



GRIT WITH GRACE

Cato, My Father, and Me: What I (Unknowingly) Learned About Living from the Stoics

By Randy Kaufman
with research assistance from Dustin Lowman

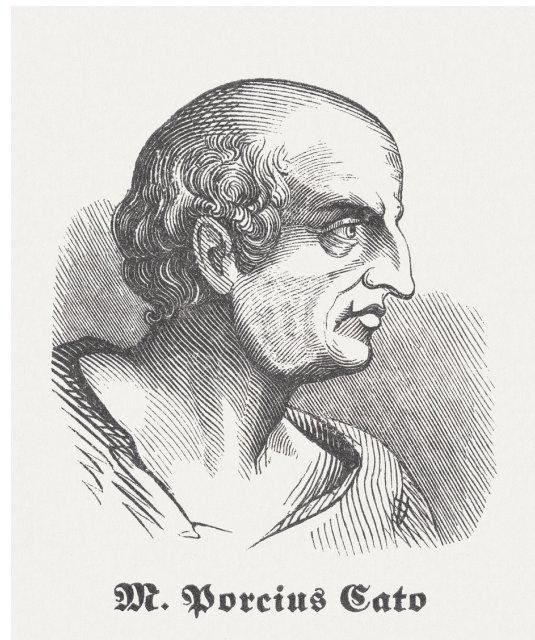
My father named our family's first dog — a medium-sized, regal brown poodle — Cato. During Cato's long life, many assumed the name "Cato" came from the Green Hornet's sidekick, similarly named "Kato." However, my father, never a TV watcher, insisted that he'd named the dog for some long-dead Ancient Roman senator.

Cato (the dog) lived to an incredible 21 years old. But it took me many more years than that to understand my father's motivation for giving Cato his name. An avid reader of Ryan Holiday's "The Daily Stoic," I recently one-clicked a biography [of Cato](#) and was surprised to make several revealing discoveries.

First of all, Cato was not simply the enemy of Caesar that many remember him to be. Cato was a soldier, aristocrat, senator, and a hugely popular voice among the founding fathers of the United States.

"George Washington and his peers studied Cato's life in the form of the most popular play of that era: *Cato: A Tragedy in Five Acts*, by Joseph Addison," writes Holiday. Benjamin Franklin, Patrick Henry, John Adams, and Abigail Adams all quoted Cato in speeches and correspondence liberally. Nathan Hale's famous words — "I regret that I have but one life to live for my country" — came from Cato.

What fascinated Addison and the revolutionaries who pored over his play was Cato's devotion to the philosophy of stoicism. Stoicism centers around the idea that, though we can't control the events around us, we can control our responses to those events.



There's a common misconception that stoicism is the philosophy of anti-emotionalism. But true stoicism is nothing of the sort. Stoicism doesn't reject emotions; it simply says we don't have to let our emotions be ruled by the world around us, which consists of events beyond our control.

The more I learned about Cato and the stoics, the more I saw connections to my father's way of thinking and being. My father could have been the poster boy of stoicism. A doctor during World War II, he witnessed more human atrocities — in particular against people of the Jewish faith, a heritage my family shared — that most of us would in ten lifetimes. And yet, he regularly described himself as the richest man he knew, because he had a family, a home, and a rewarding career — in a word, enough. ([I wrote at greater length about his and my mother's influence on me here.](#))



My father was devoted to controlling how he felt about his life. He didn't want to be ruled by the lesser emotions that the smallest slivers of popular culture seem to promote — most notably, the desire for more. More money, more friends, more stuff, more status, more more. My father took the stoic approach to life: He decided what happiness meant to him, he designed a life accordingly, and he was content.

Not only had I failed to recognize my father's stoicism — I'd failed to recognize my own. I've long done my best to live and advise according to my father's embodiment of enough. To counsel clients (not to mention myself) that happiness isn't going to come from another home, another car, another boat, another Rembrandt (not even another piece of jewelry, dare I admit!). Money and happiness can be related. But only if money is a means to defining and achieving "enough."

I'm grateful to Holiday for connecting the dots from Ancient Rome to Hillsdale in the 1960s to Manhattan in the 2020s. It's been a joy for me to explore the philosophy of stoicism. Here, I wanted to share some of the quotes from stoic philosophers that have resonated with me the most.

<p>“<i>We suffer more in imagination than in reality.</i>” — SENECA —</p>	<p>“<i>He who is brave is free.</i>” — SENECA —</p>	<p>“<i>Confine yourself to the present.</i>” — MARCUS AURELIUS —</p>
---	---	--



"Choose not to be harmed — and you won't feel harmed. Don't feel harmed — and you haven't been."
— MARCUS AURELIUS —



"No person has the power to have everything they want, but it is in their power not to want what they don't have, and to cheerfully put to good use what they do have."
— SENECA —



"In your actions, don't procrastinate. In your conversations, don't confuse. In your thoughts, don't wander. In your soul, don't be passive or aggressive. In your life, don't be all about business."
— MARCUS AURELIUS —



"Waste no more time arguing what a good man should be. Be one."
— MARCUS AURELIUS —



"I judge you unfortunate because you have never lived through misfortune. You have passed through life without an opponent—no one can ever know what you are capable of, not even you."
— SENECA —



"The only wealth which you will keep forever is the wealth you have given away."
— MARCUS AURELIUS —



"If a man knows not which port he sails, no wind is favorable."
— SENECA —



“When you arise in the morning, think of what a precious privilege it is to be alive — to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love.”

– MARCUS AURELIUS –

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Randy Kaufman, formerly a corporate tax attorney and investment banker, is now a wealth advisor who prides herself on focusing on what matters most: clients’ peace of mind, family dynamics, and getting *enough*, not *more*. Randy is a passionate student of impact investing, strategic philanthropy, and behavioral psychology (while not a psychologist, she occasionally plays one in the boardroom). She is dedicated to helping the underprivileged, and is a proud member of global venture fund Acumen’s advisory board. A thinker, learner, and pursuer of overarching truths, she is always eager to discuss big ideas about money, and its off-and-on associate, happiness.