himself to the owner in his professional capacity. His name was Luca, of Neapolitan origin. He explained that he had purchased a hundred boxes of foam cream from a relative in Naples — but that people were reluctant to use a pressurized can, accustomed to fresh cream ladled with a wooden spoon. With no other money or resources, he had borrowed the Gillette brand, printed a thousand labels, and from that moment sales had never stopped.

Word spread around town that there was a new Gillette product on the market — and good old Frega had not sold it. People walked into shops asking for it. This was the birth of demand for an invisible product — the one that P&G would later claim parentage of. But it was an invention of the Seventies, by a man who never used a copyright.

PENS AND LIGHTERS

The French company Bic was leader in writing instruments and lighters. But it had directly and

frontally attacked Gillette by launching its single-blade razor, with two precise objectives: to lower the economic value of the market, and to capture a considerable market share, because the margins were strategic.

The French gentlemen had miscalculated.

Gillette not only raised its prices — it responded in its own way. It launched a new ballpoint pen called Grinta and a new line of lighters called Cricket. Distribution became capillary. At the tobacconist, people no longer asked for a Bic — they asked for the Grinta pen, the one from Gillette.

Americans are the only people in the world who never attack of their own free will — but are always ready to defend themselves. The French understood the lesson and loosened their grip, until the day the equilibrium was restored.

REVLON

Ronald Perelman, owner of Revlon, had always been in love with Gillette. He tried multiple times — friendly offers, hostile takeovers. But Uncle Warren had guaranteed: as long as he remained the majority shareholder, everyone could look at that beautiful woman all they wanted.

But he kept her locked at home, for himself alone.

EXPLOIT

FIRST TEST

One morning in June 1980, four salesmen from Lazio were dismissed. They had been found selling parallel-import blades — they were earning five salaries, but they were betraying the system.

The other four remaining salesmen from Lazio put forward a different request: to constitute themselves as a sales agency. They wanted to change their status — from employees to commercial agents on commission. A test.

The managing director of the time and the sales director, both of Southern Italian origin, men of the South, accepted. They set a budget of 70 million lire as the commission pool, with maximum advances to purchase cars and cover the first three months — calculations were quarterly, with settlement on the tenth of the following month.

Revenue in that territory increased by seventy percent. They moved immediately to another test in another territory — because only that way are confirmations obtained, not isolated events. This was the response given to Gillette UK, which was watching with great interest. But our managing director was a powerful figure at world level.

The Roman colleagues also established a moral rule: Gillette would not revise the commissions for two years. And so it was, at least until 1996 — guaranteeing prosperity for all, not just for one side.

SECOND TEST

January 1982. The second test began with Calabria and Sicily: five colleagues united in a company structure, same budget as the Romans, no salary

cage. Things exploded. Sales nearly doubled — helped also by the launch of new products that grew the brand without cannibalizing the existing asset.

I remember that my father stepped down from his company Fiat 127 and sat his backside in a Renault 19. When he drove, he was happy — because they had always repaid him with attention to what he did. And money never had an absolute value.

That was my father. That was me.

TRANSFORMATION

The moment came to decide whether to change the entire asset of the new sales force. It was not traumatic — the company simply asked questions, and everyone gave an answer. Some accepted changing their legal status, some chose to remain employees, some gave birth to trade unions inside the company — until then confined to their Roman headquarters, never inside the company itself.

The lawsuits began. I correct: one single lawsuit out of one hundred and twenty employees. The individual was dismissed because found stealing on his expense report. Inside the reimbursement requests they found three receipts.

The man is not made of flesh alone — ten thousand lire, escort service, no supporting documentation.

The sales director was a man of spirit. He paid the first receipt. But after the third he stopped and sent the formal complaint with a handwritten note on the back: "*The man is not made of flesh alone — fair enough. But not of iron either.*"

So the salesman thought it wise to find other methods. His wife had a laundry — and began issuing washing receipts that would only have made sense with twelve hundred factory workers.

He was dismissed.

Six months later the labor judge reinstated him in his position. Gillette had to pay damages. The man built a hotel — but never gave up his job until the day of his retirement.

He was of Calabrian origin, transplanted in Tuscany. One of those people my region would gladly have done without in its records.

RCS SNC MESSINA

It was the agency responsible for Calabria and Sicily. My father was one of the administrators in the management of the Gillette business. After a few years, things improved — and all five partners moved up to the Renault 25, flagship of the French manufacturer. The commission pool had reached one hundred million lire per head.

The market was paying other agents, in that period, within a range of thirty to fifty million overall — and those agents had difficult products to sell. They, instead, remained the Gentlemen of Gillette. And if any client made them angry, they stopped serving him.

This created losses in terms of commercial references. Being served by Gillette was synonymous with being a serious, reliable client — the market in the South was very attentive to these things, and trust issues were more visible there than elsewhere. The margin on Gillette products remained between thirty and thirty-five percent. It was not nothing. The wives knew it.

Revenues were significant, but everything moved in small packages. In a thirty square metre warehouse you could hold three hundred million worth of Gillette merchandise — and no one would notice.

Once, at a client's premises, thieves broke into the depot and stole a pallet of ACE bleach and one of Dash detergent. Heavy, bulky goods. And left behind in the warehouse three cartons of Mach3 blades — worth eight of the stolen pallets.

They did not know what they were stepping on.

INTERNATIONAL

At a certain point, Gillette Italy became the crossroads for all the HR directors and managing directors in the world who wanted to see what was happening. Everyone would have liked to change. No one ever would.

With employee legal relationships concluded in favor of commercial agents, and trade unions finished — that movement born to collect monthly dues, make noise, and create problems — Gillette

Italy proposed to the international headquarters in Boston to gather all the staff from the North Atlantic area on the occasion of the launch of a revolutionary shaving system: the Sensor. The city chosen was Washington. The first great celebration in the Gillette style took place — something you never forget.

My father looked at me and said: "*Nando, we are in America. We are home.*"

SENSOR LAUNCH — SEPTEMBER 1990

The morning before the return, confirmation arrived: Italy was accredited as the second Gillette headquarters in the world for profits and revenue.

The managing director, while everyone was having breakfast, stood up and said: "*Gentlemen, I thought about it this morning. Employees on vacation always receive their salary. You are professionals — by coming here you have lost seven days of work, seven days of selling, seven days of commissions. Therefore, on our return, for the entire remaining month of September, I will grant everyone an additional twenty-five percent on their commission pool.*"

These are the men who made a company great. It is not the brand that is strong — it is the action of people that no one expects to meet. But they exist.

In the three weeks of sales that followed, Italy sold all the new product allocations that brand managers had forecast for an entire year. It was a historic launch.

History is always made by men. Never by products.

MAY 1996 — GENOA

The new managing director arrived. He spoke of evolution, not revolution. He began incentivizing the old guard — thirty-five years of hard work — delivering extra money and saying goodbye to everyone. But no one wanted to leave.

Among them was my father. He resisted. Then he was forced to yield.

He died in April 2025, at ninety years of age, with his smile and a thought he always used to say:

"*First the facts. And afterwards the literary noir.*"

And that is what I have tried to do.

Goodbye, Dad.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ferdinando Frega was born in Calabria, southern Italy. He spent eighteen years inside The Gillette Company, and twenty-three years in international management. He did not write this book to explain a brand. He wrote it because some stories do not belong to the person who lived them — they belong to anyone who has ever watched a father work with discipline, precision, and total loyalty to something larger than himself.

He publishes under the name Nando The Scribe. His platform, naples-post.com, hosts one hundred and ninety-four free eBooks in five languages. He does not sell access. He builds it.

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