

Review by Patti Stuart

During my years at the Air Force Academy, when someone would complain they would be told, “Suck it up: it builds character and makes you a better officer.” Former Navy Seal and U.S. Representative Dan Crenshaw would undoubtedly agree with that sentiment. In his outstanding book, *Fortitude*, he explains how he was taught that the importance of doing something hard helps build resilience. Dan watched his mom fight cancer for 10 years, though she never once complained before succumbing to the disease. He also had to repeat virtually the entire course of Navy SEAL initial-qual training because he broke his leg just before the end of Hell Week. As if these weren’t enough, he was also grievously injured by an IED in Afghanistan which netted the loss of an eye, among other serious injuries.

What got him through all that? First, he looked at his heroes and saw what defined them. Thus, he knew the characteristics he wanted in himself. As opposed to the emotional “influencers” on social media these days who get “likes” for being outraged, Dan took a page from Stoic Marcus Aurelius and learned to adopt a stillness of mind as his go-to strength, leaning heavily on this skill when his SEAL team faced an uncertain threat, by first stopping and observing before simply rushing in. Dan believes that the stories of hope and optimism we tell ourselves can help steer us away from the traps associated with self-pity, by focusing our efforts on what is within our power to change and accomplish, rather than on the cards that may have been stacked against us. He also believes we must each remain personally challenged.

We must define what is important to us, and then do the hard things that help us achieve those goals. He believes “self-imposed suffering is a way to build resiliency, confidence, perspective and meaning”, preparing one for the involuntary suffering of life. Congressman Crenshaw concludes by noting that the American story – a story conceived in liberty and continually improving since its founding – is in danger of being rewritten by those who tear our country down, and he suggests that, like the SEALs, perhaps we need to adopt an “American Ethos” that encourages fortitude, gratefulness and a willingness to “uphold and protect the spirit of our great republic.”