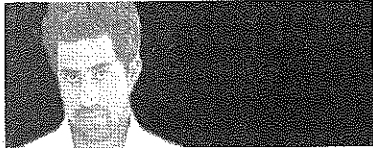


## PAGE TWO

## Accepting his fate, then mastering it



**Anand Giridharadas**

### CURRENTS

**PANZANO IN CHIANTI, ITALY** Back when the young butcher still wished he were a veterinarian, his improbably vast hands trembled when he cut. But all these years later, standing before the pilgrims who have come to dine at the table of the famed butcher of Chianti, the hands are calm. Each holds, above his head, a grilled T-bone steak the size of a respectable puppy. His radio-announcer voice welcomes guests: "Ben-ven-u-to a tut-ti!" And then Dario Cecchini, shaking those T-bones, flaunting them, sings out — in his broken, operatic English — the overwhelming question of his life:

"To beef, or not to beef?"

Until the day in 1976 when he saw that he had no choice, Mr. Cecchini's answer to that question was "not to beef." He was born in 1955 in a house across the street from where his father sold this Tuscan village its meat. Young Dario grew up knowing that he could be the eighth generation of Cecchini butchers. This struck a restless boy as a perfect reason to study animal healing instead.

So there he was, some social light-years from Panzano in the city of Pisa, studying veterinary science at the university. He was enthralled. "I had a life of books, of reflection," he said. He had escaped the silken tyranny of patrimony.

And then, in 1976, three years into his six-year course, a dark bulletin came from Panzano: Dario's father was dying. With his mother already gone, the son would have to assume leadership of the family and see to the livelihood of his younger sister and his grandmother.

Because a half-baked veterinarian is not a veterinarian, and because the Cecchins had a functioning butchery, Dario stepped into his father's role days after returning to the village. His right hand, wielding the knives, was gruesomely unkind to his left. He knew nothing about meat beyond having eaten it. He had shown no interest, and his father hadn't taught him. But his father sent him, on his deathbed, to a

man they called The Maestro, who over years taught him the craft.

Today, 36 years later, he has learned enough to hear himself, on occasion, called the world's best butcher. Some of the boldest-face culinary names worship his work. There are requests to open restaurants in Paris, New York and Berkeley, California. Instead, Mr. Cecchini chooses to remain monarch of his tiny empire of meat in Panzano: a burger joint, a steakhouse, a restaurant serving the forgotten cuts of the cow — and, supporting it all, the family butchery, where he is on most days between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

To watch him slice to the sounds of AC/DC; to see him linger in the doorway, asking passers-by "Va bene?" and offering them free food and wine; to follow him through his restaurants after dark as he doles out philosophy and offers wine — all this is to witness a man without anxiety over what might have been.

His dreams were to heal animals, not slay them; to leave his village for the world; to be a professional, working with mind, not hands. None of them came true. His blessing-cum-curse was to become a legend at the craft he didn't want. His joy has come from learning that you can do life's unwanted things with some of the flavor of the things that got away.

He has found, for example, that there is such a thing as butcher-intellectual, a worker of mind and hand; that you can read and understand and thereby merge traditions with new ways.

He has found that if you stay in one place, invest everything in that place and build excellence there, the world you craved will come to you.

And, at least to his own satisfaction, he has found that he can be a butcher in a veterinary way. "It's a paradox: to kill the animals and work to care for animals," he said. But today he ensures that the animals have a good life; and that their deaths are honored — and minimized — by eating all of them, not just choice cuts.

There will be no ninth-generation family butcher. Mr. Cecchini, who just two years ago married an American woman who has called Italy home for more than two decades, has no children. But he is working to sow a ninth generation of butchers from around the world: the apprentices in his academy of butchery.

Because they have chosen this profession, they may never know the forces that made Mr. Cecchini. Against the modern fashion, his story suggests that a meaningful life is less about doing what you love, and more about striving to love what you must do.

The other day, the butcher of Panzano pointed to the numbered map of a cow on the wall. "Life," he said, "is like that." It has good cuts, and bad. You must eat — and relish — them all.

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Unpacking weapons for the anti-piracy force. The operation involved dozens of

## Armed and ai

WASHINGTON

### Abandoned by sponsors, private anti-piracy force languishes in the desert

BY MARK MAZZETTI AND ERIC SCHMITT

It seemed like a simple idea: In the chaos that is Somalia, create a sophisticated, highly trained fighting force that could finally defeat the pirates terrorizing the shipping lanes off the country's coast.

But the creation of the group, the Puntland Maritime Police Force, was anything but simple. It involved dozens of South African mercenaries and the shadowy security firm that employed them, millions of dollars in secret payments by the United Arab Emirates, a former clandestine officer with the C.I.A. and Erik Prince, the billionaire

group, a trainee was hogtied, arms and feet bound behind his back and beaten. The group said it died from his injuries, an accusation disputed by the company.

Sterling has portrayed its effort as a bold private-sector effort to scourge of piracy where government forces were failing. Lafras Luiting, a manager for the project, died in October 2010 as a result of the violence. He said that the training covered from his injuries and allegations reflect not the professional training was new.

A lawyer for the company, Heifetz, wrote an official report, U.N. report, calling it "a collection of substantiated and often false allegations assembled by a group with views regarding participant politics."