



The story of Hamdi Ugur,
owner of
Porterhouse Steakhouse

<https://www.porterhousesanmateo.com/>



I was born in Kurdistan. My childhood was simple, but it was not easy. When I was still very young, my people were forced to run—Kurdish families scattered, trying to survive. By the time I was six or seven years old, I had already seen more hardship than most children ever should.

When I started school, we were forced to learn Turkish. It was not our language, but we had no choice. Life was about adapting, surviving, and moving forward.

As I grew older, I left home. I went first to Istanbul, and then, at around seventeen years old, I made my way to London. I was still just a boy—I hadn't even shaved yet—but I was ready to work.

My first job was as a dishwasher in London, in Piccadilly. From there, I worked my way up step by step—prep cook, busboy, grillman, waiter. I did whatever I had to do. I worked hard, and I learned everything I could.

In 1980, I came to America. Six months later, I found a job as a cook in San Mateo at a Hoffbrau restaurant. I cooked turkey, pastrami, corned beef, cabbage, and made sandwiches. I worked for \$85 a week, while paying \$325 a month in rent. Many days, I could only afford one or two meals. But I never gave up.

After two years, I asked one of my customers for an opportunity. That chance led me to a French continental restaurant called Bogie's. They hired me as a waiter. On my very first night, I made \$85 in tips. I couldn't believe it. I had never seen that kind of money before. I was so happy I couldn't sleep. I worked harder than ever—80 hours a week. I opened dinners, worked lunches, took every shift I could. They only paid me for 30 hours every two weeks, but I never complained. Some nights, I made \$200 or \$300 in tips. To me, that was the American Dream.

I bought a condominium. I got married. I had a car. Life felt beautiful.

Then my wife became pregnant. I was young, alone in a new country, and afraid. I didn't understand insurance, and people told me having a baby would cost a lot of money. I asked my boss for help, trusting him. The next day, they fired me.

Suddenly, I had a mortgage, a pregnant wife, and no job.



I went through three jobs, but none felt right. Then I found a job at a restaurant in North Beach. The owner, an Italian man named Lorenzo Petrini, gave me a chance. He provided Kaiser insurance, better pay, and a schedule that allowed me to spend time with my family. I will never forget that.

Six months later, my old boss came into the restaurant. He was sick. He sat with me, gave me big tips, and asked me to come back. I refused. He came again. And again. Four times.

By then, I had become confident—maybe even a little cocky. I told him, “If you want to sell the restaurant, I will buy it. Otherwise, please don’t bother me.”

The next time he came, he shook my hand and said, “\$165,000.”

I gave him a \$20,000 deposit check. I quit my job. My boss warned me: “You are too young. You don’t have experience.” But I told him, “I shook hands. I cannot go back. I must go forward.”

At first, they tried to back out of the deal. I was heartbroken. I stayed home, spending my savings, unsure what to do. Then finally, they agreed. I had to raise the rest of the money.

In one day, I raised \$150,000 from friends and customers who believed in me. People trusted me. I didn’t even fully understand escrow or contracts—I came from a village where I first saw electricity and cars at the age of twelve. We were farmers. We raised animals. We were self-sufficient.

But I believed in myself.

When I finally took over the restaurant, there was almost no business. Some days, not a single customer walked in. So I went out into the streets. I handed out my business card to every shop, every person. I asked for support.

And the American people supported me.

In my first year, I made \$300,000 in sales. The second year, over \$600,000. The third year, over \$1 million. It was unbelievable.

But success is never easy. After four years, the landlord went bankrupt, and I lost everything because I didn’t understand the lease. That mistake cost me dearly.

Still, I started again.

In the same location, I rebuilt. Years later, around 2006, business slowed during the economic downturn. A successful customer advised me to change the concept—to modernize, to adapt to a new generation in Silicon Valley.

So I changed the restaurant’s name to Porterhouse.

Business improved again. Thank God.

The restaurant business is very hard. I always say—you should recommend it to your enemy, not your friend. It keeps you too busy to bother anyone.

I worked seven days a week. Dinner service only. During the day, I played golf. I loved my life—but I also loved travel, and the restaurant made that difficult. An owner cannot be absent.

I learned one important truth: you must love what you do. If you only work for money, you will fail.



I love food. I love French cuisine. I love the grill. I love tableside cooking—crêpes Suzette, cherries jubilee, bananas Foster. I love Italian food too. For me, dining is not just eating—it is an experience. Atmosphere, wine, conversation—these matter.

When I was a child, I never imagined I would one day live in Istanbul, London, or America. I never dreamed I would own a restaurant, serve millionaires and billionaires, or become friends with them. Now I have a home. I have four children. My life is full.

One thing about me—I never blame others. I only blame myself. That is how I move forward.

I never forced religion on my children. I told them: when you turn 18, you choose your own path. I made my choices—I will not make theirs.

I worry about the future of the restaurant industry. We are losing communication, respect, and manners. People rush. They eat fast. They choose convenience over experience. Even days like Valentine's Day have changed—less elegance, less meaning.

I hope one day we remember what it means to be human again.

I love traveling—to Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America. I love meeting people, sharing ideas, experiencing culture, music, and food. I wish I had more time for that.

Still, I am proud of what I built.

Many people from my community came to me. I helped them. I trained them. Today, they own hundreds of restaurants. I was one of the first, and I opened the door.

Sometimes ten people would sleep in my house. Thirty people would come to my restaurant, and I would feed them all.

I sacrificed a lot. Not everyone appreciates it—but that's life. When you help people, sometimes they forget. Sometimes they even turn against you.

But I don't care.

My conscience is clean. I sleep like a baby. I am healthy. I am strong. I keep moving forward.

I live my life as if I will never die. And when the time comes—I will accept it.



PORTERHOUSE MENUS

Our Menus Feature the Finest Mid
West Steaks | Dry Aged In-House

DAILY MENUS
DINNER MENU
LOUNGE MENU
HAPPY HOUR MENU
DESSERT MENU
WINE LIST

PRIVATE DINING BANQUET MENUS

3 COURSE SET MENUS
4 COURSE SET MENUS
PASSED HORS D'OEUVRES

