

- **CHRIS KRAUSE** (1987 –) Krause@krauselabs.net lives on Long Island, New York. He said, “After fate decreed that the discourses of Epictetus and meditations of Marcus Aurelius land into my lap I immediately was inspired to take up the ‘Greek lifestyle – the camp bed and cloak’ in the tireless pursuit of prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice. With a love for the ancient way of things I have adapted my actions, decisions and judgments to follow reason in pursuit of the virtues. When not tasking myself with the profession of ‘goodness’ or imitating Socrates I am studying ancient history and philosophy at St Joseph’s College, New York, or cultivating an appreciation for the humanities. I sporadically contribute Stoic-minded ravings to my personal website at Krauselabs.net – but do not expect anything overly academic as it also stands as a form of journal. In addition to practicing Stoicism on a constant basis I am also inspired by the examples of the Cynics and Theravada.”



SPOTLIGHT On a Contemporary Stoic

ANDREW DeGROOT (Andy), this issue’s featured Stoic, hails from Cape Town, South Africa, where he was born on September 25, 1981. His earliest childhood was spent in a rural town called Durbanville until his parents divorced when he was 4 yrs old, and Andy, his mother and younger brother Marc moved to Bellville for about 11 years. During these years when his mother was a single parent, he often stayed with his maternal grandparents, to whom he credits a benevolent influence on his early life development.

Andy has an extensive educational background beginning with Boston Primary School, then Settlers High School, and finally graduation from Fairmont High School in 1999. He directly enrolled at the University of Stellenbosch for a Bachelor of Science Degree with majors in Nutrition, Genetics, Physiology, and Psychology. After receiving his Degree in 2005, he went on to take an honors degree in Wine Technology at the Institute for Wine Biotechnology that same year. In 2006 he re-enrolled in the Institute where he is working toward a Master of Science Degree.

Andy is “single at the moment” and lives at home while in graduate school. His younger brother Marc, also a scholar, is in his final year of dental school. Perhaps the highlight of Andy’s year was when he experienced the great joy of the sports fan whose team wins the big one [sorry Dr. Stephens]. As you rugby fans already know, the South African Springboks recently won the Rugby World Cup. In addition to supporting the South African Springboks, Andy claims a “passionate” interest in history.

The Interview

Erik: Andy, I’d like to start with a bit more family background. I don’t get any clear sense of whether you hail from hard scrabble dirt farmers or landed gentry.

Andy: We refer to ourselves as “middle class,” but I don’t know if that comes close to the

American usage. Landed gentry? Nope. Don't own land. I am proud of certain things about my family. My great grandfather fought in the trenches at Delville Wood in 1916 where the South Africans were outnumbered seven to one by the Germans. They put up a brilliant fight. My grandfather's two brothers joined the forces during WWII. One of them joined the Cape Town Highlanders and was at El Alamein and Tobruk. Another one flew the legendary Spitfire and saw action in Malta. I visited him earlier this year. He is the only surviving brother. Marvelous chap. I have two uncles who did service in South Africa's infamous "Border War" (1965-1989).

Erik: Thank you for that. It may seem odd to some that we often trace our ancestry by the wars in which they fought, but it does speak highly of family honor and courage, and one can take a measure of pride in that inheritance. Were you raised in a religious home? If so, are you still a member of any faith?

Andy: My mother was raised an Anglican, but became a Presbyterian as an adult. I was confirmed in 1998, but have only attended one Easter service and one Christmas service since. I cancelled my membership earlier this year, because I never felt comfortable with Sunday School or church attendance. Too emotional. And, many Sunday School teachers had their own agendas and gave their warped version of reality to us, expecting us to agree with them. I remember one of them saying that evolution couldn't have happened because of certain verses in Genesis. I was quite young, but that didn't sound right to me. Scientific evidence versus a few Bronze Age scribbles? There's a big imbalance there. Many of the traditional denominations have been infiltrated by a lot of charismatic thinking. I doubt the members of the Presbyterian church I attended in South Africa bears any resemblance to the Calvinists that founded the church in Scotland. I don't want to see people holding up their hands to the ceiling and crying during a church service.

Erik: It's interesting that you chose to go into wine technology even though, as you said earlier, you also have a "passionate" interest in history. Why do you think that is?

Andy: Well, I guess I have a wide variety of interests. Science is also one of them. I've always loved reading about natural history as well. So, it comes things like evolution and biology and genetics, et cetera. When I was doing my B.Sc., I discovered the world of wine and that my school's Institute of Wine Biotechnology offered graduate degrees in viticulture. I thought I would do that and learn the skills necessary for wine making along the way, through the back door as it were. I might still go into wine making one day.

Erik: After all this time and effort studying viticulture, surely you have some thought about what your ideal career might be. What are your plans when you graduate?

Andy: When I discovered wine I remember saying to myself, "Good heavens! I quite like this stuff." It was actually my uncle who introduced me to the world of wine. I had come across the stuff before, obviously. It was always present at a South African barbecue or Christmas dinner, etc. I just didn't know the intricacies of things like cultivar types and flavor profiles ("I get a bit of blackcurrant on the nose, old chap"). It was like the New World for me. I thought to myself that I wouldn't mind making the stuff one day. That is why I chose to do post-grad studies in wine

biotechnology, which is essentially science or *the* science of wine making. I thought I could pick up the skills necessary for wine making along the way, which I have done (80% sure of that).

But, having said that, I am primarily a scientist. I learnt many other things as well. I have learnt how to work with DNA and how to genetically modify yeast (which I did in my honours year. I produced a yeast that makes lysozyme, an antibacterial compound. Just incidentally, genetically modified organisms, or GMO's, are not allowed to be used in our commercial wine making at present, but a GMO strain that our Institute produced is being used routinely in California. It performs alcoholic and malolactic fermentation simultaneously). I learnt how to culture microorganisms and how to capture their spectra by using infrared light, or FT-IR spectroscopy, and subject said spectra to multivariate data analysis for identification purposes.

I am more of a scientist than a winemaker. I had hopes of becoming a winemaker initially, but I have also changed my views over the past 3 years. The wine industry here is very different to what I thought it would be. There is also an excess of qualified winemakers (people who actually studied the 4-year wine making degree). The market is flooded. Our wine industry is also not doing so well at the moment. There's a lot of dinosaurs in the industry and very little innovation and insight. The type of wine that I enjoy is not being made in this country in any case, or only in small quantities, so the prospects of employment for me is quite slim indeed.

I am, however, fond of another beverage fermented by yeast: beer. The trouble is that we have very little good beer in the whole of South Africa. We have one company that monopolizes the whole beer market - SAB (South African Breweries). They are a giant in the international industry as well. They bought out Miller in your country, for example. Their beers are all mass-produced crap. Beer in this country, for the most part, is not about connoisseurship, it's about quenching your thirst on a hot day (understandably, I can hear them say). We have only three micro-breweries (i.e., not affiliated with SAB) in my whole province. Birkenhead (in Stanford), Mitchell's (in Knysna) and Paulaner (in Cape Town). The last one is a German franchise, so it's technically not a South African product.

If I want to learn good beer-making skills, I'm going to have to go overseas. I wouldn't mind doing that, as SAB are not hiring white people in any case (there are laws regulating the proportion of races in the workplace of big companies). So, yeah, I guess I wouldn't mind going into the production side of beverages. Good quality beverages. Maybe wine, maybe beer. But it isn't going to be here. I am either going to go to New Zealand or Australia. I might have to work a bit here to get enough money to leave, though. New Zealand looks like the better option, right now. I could also go into scientific research. For that it would be good if I had a PhD. But once again, things in South Africa don't work like other places. For example, a PhD degree is supposed to be three years. It will take me 5 years in our Institute, so I'd rather do it overseas if I could. Better pay and better expertise.

Erik: I must admit to being surprised at the complexities of your chosen profession. Perhaps this is a good time to mention that the temperance aspect of the Stoic virtue of Decorum does not

imply being a teetotaler. Heraclitus said that a “dry soul was best,” but I don’t know if there were many who paid much attention to him after Cleanthes. As you probably know, Chrysippus, the third head of the School, the one of whom it was said that without Chrysippus there would have been no Stoa, enjoyed drinking wine.

According to antiquity’s favorite gossip, Diogenes Laertius, an Epicurean, Chrysippus behaved with decorum at wine parties and only his legs appeared to be unsteady. You may also know that of the two versions of his death, both include some mention of wine. The first is that at the age of seventy-three when he drank a sweet wine at some sacrificial feast, he became dizzy and died five days later. But my favorite version is that he laughed himself to death. Apparently one day, when he discovered an ass had eaten all his figs he said to an old woman nearby, “Now give the ass a drink of pure wine to wash down the figs (D.L., Book VII. 185),” whereupon he went into such a fit of laughter that he died straight away.



THE PORCH

After receiving Andy’s comments about being a Stoic it occurred to me that his thoughts would be of value for all of us to consider. That is, in what way are we Stoics, and why? Please read on.

Erik: I would like shift gears a bit and ask about your introduction to Stoicism. When did you become a Stoic? Was there any person or book or event that made you decide you were a Stoic?

Andy: I don’t really know exactly when I became a Stoic, or if I am a Stoic in the true sense of the word. I know that I’m inspired by their writings and how it can be applied to life. So, in that sense, there is something “Stoic” about me. But, I think that modern people will obviously cherry-pick the bits that they like from an ancient system and discard the rest. What about their views on the physical universe? I guess mine would be closer to that of Epicurus [from Democritus’s atomic theory]. But then can we really compare our scientific models to those of the ancients? When we refer to ourselves as Stoic, what exactly about that school of philosophy are we referring to? Just the ethical system? So, I am still a bit uncertain if we have the right to call ourselves Stoic. There are, of course, other philosopher’s views that I subscribe to as well. I guess I am more accurately described as an eclectic. I like to appreciate the best maxims of wisdom that humanity has given us, and Stoicism gave us a lot. I am drawn to the Stoic virtues and their “detachment,” as it were, to better fulfill their duties. Almost like a soldier, I find myself having become like this in word, thought, and deed over the years. So, if I have to choose an ancient system of philosophy that resembles my outlook, the *closest* it would be is Stoicism.

I just realized that I didn’t answer your question completely. Regarding my introduction to Stoicism, I first became interested in 2000 after seeing the film, *Gladiator*. For someone who had been reading history for years, especially ancient history, it made a very big impression on me. During my undergraduate years when struggling with my studies I often watched the *Gladiator*, nearly every weekend my last two years. It was very reassuring. It sounds quite daft, I know, but

there was something in that film that inspired me to fight on despite my troubles. It was only later that I found out it's called "fortitude." I also started reading Roman history more extensively. I read about Marcus Aurelius and was amazed that an emperor had written a work that was still in existence. I collected Epictetus along the way and gradually came to realize there was a subtle Stoic theme in Gladiator. I also realized that I had exhibited some of these qualities before, earlier in my life. I had also identified many of them in people I have come across in life, many of them who have never heard of, nor read the works of the Stoics. People like my grandfather, for example.

Erik: In what way do you remember your grandfather as Stoic?

Andy: He didn't read Stoic philosophy nor did he perhaps even hear about them, but what was "Stoic" about him was the way he conducted himself. He didn't care one bit about what other people said or thought. He wasn't given in to emotionalism nor sensationalism (I reckon that's why he didn't go to church). He was a bastion of manliness.

Erik: Thank you, Andy.

^^

And for the new year, what? A noble character.

How? By living in agreement with nature.

Thank you for reading,

Erik