
L'OREAL
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GILLETTE, FREGA, AND L'ORÉAL

Gillette Trailer 32 — Nando the Scribe

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One evening at the hotel, I had just come back from my rounds of visits and sales, and my father had done the same — we used the same hotel to stay together a little, it happened about one week every four months.

At our table came a likeable colleague named Giorgio, a sales officer for L'Oréal who had taken on the job of organizing distribution in large-scale retail — they were moving from perfumeries toward supermarkets, while their historic market stayed where they were strong: products and Corolle cosmetics.

He had recently come out of the hospital, having had Crohn's disease. He was young, forty-five, but you could see he wasn't in good strength.

He asked me what my route was for the next day, and whether I could introduce him to my clients, sparing him the street maps and speeding up his work — we'd give it a try.

My father never said a word, and stayed silent, which meant he approved — otherwise he would have said: “Nando, listen, we need to talk,” which was his way of saying, what the hell are you doing.

Giorgio and I became friends, and we went around together on the client rounds for almost two years, though never more than one week a month.

When, in '88, Gillette decided to create two product divisions — Shaving and Personal Care — I became more aware that selling toiletries was harder work. Then in '89 I went back to Shaving, and he was a great help to me — I learned a lot from L'Oréal, though we never sold competing products.

After two years of spending time with Giorgio, a lot happened, but I only remember two things that really mattered:

A wholesale client, a young graduate, received us in his office and said: “I called you both in because I need your products.” Giorgio stood up and walked toward the exit to check the sign outside, and the young man, surprised, asked what was going on. He came back in, smiling: “I had the feeling we'd gotten the wrong place — that instead of a client's office, we'd walked into police headquarters.” That got a long laugh, and afterward everyone heard about it and smiled whenever they saw us.

Then one day, someone from Milan called me, politely asking me not to go around with my L'Oréal colleague anymore, because the Gillette Personal Care division wasn't selling shampoo, and it was Frega's fault — for selling L'Oréal. Ahahahahaha.

One day we went with Giorgio to see a food wholesaler. When I told him to call me Frega and that I represented Gillette, he welcomed me with open arms — he'd been expecting me. When Giorgio's turn came and he said he was with L'Oréal, the wholesaler begged him to come back another time, since he'd just unloaded two truckloads of oil. Giorgio shot back: “Seed oil, or olive oil?” The client said: “Don't worry, I'll buy both. Come back and I'll place the order — I'll help you out. Frega doesn't need the help.”

He died young, at fifty-two. And to thank him, I gave his name to my daughter — Giorgia — so that his memory would stay with me forever.

Ciao, Giorgio.

Ferdinando

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