Stories of Resilience

Resilience in the practice of police work

Marion Brepoels
Nanette Slagmolen
Annika Smit
The Police Academy is the centre for training, knowledge and research for the Dutch National Police. It is a dynamic organization, offering training and knowledge programs on the highest level, anticipating developments in society and translating these into customized education programs. The Police Academy cooperates with the National Police and other partners in the field of security, education, knowledge and research.

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Thirteen stories, each of which recounts the real-life experiences of a professional working for or with the police force. This collection reveals the vulnerabilities and resilience of people who are passionately committed to their work, and helps to make sense of their daily experiences and concerns. It provides a practical and personal perspective on the human and interpersonal aspects of police professionalism. Using the term ‘resilience’, we explore the personal and interpersonal aspects of policing, which we have researched and sought to develop through the Professional Resilience Enhancement Programme. The Programme has led to the launch of several new interventions, as well as the improvement of existing interventions. Examples include Mental Strength Training, the 24-7 Police Help Desk, the Suicide Registration Point and Fit@NP.

Published alongside this collection of stories is the book Resilience Investigated (2010-2015), a description of our current scientific understanding of resilience in police work. The book is the result of five years of research undertaken on the basis of the Professional Resilience Enhancement Programme agenda.
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Im Nebel

Seltsam, im Nebel zu wandern!
Einsam ist jeder Busch und Stein,
Kein Baum sieht den anderen,
Jeder ist allein.

Voll von Freunden war mir die Welt,
Als noch mein Leben licht war;
Nun, da der Nebel fällt,
Ist keiner mehr sichtbar.

Wahrlich, keiner ist weise,
Der nicht das Dunkel kennt,
Das unentrinnbar und leise
Von allem ihn trennt.

Seltsam, im Nebel zu wandern!
Leben ist einsam sein.
Kein Mensch kennt den andern,
Jeder ist allein.

Hermann Hesse
Two books – *Resilience Investigated (2010-2015)* and *Stories of Resilience* – are the result of intensive research in the field of human processes in the context of police work. The first of these two books provides an overview of our current understanding of the concept of resilience using existing research, and explores its implications for police work in practice. *Stories of Resilience* is a collection of personal accounts that lends greater depth to our research findings. The stories that it includes show what resilience means in practice at the individual level. All the research was conducted in the context of the Professional Resilience Improvement Programme in the Netherlands. This programme was a joint initiative undertaken by the Ministry of Security and Justice, the police unions and the management of the Dutch police force, and was formally launched at the end of 2011. A group of fifteen to twenty people set to work on a range of themes that went beyond the confines of our research agenda, such as the Mental Strength training, the 24-7 Help Desk Police, Fit@NP (a mental and physical fitness programme for the Dutch police force) and the suicide registration point. The formal completion of the programme in 2015 provided a good occasion for writing these two books on the theme of resilience. Although research in the field of resilience is still ongoing, this is an excellent moment to gather together all our main findings and insights in a coherent way, so that these are available to educators, policymakers, administrators, managers and all other interested police personnel, as well as for those outside the police force who see resilience as part of their craftsmanship.

Annika Smit, Nanette Slagmolen and Marion Brepoels

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1 The authors would like to thank the Reading Committee for Research Publications of the Police Academy for their constructive criticisms, in particular Luuk van Spijk.
Resilience as the unifying theme...

As part of my studies in Forensics, Criminology and Law, I had the opportunity to do an internship with the Forensic Investigation team at the Limburg Police Force in the summer of 2012-2013. I was involved in their day-to-day work and carried out research, I got to see all the ins and outs of detective work and I heard some extraordinary and often very compelling life stories from the police officers who worked there. It taught me a lot about police work. During that nine-month period I started to keep a diary. I would describe the cases I’d been helping with, as well as the dilemmas that I came up against. I also discussed the feelings and questions that I was experiencing with my internship supervisor and forensic coordinator, Wiebe van Lohuizen. He was the only one who read my diary and reflected on it. This was extremely useful because my research project was all about professional resilience – I hadn’t started using that word yet, but in retrospect that is what it was.

Resilience has been a unifying theme throughout my life. I know from experience that there are days when you are more resilient, and days when you are less resilient. I think that’s just part of being human. Sometimes, things that might at first sight seem rather trivial have great effect on me and can influence how I’m feeling and how I conduct myself in my work. But I still think that it is the capacity for vulnerability that has helped me to develop as a person and as a professional.

In the spring of 2014, I decided to resign from the Council for Child Protection, the organization where I’d been working for 24 years. I was planning to take a sabbatical in order to reflect on how I wanted to develop professionally. In the end I did not do so, because I was asked by the Professional Resilience Improvement Programme to write a book on resilience with researchers Annika Smit and Nanette Slagmolen. In April 2014, Annika, Nanette and myself began exploring the idea of professional resilience in all its various forms and facets, a process that would continue for sixteen months. Together we tried to find the right way to take the idea forwards. I set out to ask police officers and experts – from both at home and abroad – for their own views of resilience.

It was not easy to make a selection from the many stories that I heard – each one was so valuable in its own right. The final selection of stories highlights some of the many different aspects of police work, both the provision of front-line policing services and detective work. We compiled the information that we had gathered in the form of a book entitled ‘Resilience Investigated (2010-2015)’. It explains the most important results of the research that has been carried out. This vol-
The theme of resilience is not one that has a finite ending; it’s not something we can place on a discrete timeline. And so I hope to be able to document many more beautiful stories from the police force and organization in the future.

Marion Brepoels
Contents

Foreword 7

Introduction 15

Sometimes I wonder how the people living nearby are doing… 23
Peter Stienen – patrol officer

Even the most resilient people have days when they’re not so resilient… 33
Anita Leeser-Gassan – former juvenile court judge

Feedback from other people makes me look at myself differently… 43
Remmert de Wit – trainer at the Police Academy

I believe that the police really do want to make the world a better place… 51
Job Knoester – lawyer specializing in criminal law

Every member of my team misses a piece… 59
Alain Remue – Police Commissioner in Belgium

It’s a search for awareness… 67
Annika Smit – Chair Resilience at the Police Academy

How I dragged all my ‘baggage’ with me, from one department to the next… 73
Jos Hermans – Police Inspector

I am a better human being having been a cop and a teacher… 81
Ginger Charles – retired police officer & teacher in psychology in the United States
I wonder why we don’t just stop running and look and talk...  
Jonathan Smith – leadership development manager in the United Kingdom

You’re only human if things get to you...  
Gerrit van de Kamp – Chair of the ACP police union

Everywhere I went, I’d see suspicious types and potential criminals...  
Carina van Leeuwen – Police Inspector and forensic expert

I have no problem at all with other people seeing my emotions...  
Fred de Graaf – former leader of the Dutch Senate and former mayor

Keep your head cool and your heart warm...  
Johan Severs – public prosecutor

Final remarks  
Jannine van den Berg – former member of the police force management, current head of the national police unit and nationally responsible for the topic of resilience

About the authors
Introduction

Police work requires humanity, and it also affects us deeply as human beings. This aspect of police work demands more than a purely scientific approach – which is set out in the book ‘Resilience Investigated (2010-2015)’ that is to be published at the same time as this collection of short stories. Personal experiences provide a rich illustration of how police officers will always remain – in an extremely complex and varied context – people first and foremost. In the last phase of the Professional Resilience Improvement Programme, we collected together the stories that we had heard during the course of our work. In a very real sense, this brings us full circle: the Programme ends as it started, with the extraordinary and compelling experiences of police officers and other individuals involved in police work. The context in which this process was able to happen is explained in the paragraphs that follow.

Historical context

The interest in human beings who wear a police uniform every day is a relatively new phenomenon. It is only since the 1970s and 1980s that interest began to grow in the behaviour and psychological well-being of police officers in the Netherlands. This process developed in tandem with some radical shifts in wider society. The social changes of the 1960s led to violent confrontations between the police and young people in the 1970s and 1980s, a period when street demonstrations and riots became a fairly regular occurrence. In order to respond adequately to rising social tensions, for the first time it became necessary to consider the factors that underlie the conduct of police officers and to

act accordingly. The internal mechanisms of human psychology – the impulses and susceptibilities of police officers themselves – became relevant. The influx of women into the police forces – The Hague was the first police force to start actively recruiting female officers in the 1970s – also raised questions about the way in which the police interacted themselves. What was the best way to handle women in the police force? At the same time, the conduct of police officers within their own ranks became a further subject for discussion.

The psychological perspective began to emerge in relation to the police force’s role both in wider society and within the police force. The health risks that police personnel are exposed to at the psycho-social level became a subject of discussion in the 1990s. In January 1996, the Police Clinic first opened its doors at the Academic Medical Centre, becoming the first centre to take on cases of possible post-traumatic stress disorder among police officers. The clinic was run by psychiatrist Professor Berthold Gersons, who worked for a number of large police forces. In the years that followed, the theme of vitality or resilience cropped up time and again on the agenda of the Council of Chief Constables, and the unions continued to urge more action in this area. During the first decade of this century, a number of studies were carried out into the health (including mental health) of police officers, and this became the subject of significant attention in the media. For example, in 2009 the report entitled Police Officers Tell Their Story was published. The general conclusion was that the work of the police is not only demanding but also psychologically draining.

The development of the theme at the national level

Around the time when Police Officers Tell Their Story was published, police forces began to discuss new issues arising from police work. The essential question that was posed in these discussions was: what

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3 Ibid.
5 Kant, A. & Raak, R. (2009). De agent aan het woord. (‘Police officers tell their story’). Report by the SP (a Dutch political party).
knowledge do we need in order to do good police work in the future? In some forces, such as in Amsterdam, forms of psycho-physiological intervention were developed with the aim of promoting resilience – even though this term was not always used at the time. Only a limited number of forces took action in this area, but where discussions did take place, the issues that were raised almost all had one thing in common: people were expressing concerns about the vitality of the police as an organization and/or the health and well-being of individual police officers, sometimes focusing in on specific groups or jobs. Here are some excerpts from those discussions:

‘Hardly anyone talks about the vulnerability of the police, so we stick to talking about mental resilience.’ (police officer)

‘Real police work is about courage, fear and stress – but nobody ever talks about those things.’ (chief commissioner)

‘The police force is ill, in a way, but we make sure that we never talk about that.’ (district manager)

‘The welfare of the police needs to be investigated. I have serious concerns. Officers are being asked to deal with too much.’ (district police chief)

The concerns were clear, and so too was the view that this was an issue that nobody was prepared to talk about. Words like ‘taboo’ were sometimes used explicitly in conversation. Some very meaningful questions were raised: how important is vitality in the police force? And how much does anybody really think about it? Police work constantly shows us what it means to be human: given the nature of police work and police officers, this is only natural. And yet we rarely consider this subject from the opposite perspective: given the nature of people and human beings, what can we realistically expect from police officers? To what extent do we need to understand the human condition in order to grow and develop as police officers, and in order to do the work of the police? In essence, this has been the leitmotif of all our research into the

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6 This occurred as part of the development of a strategic research agenda by the Police Academy. Unstructured interviews (24 in total) and brain-storming sessions (ten in total) involving police personnel, scientists and scientific bureaus affiliated to political parties were held for this purpose. All these interviews and sessions took place between August 2009 and March 2011.
theme of resilience: developing a better understanding of the human aspects of police professionalism.

The issue of vulnerability

‘Police work is people work’ is a phrase that has come up often in the conversations that we have had. Why is it, then, that concerns continue to be expressed over the human aspects of policing, as if this were a neglected issue? It seems that this is a tricky subject – something that people tend to skirt around and avoid discussing directly. Essentially, it is about vulnerability, because resilience implies vulnerability. An invulnerable person would not need to be resilient. And yet people seem to prefer to talk about the opposite – about strength and power, as illustrated by the statements of the police officer and the chief commissioner that we just saw. In-depth interviews have revealed a fundamental anxiety about vulnerability. Nobody denies that psychological damage and problems can occur during the course of police work, but there is a tendency to try to put a lid on these issues. As long as you have a resilient character or you practice hard enough, nothing should go wrong. The subtle boundary between prevention (certainty) and suppression (in which case a certain risk remains) is anything but subtle at the emotional level, involving an uncomfortable loss of control. ‘Fear is the most underestimated emotion in police work,’ one senior officer said during an interview.

Police officers are drawn to adventure and excitement on the one hand and they can be affected by high-impact working conditions on the other hand. This contrast, and the confusion that it can sometimes provoke, is also a common thread in the exploration that we embarked on when we conducted our range of studies. This exploration ran in parallel with a shift that took shape in the political and administrative arena, and that was also played out in the media. In 2011, a report entitled *The Price You Pay* was published by the AEF consultancy bureau and fuelled this debate still further. The theme of resilience brought together a number of key actors: the Ministry of Security and Justice, the police unions and police managers. At that time, there was no

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national police force. The President of the Council of Chief Commissioners integrated resilience into its portfolio and formed a steering group that included all these parties, including the police works council. The Professional Resilience Improvement Programme formally got underway at the end of 2011. In the introduction of the book ‘Resilience investigated (2010-2015)’ the programming of the research agenda is clarified, including the scientific disciplines and methods used.

**Reader’s guide**

In this collection, thirteen people share their stories about what resilience means to them. You can read these stories individually and in any order. Some of the stories are from people who work within the police force, with its many and varied units and divisions, or at the Police Academy. Others work for organizations that have regular and direct contact with the police: there are stories from a juvenile court judge, a criminal defence lawyer and a public prosecutor, for example. Three of the contributors are (or were) police officers working in other countries. The stories highlight different aspects of police work and different views of the concept of resilience. The collection closes with a reflection on these stories by Jannine van den Berg, former member of the national police management team, now leading the national police unit (Landelijke Eenheid) and the topic of resilience nationally.
Patrol officer Peter Stienen (1971) and his colleague Ron Frissen, who are officers in the Limburg police unit, became involved in a dramatic incident while attending an emergency call-out on 3 June 2011. Just before two o’clock in the afternoon, the control room sent them to Laagstraat in Hoensbroek, where a deranged man armed with a knife was walking in the street. The officers had no other option but to shoot the man dead. Peter Stienen noticed changes in his behaviour after the incident and was eventually diagnosed with, among other things, partial post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
You cannot write about reality. Reality is so incredible that no one would believe it.

Simon Carmiggelt
“Ronny and I had an early shift that day and we’d been rushed off our feet since seven in the morning. There hadn’t even been time to stop for lunch⁹ and we had just finished preparing an official incident report when a message came in about an incident in Laagstraat. It was less than 300 metres away from where we were standing. The only information we’d been given was that there was a man in the street wielding a knife.

Pandemonium greeted us as we drove around the corner into Laagstraat. It was a dead-end street and there was a moped lying in the middle of it. On the ground next to it was a crumpled heap that I could not identify. We came to a stop no more than fifteen metres away from a figure wearing army fatigues and knee and body protection. He had weapons in both his hands which he was waving around him. In one hand I could see a long sword and in the other hand a two-bladed axe. Suddenly, it occurred to me that I didn’t have a safety vest with me. I had recently lost my old one and had not been issued with a new one yet. Ronny, meanwhile, had slipped his safety vest on quick as a flash. It seemed he had lost his radio at some point between getting in and out of the patrol car, however.

As soon as I got out of the patrol car, it felt like I’d stepped into a nightmare. We decided to split up and I can still recall the exact sequence of events during the next few minutes. Ronny and I shouted to the man several times to put his weapons down. We backed this up by threatening to use our own firearms, which we had drawn and were now in our hands. But the man refused to comply and was shouting back to us – things like: ‘Go on, shoot then! You can’t do anything to me anyway, because I’m Jesus!’ and other words to that effect. He was wearing

⁹ See the chapter entitled Focus on the Body in Resilience Investigated (2010-2015).
the full kit and continued to wave his weapons at us as he drew closer. I decided to shoot at his legs so that we could arrest him; he was refusing to put down the weapons and he was getting closer and closer to us. By this point he was no more than five metres away. But he did not seem to respond at all to the shot – I wasn’t sure if I’d hit him or not. And suddenly, before we knew it, he was right up close and I froze with terror\textsuperscript{10}. He charged towards Ronny, raising his axe to the heavens, and just as he was going to strike him, I saw and heard Ronny fire another shot. It was the only possible course of action. All of this had happened in the course of a few seconds.

This time the man had definitely been hit: he collapsed and fell to the ground. He lay still, on his stomach. Then, walking towards the man with my firearm still drawn, I remember calling to Ronny: ‘It’s over! Put the guns away!’ I radioed the control room to tell them that the suspect had been shot and that he had probably died instantly. I asked them to send assistance too, of course. We tried to stay calm and decided we split up to check the surrounding area. The first thing I saw was a four-metre long trail of blood. It appeared to be from the former owner of the moped – an adult male, now lying across the middle of the road. I could see clearly where his left hand had been severed at the wrist bone. His hand was lying on the ground, a metre away from the rest of his body. He had, it later turned out, been completely impaled by the sword and had presumably been killed instantly. I turned back in the direction that he must have come from. Next to a nearby apartment block I saw a man sitting on a chair in front of his house. I spoke to him but he barely answered. Then I saw that he had serious injuries, particularly to his head. We found out later that these were from the sword of the dead attacker. In another building nearby, I found another man – his back and head were badly wounded. It later became clear that this man had tried to get away after being struck to the head with the axe, and had then been struck again with the sword.

Totally numb, I completed my round and came back to where our vehicle was. Soon afterwards we were taken away from the scene of the crime by colleagues and brought back to the station. Later I called home and told my wife that I was going to be late home. The Department of Criminal Investigation would be arriving that evening to start their investigation. Fortunately I was able to see my wife before that.

\textsuperscript{10} See the section on ‘freeze, fight, flight’ responses in the chapter entitled \textit{Focus on the mind} in \textit{Resilience Investigated (2010-2015)}. 
In the evening I had to go back to the station in Heerlen to be interviewed about the incident. Ronny had been answering questions for an hour by the time they came to pick me up. That left me confused because I’d wanted to speak to Ronny about our strategy for the interviews before we went in. I also wanted to ask him if we would make a statement or keep silent. But I didn’t get to see or speak to Ronny beforehand so I just decided to cooperate. I was questioned by the National Investigation Division. I put all my cards on the table and told them exactly what had happened. I remember them asking me if I was really up to the interview or if I’d prefer to do it another time. I chose to carry on – at least then it would be over and done with, and also because I had the feeling that I was still there in my head. I could still picture every detail. The questioning lasted until late into the night.

By the time I got home it was the middle of the night, but I was still so pumped full of adrenaline that I didn’t feel tired at all. My wife and I watched the night time news bulletin, and both the local and national channels mentioned the incident that I’d been involved in. I slept for around three hours, and the next day I spent hours working in the garden. That’s not normal for me. I’m not such a keen gardener. But that day I worked and worked like a man possessed. I can also remember not being hungry at all – I didn’t eat a thing that day. Nor had I the previous day. Everything was still there in my mind. I still didn’t know if my shot had hit the man, and for that simple reason I called the forensic team. I just had to know if I had hit him. They told me that the man had indeed been struck by a bullet in the knee, but apparently – strange as it seemed – he’d just carried on walking. I guess that must have been the adrenaline. As soon as I heard that my bullet had indeed struck home, I felt as if a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders.

During the days that followed I was told to take time off work. Lots of friends and acquaintances came to see me. I ended up talking about what had happened over and over again. Everyone wanted to talk about the incident – their concern was genuine.

After one week of compulsory leave, I went back to work the night shift. But when, during one of my night shifts, a colleague and I accidentally drove close to where I’d witnessed that awful scene, I suddenly felt

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11 For research into the timing of interviews by the National Investigation Division, see the report entitled *Interviewing Police Officers after the Use of Firearms* by Smit et al., 2015 (in the chapter entitled *Outcomes* in the book *Resilience Investigated (2010-2015)*; NB the report is in Dutch).
terrific. My colleague took me straight back to the station. After that I was able to swap duties and work at the station for four days. That meant I didn’t have to work out on the streets at least. And then I went on holiday. I can still remember how much I was dreading going back to work afterwards. I was allowed to join the burglary team (a division of the criminal investigation department) so that I no longer had to wear a uniform and I ended up working with a team that was based at the station. This took a lot of pressure off me. I couldn’t face any patrol work. Incidentally, shortly after the incident I was back on the firing range again, though not through choice. A special firearms course was arranged for me with those dummies that come out shooting at you. The course went well.

But since the incident there had been a change in my behaviour. It all happened very slowly. I had a much lower irritation threshold than usual and I’d get angry and verbally aggressive about certain things. My wife and young children were affected by this. My wife is a very strong character and always speaks her mind to me. I think that’s what saved us. It was because of her and the children that I decided to seek help. I found a psychologist through work and went for treatment. The conversations that we had were very valuable to me. It really helped me.

Ronny and I had to wait nine months before we heard that we would not face prosecution. That was hell for me, that period waiting for the verdict. Apologies were offered by those in charge for how long the investigation had gone on. They said that the case had actually been clear within a few weeks.

Sometime after the incident, I was watching a TV programme about an incident involving a police pursuit at high speed, in which the offender had ended up going into stationary traffic. The programme just seemed to be all about criticizing the actions of the police. And as I was watching the show, I just lost it and saw red. I thought it was so unfair that they were judging the actions of the police. I felt so powerless – they were just attacking the police. Criticism of police actions from other people infuriated me. My wife, who had to bear the brunt of my frustration, presented me with a choice: ‘You can either go out and walk the dog for an hour to cool down, or I’m taking the kids and leaving.’ So I took the dog out, calmed myself down and realized that the help that I’d had wasn’t enough.

I was still seeing my psychologist so I told him about what had happened, and I was referred to the police clinic in Amsterdam. There
Sometimes I wonder how the people living nearby are doing…

are specialists in diagnosing post-traumatic stress disorder who work there. I was told that I had a case of partial PTSD and they also concluded that I was very close to having a complete burn-out. Since then I’ve been receiving intensive therapy, a course of sixteen sessions. At the sixteenth session I was informed that I would have to pay for any follow-up course of therapy myself. It was extremely frustrating to be informed that I’d had enough treatment – which I didn’t agree with at all – and that I’d have to pay for any more therapy myself.

Meanwhile, my assessment period had finished and I was finally declared 20 percent unfit for work. That didn’t mean that I would have to work 20 percent fewer hours; but it did mean that I wouldn’t be working in armed street patrols. Both emotionally and financially, this had some quite drastic consequences. The whole reason I’d joined the police was because I didn’t want to work in an office. To be told that this wouldn’t be the case any longer was really difficult to deal with. So when they told me that I would be able to take part in a training course with the Forensic Investigation Division, I was over the moon. I would be allowed to join the Permanent Automobile Team (PAT) on a trial basis. I thought it was fantastic, right up my street, and I got the hang of the work very quickly. The new working environment did me a lot of good. I threw myself into it because I wanted to stay on and I’d been told that if I did well, that might be possible. My direct supervisors and managers thought I was very good at the work. So good, in fact, that on my evaluation form they said that they hoped to have me as a colleague sooner rather than later. As far as they were concerned I was the most suitable candidate.

Then came the reorganization, and my dream job went up in smoke. At least, that’s what they told me. It seems that there was only one place in the team, which was at pay grade 8. And I was on pay grade 7. It wasn’t possible to move me up a pay grade, so I asked if I could take the place in the PAT and stay on the same pay grade. Since I could no longer work in street patrols, my heart was set on the job. But there was no way around it and a colleague who was on the right pay grade was given the position instead. What I went through after that is hard to describe. I just felt totally powerless, and I guess the best way to describe it is a feeling of betrayal. I felt completely side-lined. At the same time, the claim for damages following the PTSD was (and still is) ongoing and was causing me a lot of stress and anxiety.

Fortunately, I have wonderful colleagues around me every day who support me, and nobody understands why I wasn’t able to stay on in the
PAT. I’m pleased that I reached out for help when things were getting really bad for me, psychologically. That meant that I got the help that I needed and I was able to continue working.

Sometimes I wonder how the people who live in Laagstraat are doing now. It’s a deprived neighbourhood and the people who live there really are treading the line between life and death, when you think about their financial situation and the opportunities they have. And then I think about the woman who called the police to tell us that there was a man in the street waving a sword around. She had seen everything from the window of her house and showed me the exact spots where those horrific incidents happened. I feel real compassion for her because I realize that the people who actually live in the area aren’t getting the same help that we are, as members of the police force. I’d like to go and see her to ask how she’s doing now. That’s a different kind of powerlessness and I suspect that many police officers might experience the same feelings as I did, even if it is not visible to other people. But learning to deal with them is just another aspect of working in the police.”
Anita Leeser-Gassan (Master of Laws, 1936) spent many years as a judge in a juvenile court. She was also a lawyer, magistrate and vice-chair of the Court of Amsterdam. For her, resilience means being able to compensate for the fact that some days go better than other days. She is sure that even resilient people also have days when they are not so resilient. As a girl, she was sent to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp with her mother during the Second World War because she was Jewish. She developed a strong sense of justice as a result of this extraordinary experience.
No man's knowledge here can go beyond his experience.

John Locke
Even the most resilient people have days when they’re not so resilient...

*Anita Leeser-Gassan – former juvenile court judge*

“I think that most police officers are decent people. On the one hand, they have to be tough, but at the same time they’re only human. But I’ve also seen some fanatics during my career. And by fanatics, I mean that mind-set that says ‘I’m going to get you come what may’. That attitude often brings out the rebel in me, even if I am a judge.

One of my last cases involved an incident with firearms. There was an attempted burglary at a clothes shop in the Bijlmermeer district in Amsterdam and a couple of police officers attended the scene. The boys escaped on a scooter but the police car pursued them and ran them into a fence near the Arena stadium. The boys came off the scooter but those rascals were so determined to get away that they ran off and split up. The officers pursuing them split up too and one of them was so fanatical that he shot one of the boys dead. He said he thought the boy had pulled a gun, but no weapon was found on him. ‘It was him or me,’ said the officer. For me, the forced collision showed that something was not right. After all, what had actually happened did not merit the use of such force. Later, psychologist and security expert Jaap Timmer was asked to evaluate the police officer’s statement. It was not possible to know for sure whether the suspect had been carrying a firearm or not. ‘It was him or me,’ the officer kept saying. But still, couldn’t he have aimed at the boy’s legs? The officer appeared at the hearing in uniform. I asked him what he thought of the case himself, and he just kept on saying – ‘It was him or me.’ There were no visible signs that he had a problem with having taken someone’s life. To me, he seemed to lack any kind of empathy. We had to decide on the basis of the officer’s right to defend himself. He was not present for the verdict. From what I could see, the man’s attitude was awful and I found it very hard to acquit him. But that is the law. Where would anyone get the idea of forcing two young boys to collide with a fence because they have been
involved in an attempted burglary? What kind of fanatic does that kind of thing?

Not long before that, there was a case in which a police officer had been called to a block of flats in the Bijlmer area of Amsterdam because a girl was going hysterical. It turned out that there was a man with her and the situation was escalating. Many reconstructions of what happened were carried out afterwards. Basically, the officer had to shoot at the man and he had suffered a spinal injury that left him paralyzed. The victim appeared in court in his wheelchair during the trial. The officer made a fine impression as policeman, quite a tough-looking man. We had already seen the victim during the reconstructions, but the policeman was devastated when he saw the man there in front of him in the wheelchair. Well, I could have kissed that officer. He was just a human being. It really upset him. I think he left the force as a result of that incident. The case moved me deeply.

The thinking is that, as a policeman, you just have to do your job. But I think there is such a world of difference between the fanatic in the first case and the second officer, who was simply left with no other choice, but who reacted to what had happened with such remorse and humanity. As a judge, too, you just have to do your job, but I couldn’t bear to see the officer from the first case to get off scot-free, and that was partly to do with his attitude afterwards.

I always enjoyed dropping in at the police station. I liked the atmosphere there – it was such an interesting place with all the drama and the kind of people you’d see there. I used to organize training courses for the Ministry of Justice with police commissioner Kees Sietsma. He’s a lovely man, and we would drive to the training centre together. Police officers are often interesting people, and the type of people that I like to associate with.

I remember a huge corruption case in which I was acting as the examining magistrate. The senior officer in the case was a young woman, whom I was due to interview. But she was no match for the ‘tough guys’ who staffed her unit. And none of those ‘tough guys’ offered her any support – they just used to make fun of her. During one of the interviews, I told her that I could see how hard it was for her. She broke down in front of me. Later, I ran into her again sometime during a day on domestic violence and she told me how hard that case had been for her.
People function better and become more resilient when they avoid the trap of having a one-track mind and, despite all the problems they’re facing, stay human. It’s that macho attitude of ‘I’m going to get you come what may’ that brings out the rebel in me. Because you want to bring people back down to earth. It’s silly, perhaps. But for example, when a police officer shows up to court in his uniform and helmet just to pick up a license to serve alcohol, I’ll make a point of asking to see his ID. I have a problem with people who have such a strong need to show off their status. I just think – come on, can’t you just act normal?

During the most difficult period in my own life, when I was in hiding during the war and later when I was held in the concentration camp, I survived through a simple determination to carry on breathing. We had to stay alive for each other, my mother and I. To me, resilience means being able to deal with the fact that some days are better than other days. I don’t think it’s a question of some people being resilient and others not. I know for sure that even ‘resilient people’ have days when they’re not so resilient.

Sometimes, with memories from a long time ago, I wonder whether it is actually something I’ve seen in a photograph or a film. Is it something that I’ve really remembered or something I’ve heard from other people? For example, in May 2014, there was a play on in Amsterdam ‘Theater na de Dam’. I was interviewed about it along with the girl with whom I was in hiding during the war. They asked us about our wartime experiences. We got talking about her tenth birthday. We were in hiding in a guesthouse in Alexander Boersstraat in Amsterdam at the time. I can still remember that birthday really clearly. We decorated one of the shelves in a closet to celebrate. I’d embroidered a piece of cloth with a ‘10’ for her. And she told me that she remembered that we’d also made nougat for her. The memory came back to me then. We met up again to celebrate her eightieth birthday together. I embroidered another piece of cloth, this time with an ‘80’, and I wrapped some nougat inside to give to her. The funny thing was that she’d forgotten all about the embroidery and I’d forgotten about the nougat. It was something so simple, but there we are. And yet it was still just as moving for both of us.

During my days working with the police, there were some police officers who did not trust each other. That was certainly true during the corruption case that I mentioned earlier – they even used to hide the keys to their desks from each other. This led to an atmosphere of mutual distrust and people wanting to get one over on each other. For me, that’s
the most difficult environment to work in, when you can’t trust other people. It becomes very difficult to have any confidence, and maybe even to have any contact at all with each other.

I once heard a case about two boys who’d been involved in a shooting during a robbery. One of the boys denied everything. He’d been inside for a while already when the other one was arrested too. He just kept insisting on his right to remain silent. I told him that his friend was in prison and that he might have some sleepless nights, knowing that his innocent friend was in prison. He looked me in the eyes and told me that he never had any trouble sleeping. But I kept talking to the boy until eventually he came out with the whole story. How did I do it? Well, sometimes it’s a process of persuasion – you have to be a bit of a saleswoman.

Once a boy came into court with his cap on back-to-front, leaning over backwards on his chair and making silly noises. In situations like that, I would feel myself getting angry. So I told him the effect that his attitude was having on me. I told him that I could get pretty angry with him, but I really didn’t feel like it. Saying something like that can break the other person down. They’re all just techniques really. At that moment, the worst thing to say would have been: ‘Take off your cap.’

And then there was a suspect who I already knew well but who was refusing to give his name. So I introduced myself using the name of one of my colleagues. That threw him off guard. He burst out laughing, saying: ‘All right Mrs Leeser, since you already know exactly who I am.’ And then he began to talk.

And as well as using techniques like these, you also need a lot of self-knowledge. Or perhaps that is just part of the technique – realizing that you can’t just boss other people around. I did have some training on how to conduct myself during hearings. But I got many of those techniques from my upbringing. My father was a great salesman. He was a travelling representative for the ANWB magazine, ‘Kampioen’. He sold signs for hotels. Once he went to the Amstel Hotel in Amsterdam and gave the receptionist a tenner and asked her if she would call his customers and then put them through to him. That made a very different impression on the customers than just turning up at the door with his suitcase.

I think the most important character trait that a police officer needs is respect for human beings – and I think that is definitely something
that you can learn. But you do need a capacity for empathy and honesty. As a policeman, you’re giving something of yourself – your humanity. It’s hard to describe how to get the balance right. You’re confronted with many different situations. You can’t let yourself be moved by everything and everyone – but you don’t want to be cold-hearted either.

I didn’t find it easy. I can give an example, because as a judge in a juvenile court, you get a lot of experience of these situations. I was the judge in a case that became notorious as the first racist murder. Nico Bodemeijer stabbed and killed a 15-year-old Antillean boy Kerwin Duinmeijer. The event is still commemorated every year. Well, one day, Nico came to the hearing with his head shaved completely bald. I knew that his father was Jewish. His father would always get upset around 4 May, because of all the memories that would come back up to the surface. When the boy suddenly turned up with his head shaved, I was really shocked. Because seeing someone’s head shaved was one of my traumas. If they shave your head, you are no longer a person. I always said that if that happened to me then I may as well be dead. And so I said to the boy: ‘Well goodness, you’ve shaved all your hair off, and what does your father have to say about that?’ So I put my personal perceptions right out in the open. Actually the father didn’t know what I was talking about, because evidently he didn’t have the same associations as I did. Later, when we adjourned for the coffee break, Nico’s mother came straight over to me to ask me something about the posture of the victim. It was as if I’d been stung by a wasp. That she had the cheek to speak to me about that – how had she got it into her head to come and speak to me? So again, my own feelings were clear to see.

I used to be friends with footballer Rinus Michels. It was the first day in my job as a lawyer and my father had sent me some roses. My first client was a woman with nine children who wanted a divorce so that she could start a new life. I asked her if she was really sure that she wanted the divorce. In the evening, Rinus called to ask how my first day had gone. I told him how hard I’d found it, that woman with nine children. Rinus said: ‘Well anyone can feel sorry about it, but at least you are in a position to do something for her.’ Finding the right balance in what I could do for people really meant something. And it doesn’t always work, but it’s part of being a professional. The fact that it doesn’t always work out – well, that’s just life.

There was one woman who was brought before us for smuggling drugs. She had a son and she mentioned that it was his birthday that day. I asked the woman if she wanted to call him to wish him a happy
birthday, because the boy was in a care home. It turned out that he was in Het Dorp in Arnhem and that he was deaf and dumb. That was quite tough to deal with. I suspended the hearing and I went to cry to a colleague for a minute or two. It was a very difficult thing to do, but the woman had to stay in prison.

The journalist Loes de Fauwe wrote a book of stories about the children who appeared before me during my time at the juvenile court, and the children who were under my charge. For example, there was a girl who had been so severely beaten up that the police had to carry her outside in their arms because she was too seriously injured for a stretcher. After I retired, I still wanted to know how the children were doing. Loes and I went to look them up and Loes wrote a book of stories about those meetings. It pained me to discover that in spite of the supervision orders and placements, some of them are still not doing so well, but luckily some of them are in a better situation now. You can’t keep track of them forever. You have to let go at some point.

Police officers sometimes keep going over actions that they have taken – I should never have done this or that. When a suspect goes to the police and confesses that he has committed a crime, and then he says that he has not had a fair hearing... That happens in some cases, and it’s difficult to get the balance right. That’s something that the police need to deal with, just as others do, including judges.”

Remmert de Wit (1968) works as a trainer at the Police Academy. He teaches a course in Resilience and IBT (Integrated Professional Competence Training) and acts as the mentor for a group of trainee officers who began their training in Apeldoorn in February 2015. This group has taken part in the ‘formation’ pilot scheme, which has been changed to emphasize the theme of resilience. In his opinion, the trainee officers are motivated by their desire to reflect on their own actions and motivations, and on what their work really means.
The more we grow, the more that truth eludes us. We will never catch up with it.

Hella Haasse in *Self-Portrait as a Puzzle*
Feedback from other people makes me look at myself differently...

*Remmert de Wit – trainer at the Police Academy*

“Resilience is always the focus, with its three basic dimensions: the physical, the mental and the moral. I am convinced that consciously reflecting on the mental and moral aspects of resilience has a significant effect on the training of our agents. It is so important to know what you stand for and to be aware of your own moral compass. Mental resilience and a healthy lifestyle are also essential to maintaining a good balance.

This transformation has now been achieved through our training courses, and I call the method that we use ‘formation training’. That’s because it does not involve a separate module within the course, but rather there is a focus on the moral, physical and mental aspects in *every* module or lesson that the candidates take part in. The lessons that are learned are also put into practice, students work on exercises and they have to contribute certain dilemmas from their own experience. We took our inspiration for this from Annika Smit who works in the Professional Resilience Improvement Programme.

Group dynamics and the issue of vulnerability are an important part of the programme. Actually that was always the case, but the focus is clearer now. The candidates bring up very different subjects during group discussions, and they all share their experiences in very different ways. For example, I once asked a trainee how his training had been going and whether he had experienced anything that he would like to share. He replied that he had not. But, when I dug a little deeper it turned out that the guy had actually experienced finding a dead body, something that he had never been through before and it had actually made more of an impression on him than his first answer suggested. Another trainee started talking about a particular case that had had an impact on her. She had been responding to an emergency call involving a 16-year-old girl who had committed suicide on railway tracks. The
trainee had also been there when the news was broken to the parents. This had really affected her – so much so that a few weeks later she decided to go back to visit the parents to see how they were. This had done her good, and it was positive for the parents too. The trainees are motivated particularly by a desire to reflect on their own actions and motivations, and on what their work really involves. Every officer has a particular story that has moved them. How you deal with traumatic events in the course of your work determines how well you are able to cope with that work.

This is something that you can train and develop. On the one hand, there are practical techniques like how to handcuff a suspect or improving your knowledge of the law. But there are also certain mental techniques that you can learn: how to stay focused on the task at hand when you are in a stressful situation – and those techniques can also be used in everyday life. One very important aspect is how to cope with and recover from stress. There are similarities with the techniques used by professional sportsmen and women. I have a background in sports myself, and I’ve always been a karate enthusiast. One aspect of being a serious sportsman is becoming aware of the mental processes that reduce stress, because those processes play a crucial role. They are also applicable to executive functions within the police organization.

For the teachers, too, the new way of teaching represents a real shift. Some teachers had been using the same training methods for years before this. Under the new project, which is headed by Commissioner Stefan van Zanten, the aim is to make sure that everyone uses the same techniques in their teaching and training. That is not an easy process, because personal beliefs play a major role.

A pilot scheme has been running in Eindhoven since last year. The candidates work a 38-hour week with the emphasis on real-life practice and they also focus on exercise and eating a healthy diet, for example. The trainee officers work in rotation. While they’re on-call, they accompany the officers on patrol and attend incidents with them. The students are very enthusiastic about this pilot scheme and I’m often asked by our candidates in Apeldoorn when we’re going to start the project here too.

We’ve been working with the Apeldoorn group for six months now. In fact, we have already started the formation training on an informal basis. The trainees do six hours a week of sport. My colleague and I are the head trainers, and we have a kind of mentor role for the group. We began the two-week introduction with a special programme that
included physical, mental and moral aspects. We introduced this from the very start. On the first day, the trainees started at seven o’clock in the swimming pool, where they were set a physical challenge. After that, we went out into the woods and worked on group dynamics. Resilience was a central aspect and we gave them continuous feedback. By the end, we had a group of people who had really grown and developed together.13

We also made some changes to the mental aspects of the introduction phase. We asked the group members to introduce themselves – we called this the ‘who, what, how’ session. The aim was to answer the following question: ‘what has made you who you are today?’ The teachers introduced themselves, too, presenting themselves as vulnerable and revealing something of themselves to the group. It was a very meaningful process, and we heard a lot of really interesting and beautiful life stories. They included bullying, adoption and a story about military service in Afghanistan. Sharing those stories created a really unique kind of bonding in the group – between the candidates, between the teachers and the candidates, and also between the teachers. Before that we used to be more ‘distant’, because that was just the way you did training programmes – the classic teacher-student relationship. But we’ve learned that trying to create and maintain a bond is both enjoyable and valuable. During those weeks, we tackled all the core values of the national police force. What does courage mean to you? And what about bonding, integrity, and trust? And we looked at these concepts in relation to the three dimensions of resilience.

We added briefing and debriefing sessions to the training programme. That meant starting the day at 8 a.m. with the briefing session and a well-being session. That helps us to identify any issues more quickly. For example, there was one occasion when someone in the trainee’s immediate family had passed away. Another time, there was a problem with a trainee’s partner. Those are the kinds of things that the candidates are able to tell us, and it is useful for colleagues to know about them so that they can make allowances. To start with, the briefing session lasted a little longer, but now we can have it done in 20 or 30 minutes. The briefing also means that if the candidates have any particular problems, we can provide professional help. Without the briefing sessions we might never have found out about those problems. It’s very difficult to hide things when someone asks you directly how things are going. And the group learns that revealing vulnerability actually takes

13 Also see the chapter on Group resilience in the book Resilience Investigated (2010-2015).
courage. The approach allows the group members to grow stronger. We also have a buddy system and people choose themselves who they want to buddy with. And the teachers learn from the group, too – that means having to open up. My team of teachers is very receptive to that. The teachers often attend the briefing and debriefing sessions. And they also receive feedback. That took some getting used to, because it was not something that we’d much experience of before. But I find that it has a very positive effect. Feedback from other people makes me look at myself in a different way.

In the fifth week of the programme, the whole group went to the Garden of Reflection in Warnsveld. The students were given an exercise to do – they were asked to research the story of a colleague from that unit who had died on police duty. It was a very special experience to stand together next to the memorial of the deceased colleague and then to hear from the candidate who had researched the story of that colleague, and how he or she had died.

There’s a strong focus on sports in the training programme and a nutritionist comes to talk about food and sleep. Smoking is also discussed, for example. To begin with I thought it would be quite easy to persuade people to give up, but it’s actually much harder than I thought. It makes you remember that these are all individuals – and they’re entitled to stay that way.

Personally, I love the fact that my work means that I can immerse myself in the moral aspects of our work. I spent quite some time working on that before we made these changes, so I’m delighted that the moral aspect has now become such an important part of the training. The reaction among the other teachers varies – some people take it all on board very easily and others need time to get used to it. It certainly makes a real contribution to the group. But I know for sure that the way we’re doing it now is a tremendous step forward – both for the candidates and for the trainers.”
Job Knoester (Master of Laws, 1968) is a lawyer who specializes in criminal law at the law firm Knoester & Van der Hut. He handles cases involving sexual offences and homicide, and his particular expertise is in detention and cold cases. He is a guest lecturer at Fontys University of Applied Science’s Faculty of Journalism and he teaches courses for legal and criminal justice specialists. He also writes for specialist journals, and since June 2015 he has been a member of the board at the Dutch Register of Court Experts (NRGD). He wonders whether police officers – given the training and remuneration that they receive – are adequately prepared for the difficult but essential role that they play in our society.
...because between dreaming and action there are laws and practical objections, as well as disillusionment, which no one can explain...

Willem Elschot, in *The Marriage*
I believe that the police really do want to make the world a better place...

Job Knoester – lawyer specializing in criminal law

“A detective once told me, 26 years ago, that I was too stubborn to work with the police. I was being interviewed as a witness at the time, in relation to an assault on public transport. I don’t know if that detective was right. Eventually, I went on to become a lawyer, and although I like to think that I’m not particularly stubborn, maybe that simply confirms that it’s true. I hope that today’s police officers do not come to the same conclusion as that detective did, because I really am open to other people’s wisdom and opinions.

Standing up for people is what motivates me, whether those people are suspects or their relatives. I don’t know why, but this can really affect me sometimes. Then I realize that police officers are exposed even more frequently and more intensively than the rest of us to pain and suffering. That much is clear from the reports that I have to read, the photos I have to look at and the recordings of interviews that I watch. By that time, emergency service workers and police officers have already had to face the anguish of the victims or the horrors of the dead bodies at the crime scene. These cases sometimes involve children. For other cases they have to spend hours looking at images of child pornography, just to mention a few particularly disturbing examples.

I have a caring nature and a strong character, and that means that I am usually able to cope with these gruelling cases and the strong emotions that they evoke – and with the critical and sometimes hostile reactions from society. My resilience stems mainly from the fact that my partner gives me her absolute support and we complement one another. This makes me feel more complete. For half the week, I look after my children and while they are with me, they have my full attention. The time that I spend with them and my wife is what enables me to forget the trauma and emotions that are part and parcel of my work. I live on the dunes, right next to the beach, and the smells and sounds of the
sea bring me a sense of peace. That’s where you’ll most often find me during my spare time.

The police and the legal profession have something in common, I think. The world would be much better if we did not need a police force. And if I’m being completely frank, I would have to admit that the legal profession, too, is a necessary evil in society. I have specialized in the field of the law that I feel that I have the closest affinity with. I represent suspects, who may or may not be assumed to have a disorder of some kind, and people who say they have been wrongly convicted. This means that I often have to handle cases that involve violence, murder and manslaughter, rape and other sexual crimes. I also work for family members, which means that strong feelings are regularly involved. I now find it more difficult than I once did to maintain an emotional detachment while I’m listening to stories or looking at case files.

Of course, I have to approach all my cases in a business-like and professional manner, but I still sometimes feel a chill run down my spine. This also happens when some clients tell me their life stories. I work with dozens of prison inmates each year. Although I don’t have any scientific proof of this, I can quite confidently state that the perpetrators who end up in prison are almost always victims too – victims of their own personal circumstances before committing an offence. And victims too in the sense that they find themselves in a very precarious situation that I would not wish on anybody. I don’t mean to imply that it is always the result of a bad childhood or such like, but I am very familiar with ‘the other side of the story’ because of my specific legal specialization.

I think that police officers who have chosen to join a profession that is so demanding and stressful have made this decision, first and foremost, on the basis of their own dedication and passion. That’s why I believe that police officers basically want to make the world a better place – although there will always be a few exceptions, of course. But at the same time, I wonder whether police officers – given the training and remuneration that they receive – are adequately prepared for the demanding but essential role that they play in our society.

During criminal proceedings, written work done by the police force often forms the basis of the decisions that are made in court. In neighbouring countries, lengthy hearings are carried out publicly in relation to major criminal cases. In the Netherlands, mainly for reasons of cost, we have opted for a system in which judges generally make
their decisions on the basis of reports written by the police. In the cases where witnesses are heard, the final decisions are often made behind closed doors in the magistrate’s office. Hearing witnesses publicly is the exception rather than the rule. This means that all the participants in a trial need to have enormous confidence in the work done by the police. I am a firm believer that your level of training and education does not determine your level of (emotional) intelligence. But I do sometimes wonder whether the gap – in terms of training and education, as well as remuneration received – between the police officers whose job it is to provide the basis of criminal proceedings and those who actually oversee those proceedings – the public prosecution service, the lawyers and the judges – is not too great. By this I do not mean to suggest that police reports are full of spelling or grammatical mistakes. For me it is about something much more substantial than that.

For a number of years now, I have always watched and listened to recordings of suspects, informants or witnesses on DVD or by other means. I rarely find that the written police report matches exactly what I see and hear in those recordings. And the discrepancies can often be crucial. For example, there was one case in which I represented a suspect who was accused of committing adultery with a minor, someone younger than 16 years of age. The question was not whether there had been sexual contact but whether the sexual contact had occurred before or after she had turned 16. During a recording of an interview with the suspect, I heard several indications that the complainant displayed very clear signs of being unable to place events accurately in a particular moment in time. However, this was omitted from the report written by the police officers involved.

One of my recent clients was a man suspected of sexually abusing his mentally retarded adult daughter. According to the police report, my client had admitted making physical contact with her breasts. But when I watched and listened to what he had actually said, the matter turned out to be rather more nuanced than that. The police report omitted to mention that, according to my client, he had been sitting close to his daughter on the sofa and while reaching for the remote control he had accidentally made contact with his daughter’s breasts. I could cite very many more examples.

Despite this, police officers are given no particular incentive to carry out their work better or more equitably in future. In the cases that I have referred to, the court took very little or no account of the errors made (as demonstrated by the verdicts). You may wonder what is worse.
As with any professional group, there will be good police officers and bad police officers – individuals who knowingly play the system and thus undermine the principle of due process and a just society. But even so, I would assume that when these kinds of errors occur, they are not intentional, but simply reflect a sincere wish on the part of police officers to prevent a criminal from slipping through their fingers. But society rightly expects and demands that everyone has the right to a fair trial. And anything that undermines that right, even mistakes made by the police that are ‘unintentional’, must be looked at very carefully. Nevertheless, when the police are held accountable for mistakes made, there does seem to be a tendency to close ranks and a process of externalization takes place. As a professional observer of police conduct, I notice that the reflex response is to seek to cover up bad decisions, mistakes or errors. My current impression is that the police are slow to admit that mistakes happen within their organization, and sometimes fail to do so entirely. I suspect that this situation arises due to the fear instilled by internal peer pressure and negative publicity, for example.

What a judge usually wants to see in an offender is that he or she understands where things went wrong, because that understanding is what can offer hope for the future. The same principle should really hold true for the police. It is not possible to prevent all errors in police work, even though that should always be the objective. Any violent crime that is wrongly ascribed to somebody who did not commit that crime is terrible. If a citizen dies as a result of it, they call it a disaster. Let’s take the case of the death of Mitch Henriquez from Aruba during his arrest by the police in The Hague. In that district of The Hague, the use of disproportionate force by the police had been the focus of attention for years. But only very recently did the mayor of the city, Jozias van Aartsen, admit to the municipal council that this was the case. Of course, society also needs to accept that violent incidents are part of life. But we must expect the police to do everything within their power to prevent it.

I was raised with the idea that a police officer is your best friend. That’s what I teach my own children, too. The police deserve respect for the work that they do. On the occasions where police officers – whether intentionally or unintentionally – report their interrogation of suspects or witnesses inaccurately, it makes me question this assumption, particularly when I see the police force demonstrate an insufficient understanding of the need to do better in the future. I have the same feeling when the police routinely and immediately deny that mistakes have been made, as occurs in cases where they have used their monopoly on violence.
The police carry out important work – difficult and often unpleasant work. I am fully aware of this. I also want to believe that they wish to be a force for good in our society. Sometimes, I long to be able to believe what I used to feel as a child, that a police officer is my best friend. I think I would have this feeling more easily if police officers were better paid and better trained. This would be a more appropriate reflection of the responsibilities that they bear. And I believe it is essential that police officers understand the importance of the right to a fair trial, and how to interpret that right.”
Commissioner Alain Remue (1964) is head of the Missing Persons Bureau, a supporting agency of the Belgian Federal Police. His department works on cases that are often disturbing, such as disappearances, identifying bodies and/or body parts and identifying people who are suffering from amnesia. There are sometimes fierce conflicts within the team, but they always talk it through until they have resolved their differences, because ‘we’re there to support each other, no matter what that costs’. That is what makes his team so resilient, he says.

The Stress Team
The Stress Team is an agency of the Belgian federal police that consists of psychologists and social workers who support the work of police officers. Their work includes handling crisis incidents and providing therapeutic counselling for police officers. All the staff are professionally trained and educated in psychology and therapy. They are available around the clock. In crisis situations, the Stress Team arrives at the scene and briefs police personnel on the possible impact of what the police officer concerned may have experienced or witnessed. This means that contact is established from the outset, making it easier to contact the Stress Team subsequently, if more support is needed. They deal with some difficult issues within the police. These include stress problems, PTSD, burn-out, depression and anxiety issues. Cases of harassment are also part of their work. At the level of prevention, those who work in positions that expose them to the highest levels of stress are monitored more closely and courses are organized in areas such as stress management, suicide prevention and burn-out prevention.
“In my team, we can talk about everything. The group is close-knit and the atmosphere within the team is really crucial. It’s even more important than the quality of the work we do. We hold selection interviews for new team members, and if you are not affected by death, you can’t join us. How people look at death is extremely relevant for me. My people are not just assigned to the team; for this type of work, you need intrinsic motivation and we only take people who have actively chosen to approach us. We have a fantastic team, and every member gives 100 per cent commitment. Emotional stability is the basic quality that you need to join the Missing Persons Team. This means not only being highly motivated in your work, but also that your partner is part of the team too because there are days when we’re at work constantly. When a new team member joins us, they go through a kind of training process for the first six months. This gives the new member the chance to adapt to the new environment and gradually learn to take responsibility for their work. We keep a close eye on each other and there’s a high level of social control in my team. I sometimes say that each team member misses a piece – in fact, that’s what you need to work in my team, because none of us is perfect.

We work nationwide and we have two or three serious cases per week, with around three new cases of a missing person every day. Fortunately, most of those individuals are found alive and well. But we still have to deal with a large number of bodies every year, and some missing persons are never found at all. I know from personal experience what it’s like when parents approach you while you’re working. When you’ve been searching the water for a week and the person is still missing, for example, and they ask you what their child will look like if it is recovered from the water. By then, you have heard so much about the child that it almost feels like your own. I can tell you that at those moments, our

Also see the chapter on Group resilience in the book Resilience Investigated (2010-2015).
work is anything but routine. I try not to give people false hope. Being honest with relatives is an absolute must for me. A body that has been in the water looks like nothing you can imagine. It will have started to decompose and it’s a truly terrible sight. If someone asks me about this, then I have to tell them this, no matter how difficult I might find that. And we do get that kind of question regularly – it’s part of our job.

In Belgium we work with a ‘Stress Team’. It’s a team that springs into action when there are serious incidents, made up of psychologists and experts who work with the police officers involved in the case. My team members have a compulsory meeting with a psychologist twice a year – Sara Belmans, who is a member of the Stress Team. They can see her more often than that if they want. To start with, there were people who thought it was not necessary, but that soon changed. Everyone is happy with Sara and she often spends a day with the team while they are working, just to see what we do and how we do it. She also joins us for a drink sometimes. That’s something we often do in my team. If it’s quiet on a Friday afternoon, we close the office early and all of us go and eat something at a café in the neighbourhood. But we make it compulsory, because we do it during work time. I ask people to stay for about two hours and after that it’s your free time and you can have either another drink or go home. I think those moments are really essential because our work is so intense and we don’t often find time to do things together as a team. It’s a form of team-building and it strengthens the bonds between us. The stress and workload mean that we need to work really well as a team and to feel part of the team. In the end we become like family to one another.

When you work as intensively together as we do and you’re under stress too – because of the nature of our work – there are often tensions and arguments, especially since we’re all people with strong characters. I have one rule about this: disagreements in the workplace mean that we close the door and it stays closed until the conflict has been resolved. Any interference from outside will only make things worse. And this method works – we always work it out. There is a major group dynamic. You could see us as a constant intervention group – we support each other, mentally, no matter what. In my opinion, that’s why my team is so resilient. I am proud of this.

The Missing Persons Unit is still my baby. Until a few years ago, I always hoped to stay in the team until I retired. Well, I haven’t decided for sure yet, and sometimes now I do wonder what it would be like to have a change and find somewhere else to end my career. This is
Every member of my team misses a piece... really due to the death of Olivier Rouxhet, a diver who used to work for the Civil Defence Unit. Olivier was a friend and colleague. He was an experienced diver and he died in 2011 during the search for Amélie and Alyssa, two missing girls. I was running the investigation. We had worked together for fifteen years and I was there when the accident happened. I saw them trying to revive him and I can still see Olivier’s face when they brought him up. He was still alive at that point, but somehow I knew that he wasn’t going to make it. It was a strange moment. As they lost the battle to save Olivier, it seemed like I couldn’t hear anything that was going on around me. For a good few minutes there was total silence in my head and the sound only came back when I heard the sirens of the reservists as they arrived. For the first week and during the funeral, there was a lot of togetherness. The incident really changed our team.

But I found it very difficult to get over that incident. While I was on holiday, I lost all my hair from one day to the next. We were having breakfast and my wife said to me: ‘You don’t look too good, where did all your hair go?’ And when I rubbed my head the hair started coming out in clumps. The doctors examined me inside and out but they didn’t find any underlying condition that could have caused my hair to fall out: it had happened because of the stress of Olivier’s death. The next major blow came when the prosecutor in Liège had a change of heart: my colleague, three other police officers and I were taken to court. We were charged with ‘causing death unintentionally through assault and battery’. We received a lot of support during this period, including from our ultimate superior, the Commissioner General of the Belgian Federal Police, Catherine de Bolle. There were countless expressions of support on social media and huge media interest. The case was extremely sensitive, politically. In the end the case collapsed and the charges against me and my colleagues were dropped.

All’s well that ends well. But the whole episode left me broken. I always thought I had thick skin, but after the death of Olivier and what happened afterwards, I know that I don’t\textsuperscript{15}. About a year and half ago, I had a complete break-down. It was a combination of a burn-out and post-traumatic stress. I have been seriously ill. I had severe hyperventilation, and I’m at least twenty kilos lighter due to what happened. I was out of the running for six months in all. My family, friends and colleagues gave me so much support, and I also had a lot of contact with Sara, the

\textsuperscript{15} Also see the chapters Focus on the mind and Resilience: three domains connected in the book Resilience Investigated (2010-2015).
Stress Team psychologist. It was also the time when I started to have real doubts about whether I wanted to carry on. In the end, I realized that the Missing Persons Team was ‘my baby’ and I returned to work the next time a child went missing. But before the incident involving Olivier I’d never had the doubts that I have now. Back then, I never thought for a moment that I would ever want to do any other job.

I never want to see another colleague lose his or her life at work. Since the accident with Olivier, I’ve looked at each new diving operation in a different light and I’m always relieved when the divers are back with us on dry land. Ever since I first started the job I’ve always felt a strong connection with the parents of missing children, but even though things would affect me emotionally, I was always able to keep strong. The loss of Olivier has affected me in a different way, though. I lost a piece of myself that day, and I had no more reserves of strength to draw on. It has been an extremely difficult period, and I look at my work differently now. I have moments when I wonder if I might not prefer to go in a different direction. But I haven’t decided yet!”
Dr. Annika Smit (1975) is Chair Resilience at the Police Academy. She was part of the Professional Resilience Improvement Programme (2011-2015). From the meetings that she regularly has with individual police officers and during group sessions, she seeks to hold up a mirror so that participants can look at themselves. These conversations are deep, and far from easy. For her, understanding what police work involves has been a process of first-hand experience. And she believes that you need to understand what it means to be human to do good police work.
“Working within this Programme has really shown me the essence of who I am. Police officers are human beings, and it is their humanity that touches me. Knowing that I have a dynamic role to play in this is really important to me. I work on the particular issues and themes that affect police officers – love for fellow human beings, but also death and suffering. Everything that it means to be human, in a nutshell. I’m fascinated by the contrasts that I see: love, fear, pride, confrontation, and struggles that come back again and again.

This takes me back to my own first memories as a child, because I was born struggling. As a young child, I can remember that I was often sad and anxious. I couldn’t put a name to those feelings of course and it was just a part of who I am, rather than anything in the immediate environment in which I grew up. I couldn’t always be consoled as a kid – I was very much a loner and I would regularly avoid contact with other people. Sometimes I would literally crawl under the table to get away from everyone. It wasn’t until I went through adolescence that I changed and started to enjoy other people’s company. The Programme has taught me how to understand myself and I’ve become more self-aware. And I’ve seen the link with other people’s struggles. On the way, I’ve also learned to understand police officers. I’ve seen what police work involves through first-hand experience. And I’ve come to understand that we are all the same, irrespective of our job title or rank.

I started work at the National Police Force’s Cooperation Facility (vtsPN) in 2006. Before that, I worked in the industrial sector as a researcher and programme manager in a virtual lab. I was working on emerging issues in the field of security, looking at their human aspects. People have always occupied a central position in my research. My work in the industrial sector was very innovative, but in the end it was not really my thing. I wanted to get back to the basic research that I did when I was a
PhD student at Radboud University. That was about how memory and attention work in humans.

I really enjoyed working with the police from the very start, and from my first position with the vtsPN, I moved on to the Police Academy in 2009. I was given the chance to work on the Academy’s strategic research agenda. I went out on the road with Commissioner Jan Struijs to get in touch with police officers around the country. The combination of police and science is an exciting one and I really feel like I’m in the right place now. It was me who first identified the combination of factors that we later began to refer to as ‘resilience’. Initially, the research chiefly involved the physical and mental aspects of resilience. The moral aspects and group dynamics emerged later on.

Our work often focused on themes like trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In 2010 I began the first research programme on ‘resilience’. We formed a club of police personnel and that provided the impetus for the Professional Resilience Improvement Programme. This later grew to include all kinds of other people and portfolios. The enthusiasm that the programme has generated is really interesting to see. Over recent years we have studied various aspects and for me it has been a process of bringing these dimensions together. The Programme also includes a whole range of difficulties and limitations that are part of police work.

Police work inevitably involves conflicts because it is all about boundaries: good and bad, exclusion and reconciliation, fear and blame. This has negative aspects, but also many positive aspects. In fact, police work goes to the heart of what it means to be human. A trainee officer might be threatened by a citizen who is mentally ill. A chief commissioner might be on the receiving end of pressure during a meeting with the local mayor. Both of them could experience the same feelings of powerlessness, trying to interpret the meaning of the work they’re doing, and the need for acceptance from others. Unless we take the time to stop and reflect, it can quickly start to weigh us down, and before we know it we feel like we’re wading through thick mud.

Some people are angry when they come to see me; others are grateful or enthusiastic. But I always start by asking the same first question: ‘What’s going on here?’ Then we talk about steps that the people involved want to take to move forwards. I act as a kind of mirror for them. When people are telling me their stories, certain words light up for me and I latch onto them. This can be quite a profound process,
and far from easy. The conversations that I have with people are often difficult and sometimes involve unpleasant details. This affects me outside work at times. I feel this both physically – in the form of tension and pain in my neck – and emotionally, in that I feel sad. I’ve found ways to handle this. Meditation and walking both help me, and I write sonnets. I also have people around me who are supportive, including a coach who has been helping me for a long time. My work is based on the desire to develop as a person – that’s what keeps me motivated. It’s a search for awareness... Involvement and commitment to my work are very important.

I hope to continue working with the police for now, because it’s still a fascinating place to work. Doing research and giving advice, from clarification right through to implementation, gives me a great sense of satisfaction. I’m always confident that something beneficial will come out of it. That’s the most important thing for me. I help the police force to identify the resources they need to do police work. This takes various forms and is not always self-evident. I sometimes find myself in positions where people don’t understand what I mean straight away. For example, during one session, I asked a chief commissioner about his motives and he did not understand at all what I was getting at or why I was continuing to ask questions. It was an awkward moment, and the most difficult thing for me was the discomfort of the other people there. But with my persistent curiosity and questions, the anger passed and this brought us closer together. It doesn’t always work that way. Sometimes meetings or sessions are just uncomfortable. In that kind of situation, I explore what we can achieve and I push my own limits too – but always on the basis of my own humanity. Ultimately, I try to help individual police officers and the police force as an organization to take a step forwards by enabling them to understand and see things that they might not otherwise have been aware of, even though that understanding had always been there collectively, under the surface.

In my experience, you need to understand what it means to be human in order to do good police work.”
Inspector Jos Hermans (1953) has been working in the police force since he was 17, and since the spring of 2015 he has been benefitting from the ‘18-month rule’ (the opportunity to stop work 18 months before redundancy during the reorganization), a nice step on the road to retirement. He has held various positions during his career in the police, including a long period working as a detective in the youth and sex crimes division. In retrospect, it was too long as far as he is concerned. He stopped too late and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). After a period of crisis, he managed to get back on his feet after getting professional help from his employer and a lot of support, both from those he worked with and at home.
How I dragged all my ‘baggage’ with me, from one department to the next...

Jos Hermans – Police Inspector

“I was a well-motivated police officer and detective, and ready to take on the whole world. My colleagues saw me as someone who just wouldn’t take no for an answer. I would walk through fire for them. Some troublemakers on the street would call out ‘Here comes that maniac with the gold cap’, because if I saw that they were getting out of hand, I’d grab them by the neck and push them up against the wall to warn them that they’d crossed the line. One day a colleague tapped me on the shoulder and said: ‘Jos, that’s enough!’ That particular young man, who I’d lifted right up off the ground, so that both his legs were dangling, definitely wasn’t going anywhere. I had a very short fuse back then. Looking back, I can see that many times it wasn’t the real Jos who was acting like that. I was a walking time bomb. My colleagues really should have stepped in. But the comments from the troublemakers on the street didn’t get through to me. They should have been a serious warning sign. Well, sometime later, we were called out to do a search and arrest at a house in Roermond. None of us could get the door open, try as we might, not even when we brought in a special door ram. So I pushed everyone else to one side and threw all my weight against the door. It flew right out, taking the doorframe with it. And the man who lived there, who had been trying to stop us getting in, was lying flat on his back under the door in his hallway. In that sort of situation, I would lose it and I’d get so aggressive sometimes. The magistrate, who was there with us, took me to one side and told me urgently never to use that method again. It was a serious warning to me, and again, it should have made me take a good look at myself.

Another incident happened at a centre for asylum seekers. We were called out because of a fight between two groups of men, one from Africa and one from the Balkans. Someone had suffered a head injury. The situation calmed down and we left the centre saying that we would be straight back at the first sign of any more trouble. I was working
again that night and was called by the emergency room. As soon as I heard the word ‘argument’, I lost my temper, jumped in the car and drove to the asylum centre with the sirens blaring out. Along the way, I called for back-up from a number of other patrols and a team with police dogs. We all rushed into the asylum centre. We just flew straight in and everyone scattered. The dog literally tore the pyjamas off one of the residents – it must have been a really frightening experience for all the people there. At this point, the emergency room called again and it seemed that the first message was misunderstood. Apparently, I’d jumped to the conclusion that there was another fight when this wasn’t actually what they had said. As soon as we understood this, we all realized that this slip-up could have serious consequences. Fortunately no-one had been injured.

In the end we decided not to publicize what had happened and I filed an internal report. When I was called to see my boss a few days later because he had got wind of what had happened, I asked him what he would prefer – a whole lot of hassle and fuss or just to let the matter rest. The asylum centre had not lodged a complaint. No-one had been hurt. No further action was taken. But they should have done something after what I’d done. My colleagues and my boss should have called me to account and shown me that my use of disproportionate force must have had some underlying cause. At that time, a measured response would still have been possible – this was before the days of social media and before everyone would file a complaint against police actions at the drop of a hat. There was no specific policy in this area, like there is now. I’m describing this because I want to show how far I’d gone before anything happened. This was the type of incident that was happening.

In around 2000, I started a course in Personal Leadership. That was what showed me how I was actually doing and how I had taken all my ‘baggage’ with me from one department to the next, until the weight was dragging me down. I had seen colleagues around me go to pieces, quite literally – one committed suicide, another drank himself to death, and a third developed Korsakoff Syndrome. I saw marriages and relationships hit the rocks. And I genuinely believe this was all down to the workload and the stressful nature of the work. The work that I did all those years eats you up inside and it can break you. And I wasn’t the only one who suffered, because these departments are everywhere and there are lots of people who do the same work that I did. In the sexual crimes department, the work is so stressful that people should not be allowed to stay longer than a few years. I’m sure that you need to
change department regularly if you do work like that. Before I left the Criminal Investigation Department to train as a police manager, I was assessed at a psychological centre and approved as a crisis manager. After that, I worked as an operational coordinator for two years.

Then, in the summer of 2002 there was a major fire in Roermond in which five children died, and at that point I’d really had enough. A few weeks after that disaster, I left my post. I’d felt for a while that I wasn’t being listened to when I raised concerns about my colleagues. Some of them were under far too much pressure. As for me, I’d hardly slept for several weeks and my concentration at work was down to zero. I could hardly function. As I see it, too little was done about the specific problems I was experiencing and about the situations I’d been warning them about, and I felt that some colleagues were no longer able to do their work in a safe way. My manager at the time took the view that the problem lay with me. I felt unable to protect myself, my teammates, and also society. So I told them that I wanted to quit my post. They said, literally, that there was no other job available for me. In desperation, I approached my old boss in the Criminal Investigation Department and he helped me to find a new position. Those children’s bodies in the fire were the last straw for me. I’ve seen many dead bodies during my years in police work, but that fire was the tipping point for me. I can still remember sitting in my car next to a level crossing, completely numb and unaware of anything around me. I came to my senses when a passer-by tapped on the window and asked me what I was doing there.

That was the moment I asked for help. I ended up at the police clinic in Amsterdam, where a psychiatrist, Professor Berthold Gersons, diagnosed me with PTSD.16 At that time, very little was known about this condition within the police. I underwent successful treatment in Veldhoven. It worked for me, because I was able to carry on working and from that point on I began to turn the corner. I’ve been working at the Security Investigations Bureau for the last few years. My colleague saw what was happening and understood me. He picked me up and gave me the time and space to get back to my old self. I’ll be grateful to him for that for the rest of my life. I was lucky, and as the manager of the ANPV police union I’ve been able to work on raising awareness about PTSD in the police force.

16 Also see the report entitled PTSD in the Police – a better picture by Smit et al., 2013 (in the chapter entitled Outcomes in the book Resilience Investigated (2010-2015)). NB report is in Dutch.
I come from that generation of police officers who were trained on the basis that brute force and bloody noses are just a necessary part of the job – and by that I mean that we felt that we had superhuman strength. We were proud of how tough we thought we were. Police school had a huge influence on me. I started out with the police in Helden and later I ended up in Echt. There, I worked under an ex-soldier from the East Indies, a former group commander. He was a man of his word and he would always make sure we did the right thing when that was necessary. For example, after one incident we were sent back to see those involved to find out how they were. That was what I’d call truly inspiring leadership. I never worked under anyone else like that. I feel privileged that I was able to start my police career working in his team. He came to my house and he asked my wife Marly: ‘How’s it going with your hubbie?’ He would get to know us properly, and if there was anything wrong he’d spot it and that’s what stopped people from having burn-outs. He’d send people home if he could see that they were suffering under too much pressure. After a really stressful incident, there was always coffee with cake and then we’d be allowed to go home to recover. I was in his team for six years – that was a really great time. Then I moved to the Criminal Investigation Department, working on cases involving young people. That was difficult because I was dealing with a whole new set of problems. We would do regular exchanges with Utrecht and Amsterdam in those days, because they were much further ahead with the new specializations. That was another wonderful period. We would work with the Child Protection Council regularly. That mainly involved ensuring their safety – we would sit in the patrol car on stand-by while the child protection staff were inside on home visits.

All that came to an end when the privacy laws were tightened up. Freely exchanging information, honestly and in good faith in order to protect the interests of children was no longer possible. That put a stop to a lot of cooperation. Compartmentalization became a reality. We no longer had specialist tasks, and police officers were expected to do anything and everything. I was placed with the Criminal Intelligence Service. I worked on investigations involving boys and girls, young women, mainly from Eastern Europe and Asia, who had been trafficked into the country and ended up in prostitution. During that time I saw the most appalling things imaginable. There is a film series that portrays people-trafficking – it’s called Matroesjka’s. To anyone who is wondering about the kinds of things that we witnessed, I’d recommend watching that series – and remembering that the reality is much worse than what you see in the film. During that period I went to Warsaw and Prague.
with a colleague to give presentations to the judiciary and police officers on people-trafficking. We also visited women’s organizations there. This led to the exchange of an enormous amount of expertise. Unfortunately, I lost this position when the powers decided that responsibility for human trafficking was to be shifted. I was moved from strategic management back to basic management.

At that time, I began to be haunted by the things I’d been exposed to. The horrific images would often come to me at night while I was dreaming and I had nightmares about a horror film that was eerily similar to my work. I knew very well that I wasn’t the only one experiencing those issues, but nobody else reached out for help. It’s possible that some of my colleagues went under because of it eventually. People still try to carry on regardless and some of them end up having break-downs because of the type of work they do. My sessions with psychologists and counsellors revealed that I had always taken good care of other people but hadn’t taken enough care of myself. I found it difficult to say no, I had an unhealthy lifestyle and everything had piled up until I couldn’t cope any more. Thank God that my old boss was there and that I was brave enough to ask him for help.

Because of my position in the union, last year I was able to attend a special training for people diagnosed with PTSD. It was in Ibiza. I went there with a colleague of mine and some defence workers who also had PTSD. Ibiza was the final step in my healing process, and it finally brought me some peace in my head. Now I can go to sleep without having nightmares. I’ve given up alcohol completely, I eat more healthily and I’ve changed my lifestyle by doing more sports and taking better care of myself. I learned about that in the PTSD therapy. Since I stopped working, the work for the union has also come to an end, but I’m still active in a buddy scheme for PTSD. I’ll be starting that soon. And I’m also doing work for the Blue Foundation. That’s a charity that works with Polish street children, among other things. So all of that means that I still have links to the police force. I hope others like me seize the opportunities that are out there, because work does not have to break you. Being a police officer is the best job there is. If I was 20 again, I’d definitely do it all again – but differently.”
Dr. Ginger Charles (1960) has worked for twenty-seven years as a police officer, seventeen years in Arvada, Colorado. Her experience in working within the police community provides unique and very powerful insight into policing, police officers, resilience, and the police culture. She received her doctorate in Health Psychology from Saybrook University, San Francisco. She retired from police work in April 2013 and is currently teaching psychology at Modesto Junior College, Modesto, California. Dr. Charles continues to research and write in the police community.
The longest journey is the journey inward.

Dag Hammarskjöld
I am a better human being having been a cop and a teacher...

Ginger Charles – retired police officer & teacher in psychology in the United States

“Resiliency in law enforcement requires self-reflection, hope, courage, and honesty. So how do I state this so firmly? Well, I served as a police officer for a total of 27 years. I have experienced the tremendous highs and lows of this profession. I treasure each moment, each tragedy or crisis, each situation where I had the opportunity to touch another’s life.

And then there is a time when one has to observe the effects from the profession that I love and make an ultimate decision. In April 2013, I decided to retire from police work. I could see that it was time to leave.

I explored, read, and analyzed the research of how difficult it is for police officers to retire. The work provides such meaning and purpose. The job can be addictive with excitement, risk taking, and power. Police officers can feel lost when they leave the profession. Many wander back into the profession, into jobs far less satisfying than what they left. Some police officers don’t survive long in retirement, either mentally, spiritually or physically.

So, I made a decision to retire from police work by setting an example as to how to ‘retire’ well from law enforcement. There comes a time and it requires wisdom to know when it’s time to leave. I moved to another state, promised to help the law enforcement community, and find another sense of meaning and purpose. I took a leap of faith, moved 1200 miles from my familiar world and started applying to teach at colleges and universities in California.

I remember as I was getting prepared to leave police work, many of my peers would say to me, ‘That’s the bravest thing that you are doing!’ I was shocked because these were the same individuals that I stood shoulder
to shoulder with as we confronted violence and evil. Yet, they believed that to step out of the work and into faith was BRAVE.

As I spent the next few months searching for work, I had time to reflect on the profession I left. I did miss my peers and the work. But there is an innate wisdom to gracefully moving into the next phase of life. I will always have a police officer’s soul but I hand the career to the next human soul who is willing to create a life of service.

After six months, a small community college hired me to teach psychology. I have a doctorate in psychology but with my experience as a police officer, I am able to give the students a ‘boots on the ground’ approach to psychology. The concepts are given color and illustrated in street examples so they can apply the subject to their own lives.

What has opened for me is new meaning and purpose, another calling, a sense of integrity in my life as I have the opportunity to open doors for these students. These students have shared some of the most amazing stories of survival and challenge. Overcoming drug addiction, severe sexual abuse from parents, attempts at suicide, and other debilitating circumstances only to pick themselves up and get educated.

I have had gang members in my classroom and then watched these gang members stop wearing gang-colored clothing, start eating better food, study the course material, and successfully pass the course. Perhaps there is a hopeful future for them beyond the dysfunctional gang mentality. For me, I have learned to embrace all diversity, envisioning it as a lovely tapestry that creates such beauty.

At the end of each semester, many students continue to maintain contact with me. Perhaps they need a letter of recommendation from me for a scholarship or a job application. Sometimes they just need a bit of advice. Once in a while they ask to meet for a meal just to catch up with me.

I am often shocked that students also give me such lovely gifts of movie tickets or a coffee gift card at the conclusion of the class. These kids who have absolutely no money are giving me a gift! Their gratitude brings tears to my eyes.

In psychology, there is a concept in lifespan development where an individual will look back at life and determine whether there was meaning and purpose, whether the individual feels successful. This is called
‘integrity vs. despair’. While I am not at this developmental stage, I am certainly aware of how these two professions have given me such meaning and purpose.

I cannot say this road has been smooth. I sometimes feel as if I’m off my path, that maybe I should have stayed in police work. I was making quite a bit more money and it was certainly more financially secure. But, then I think about what I have learned in this new environment. I am a better professor having been a police officer. I am a better human being having been a cop and a teacher. I believe I can better help the law enforcement community by learning to teach.

When we look at resiliency in a human being, we must recognize the journey will push against us, causing contraction and discomfort. Then hope and faith provide us with the ability to recover and bounce back. Had I not taken this leap of faith, I would not have found a deeper sense of integrity, another level of meaning in my life. Perhaps it is brave.”
Dr. Jonathan Smith (1960) is a Chartered Fellow of the CIPD, Fellow of the HE Academy, Fellow of the Leadership Trust, and Director of the Institute for Spirituality and Policing. He is passionate about learning and helping others realise their full potential and has been researching, practicing and helping others to develop effective leadership and leadership resilience for over 25 years. He has experience in a variety of managerial and training roles, in a number of public and private sector organisations. He has been a Director of Studies in the police, a Senior Lecturer and researcher in leadership in a University Business School and currently helps to develop leaders in one of the UK’s police forces.
I wonder why we don’t just stop running and look and talk...

Jonathan Smith – leadership development manager in the United Kingdom

“How do I cope?

6.30 am and I’m wide awake. Always seem to be waking earlier than the alarm these days. Quick breakfast and I am away. It’s a beautiful morning. Sun is shining, clear blue sky but it’s obvious there has been a sharp frost: it’s cold and crisp and I can see my breath as I exhale. I am cycling the 12 miles to work this morning. It takes me almost exactly one hour and it’s a beautiful ride. I hear the birds singing, smell the flowers and trees as I ride and see the most amazing views and most wonderful flowers, trees and wildlife. I feel really alive and connected to the environment and at this time of year I feel a real excitement seeing all the flowers and trees bursting into life – fresh, new and alive. I love the ride but I am also hurting. I always ride as hard and fast as I can, trying to beat my time. Part of me doesn’t understand why I do this – why suffer? Another part of me though in a strange kind of way enjoys the suffering and pain, pushing myself to my physical limits. There has always been something deep inside me I think that drives me on to always do my best, push as hard as I can in everything I do. Cycling and my work are no different. As well as giving me time to suffer (!) the ride also gives me some quiet ‘me’ time to reflect on what’s been happening, on what is important to me and what I need to be doing at work today. I feel another hurt though, a bit of a sense of dread as I get closer to work – I know it’s going to be a tough, very busy and frustrating day again today that is going to push me to my limits in another way.

Quick shower and change and I’m into my first meeting. I’ve had little time to prepare for it and I know I need to listen hard, be diplomatic, manage my emotions, control my frustrations, and try and think on my feet as to the best ways of convincing others and taking the best course of action. During the meeting I note too many things for me to do as
soon as possible and wonder silently when I am going to actually have time to do these things. The meeting has to end after the scheduled one hour even though the exploration is not complete. All members have to get to their next meeting, where the same pattern, challenges and equally long list of actions emerge.

Just a few minutes now before the next meeting to share with the team the team briefing that is to be cascaded down the organisation. I received this on Thursday and its already Tuesday but it’s the first time I have had the opportunity to share this with the team. When I received the briefing I felt that it was very out of date and that I knew everything that was being shared. I notice now it says on the brief it should have been cascaded down two months prior to the date it is now. I wonder where the briefing got held up and whether there is any point doing it now or whether as me, everyone will know what I am going to share with them. One key member of the team is running a training event this morning so I will have to speak to him separately. I know it is a duplication of effort and a bit of a waste of precious time I can’t afford but it’s the best I am likely to be able to do, so I decide it’s best to share with the others and press on with the team brief.

We finish five minutes before the next meeting. Just enough time to notice the huge long list of e-mails that have arrived – I reckon about 100 since this time yesterday – and register the frustration with this number and my lack of time to respond to any, but no time to answer any at all. I also note that I am thirsty, need something to eat, and need to go to the toilet but no time for any of these as a rush down the road to my next meeting. That one overruns by 20 minutes and I have to give my apologies to the next person I am meeting who sat waiting for me. And so it continues.

3 pm and I can pause for a moment as the person who is going to call me on the phone is late. Just in time to realise that I still haven’t been to the toilet, had a drink or had my lunch. Frustrating as I wanted to go to the gym today, just really to take a break, do some physical exercise, and be a role model to the team about the importance of taking a lunch break. I console myself that at least I came in on the bike this morning just as the phone rings.

I have collected numerous action points from my many meetings today that are really important and several people have shared frustrations about things that really should be happening, are really important and which I really should be doing something about, but for which I have
I wonder why we don’t just stop running and look and talk...

no time. The nature of the work I am involved with in the police means these things are important as they impact directly on people’s lives and the most vulnerable members of our community. I feel frustrated and guilty. Many of these things are big, culturally engrained things which don’t have easy answers and will take a lot of work and support and help from others. Many of the others though are blocking progress and are actually part of the problem so I need to address those difficulties first. Feels like I am swimming upstream most of the time. One of the leaders uses the analogy that it is like we are all trying to play football, we are all madly running around as fast as we can, it’s misty and nobody knows where the goals are, but we occasionally kick the ball and hope it’s in the direction towards of the goal! I wonder why we don’t just stop running and look and talk to plan the best course of action and priorities and wait for the mist to clear so we can see what we are doing. I am thinking now I might extend the analogy in that, when the mist clears, we all see where the nets are but realise that they are basketball nets and the goals are up in the air. We have all been so busy running around in the mist we haven’t seen we are playing the wrong game – kicking and hoping we get the ball in the nets but now realise that was never ever going to happen!

I could stay late again tonight to deal with some of my action points but decide I need to be at home and manage to get on my bike just after 5pm. As I ride home I reflect on my day, taking my frustration out on the pedals I go and pushing as hard as I can to try and beat that fastest time again. Have all these meetings actually produced anything, made any difference, moved things forward, I wonder? Do I really need to go to them? Why don’t I, we, just stop and think about what we are doing? I must prioritise I tell myself, but I have already prioritised the priority priorities and the problem is finding any time to even think about these things, let alone do anything about them. So often I see people just quickly actioning things without any thought – ‘ready, fire, aim’ as a good friend of mine used to say. I find myself being drawn into doing the same in an attempt to ease the pressure and demands to provide some action or response but I feel constantly frustrated that this is not the best way or best response. I hear myself constantly saying ‘there is a better way’ but regularly feel washed along by the power of the stream as I try desperately to swim upstream.

I am very tired as I turn into the drive at home. Tired from the cycle ride home but more so from the extremely busy and frustrating day at work where in all honesty I feel I haven’t achieved a great deal today. I think of all the many disillusioned people who have e-mailed me today in the
hope of some response, answers to questions or concerns, only to have received no response again. And in all likelihood they will never get a response from me because there will be another 100 tomorrow and another lot the day after that.

As I turn into the drive I see the long grass on our big lawn and realise I really have to cut that tonight. My two children and wife welcome me home. My son hasn’t had a good day at school, is upset and wants to talk to me. I am tired and would like to just sit quietly on my own and have a cup of tea but fight this desire and try and be there for him. I try but I know I fail, I know he can see straight through my lack of interest and I feel really sorry for him. I try and fail with my daughter as well who has fallen out with the other girls at school and fail with helping my wife with what she needs to talk through.

Tomorrow, the next day, the next month, I feel could be much the same.

How do I manage to cope with it all I ask myself. I think there are many things that help. My family and friends and the fact that I know I am not alone. Physical exercise, my bike and an opportunity to work in the garden. A big thing that has helped my wife and me, when we have been facing some enormous changes and challenges recently is not to be thinking too far ahead. Working hard to be mindful and stay in the moment, and then just focus on what has to be done today. There is a danger with this, I think though, in that you can then easily lose direction and be like a boat on a rough sea and just be battered around whichever way the wind and tide is going. For us then this mindful approach has to be balanced with an eye on the long term and what it is we are wanting to achieve. One of the biggest things here that really helps me is for me to be really clear on my overall purpose in life. For me, it’s ‘helping people realise their full potential’. I know I can do that in my current training role and also by the fact that I am working with the police in helping to protect the most vulnerable in our society. There have been occasions since I have taken this job where I have thought the only thing that has kept me there, kept me going, kept me in the ring fighting is this life purpose of mine.

I am aware that me telling my story could be seen by some as just moaning about my situation, perhaps they think I want people to feel sorry for me. That is not the case at all. I am very aware that I am making lots of choices and that my current situation isn’t going to stay like this for long. I have the capacity, desire and ability to change things for the better. I feel very positive and believe that reflecting on my expe-
rience today and considering the implications are of great assistance in enabling me to make the appropriate changes I need. I know I am engaged in important work and feel we all have a role to perform here on earth that only we with our unique collection of skills, abilities, and experiences can fulfil.”
Gerrit van de Kamp (1964) is chairman of the ACP Police Union and describes himself as ‘a child of the security forces’. He is someone with real staying power, constantly absorbing new information and tracking everything that moves – his many contacts and his ever-changing network. For him, resilience means being able to recover during those moments when your work becomes really stressful.
The greater the chaos around me, the more I value wholeness.

Adriaan van Dis, in Indian Dunes
You’re only human if things get to you...

Gerrit van de Kamp – Chair of the ACP police union

“I’ve been working with the police since I was 17. I grew up within this organization – you could say I’m a child of the security forces. The job really suits me as a person. I work primarily on the social aspects of the force and the individual interests of the employees within it. That’s what my work is all about. I was educated the old-fashioned way at a school in the fishing harbour area of The Hague, and after that, in the 1980s, I started work as a police officer with the city police. I learned the basics at Jan Hendriksstraat, and then the Schilderswijk area of The Hague. A few years later, I joined a much smaller force in Bussum. It was a very different environment and I made the move mainly because I had a family to support. The Hague was very expensive and the 1980s was a time of economic crisis, like today. It was difficult to make ends meet in The Hague on my salary. Years later, the regional police forces were established. I became involved in employee representation on a voluntary basis, first in the works council and later, in the mid-1990s, through the union too. I held all sorts of different positions, and at some point I ended up as chairman. I’ve been in that position for ten years now. I still really enjoy it – it’s such a stimulating job. For the last two years we’ve been involved with the national police force and that is a very big job – including for the police unions.

The tools and resources that I use to switch off are all based on the fact that I see this as more than just a job. I do what I do because of my inner drive and the role that I have in social responsibility. I don’t have a problem with separating my work and private life. Because for me, work feels like a part of me, so that sense of burden that the word ‘work’ often has for people doesn’t really apply in my case. I make my contribution by helping things to run smoothly and at the same time I’m able to help other people. I do that in any way I can. I unwind by doing sports, which helps me to clear my head. My girlfriend knows how closely involved I am with emergency planning issues, but she also makes sure that I stop when I’ve reached my limit. At that point, she
tells me that I have a private life to think about too. And I know she’s right, because I’m a kind of information junkie – I just go on and on. Other people in my network are the same, because they work on the same things. That’s something we have in common. I must admit that I live on adrenaline and I do let things get to me. But once I see that things are getting too much, I give myself time to cool down and let go. That’s when I’ll take two or three weeks holiday and just leave all the serious stuff behind.

I’m sometimes involved in very complex collective negotiations that involve extensive consultations among the membership, as well as a lot of disagreements and conflicts and long meetings with the minister. Negotiating in that kind of situation demands everything I’ve got. But I don’t mind. As long as the final result is a good one and people are satisfied, then I’m happy to put the work in. But you do have to know yourself and your own physical limits, and be able to say ‘enough is enough’ when you reach those limits. Sometimes you’re aware that you’re already running on empty. I know exactly when that happens because I’m less able to be patient with people. I get restless. That manifests itself in sleeping less well, and it also shows through in my behaviour. I become distracted – I find it difficult to just sit quietly in a chair for half an hour, for example. That’s when I know that I really need to take things easier. Those are also moments when I have a little less patience – I’ll just tell people that something needs to be done in a certain way and I’ll explain why later. When I notice myself doing that, I know I need to watch out. It’s possible to work that way, of course, but I prefer to take time to discuss things. Because you have to bring other people along with you.

I tend to feel that I can do more than other people – that’s just the way I am, and I see it as an advantage. Let’s take the case of the MH-17 disaster in Ukraine, for example. When the fighting started in Kiev – so before any agreement had even been signed. At that time, we were in contact with our colleagues from the unions on location and of course, you want to help wherever you can. But it was very difficult, because we didn’t know how long the fighting against civilians would continue. We had a lot of meetings about it in many locations across Europe. The forensic experts were really keen to go and work at the disaster site but sometimes you have to protect them from themselves. You have to think very carefully about who you send out and what their remit is, all the while thinking about the work that needs to be done and the risks involved. If you just let the police experts have their way, before you know it there’ll be planes full of people going out to the crash site. So
you have to put some thought into it. In social terms, it’s vital for the unions to be involved – you can’t keep them out, if only because of the emotions that are at stake and the general atmosphere. But you also have to put some thought into how that should happen. And there’ll be some close shaves along the way too – some knocks and bumps are inevitable.

If I’d had more time to think about resilience, I’m not sure that I’d have chosen that particular word. In our later meetings, once we’d been working for a while, ‘resilience’ cropped up again as the key word. But for me, the word resilience suggests that things just bounce off the surface, as if you have been vaccinated against a virus. But sometimes that’s not really how it works because things will get under your skin – not everything just bounces off you. In police work, there will always be ups and downs. The emotions that you feel can take you right to the top, high on adrenaline; and at other times you stop feeling anything at all. And those ups and downs mean that you have to be able to find yourself again and make sure you have a soft landing. Maybe the word ‘resilience’ doesn’t always capture this idea of flexibility and of sometimes allowing things in. I think you’re only human if things get to you, and if you try to find a way to deal with that as a professional. It won’t happen of its own accord. Once you’ve had to deal with enough stress and distress, it’s only natural that you find ways to keep your emotions in check. The trick is learning how to recover during those moments when your work becomes really stressful.

From the perspective of police officers, I know this is different for every individual. Everyone has their own pattern and everyone is strong in his or her own way. Sometimes things can be fine for a very long time and then suddenly they start to unravel. The fact that you have feelings and that you show and recognize them and know how to handle them – that shows courage and professionalism. Because if you can do that, you’re taking a step towards handling things on the basis of your own resilience. Acknowledging yourself is the first step to resolving your issues. I think the first ingredient of resilience is having a picture of who you are, a feeling for who you are. How much can you cope with? And how much time do you need to process the things that happen to you or around you, so that your performance is not undermined? And that applies to both personal life and professional life – both are just as relevant for me. It’s always difficult and things can manifest themselves in different ways. I hope that police officers will begin to understand that. They have to know what they need in order to stay resilient. It doesn’t matter how many rules or guidelines we put in place, or how
many agreements we make with the union, or how many resources we make available – individuals will always need to take the first step when they see that they need some support. That’s something that I often see in the Mental Strength Training courses.

We know we have a long road ahead of us. It’s not just about individual employees, but also the group dynamic. We need to look to the future, because this is something that we have only recently started working on. All of us need to be constantly working to make sure that there is awareness among our colleagues. People need to understand that police work has a very particular effect on them, and that’s not something we need to hide away. Needing time to work things through is part of being human.

I’m sure that if people had been honest with themselves earlier and had really given themselves the space to work on the issues that they had, they would have understood sooner that something was not quite right. People can carry on for a long time before they finally reach breaking point. And that can lead to some very unpleasant situations. From suicide to marital break-down, turning to alcohol or suffering a nervous break-down. I think that awareness has to start with yourself and learning that it’s normal to have emotions. We need to get away from that idea that you’re a strong person if the intensity of your work doesn’t affect you. Of course, that’s not to say that you should say you’re affected by something when that isn’t the case – not everything will affect you necessarily. But at the point when you start to hear those horrible jokes flying around and nobody is admitting to any conflicting emotions, or when you hear comments like ‘that was number 25 this year’ or ‘we were lucky there were no maggots crawling out of that one’ – that’s when the alarm bells should start to ring, because maybe your colleague is finding it difficult to cope. To some extent, that kind of reaction is a normal response and a way of distancing yourself – part of the resilience process. But you do need to keep an eye on it. Nobody can continue switching off their emotions for too long. At some point, that strategy stops working. There will be times when people are really shaken up by what happens in the course of their work. The strength of their emotional foundations will be tested. Or rather, their moral foundations. And if those foundations are not sound, or if people have already reached the point where they’ve used up all their reserves of strength, it can easily tip them over the edge.

Big changes have taken place since we first started the Resilience Programme, I can see that. For example, resilience is now a part of group
debriefing sessions – people are more aware of the need to focus on it. That greater awareness is impacting on employee behaviour and we no longer talk about traumatic or violent incidents only from that macho perspective that used to be so prevalent. More and more, it’s about how people might have been affected by things that have happened. The idea is that in the long run, this will become a systematic part of the way we work. What form that will take for each individual, I can’t say at this point. Time will tell. But what I can say is that in my years with the police force I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything else take off in such a relatively short period of time as the Professional Resilience Improvement Programme.”
Inspector Carina van Leeuwen (1959) is a forensic expert from the Amsterdam division of the national police, where she works in the Cold Case and Review Team. She was a member of the investigation committee that looked at the case of the Schiedammer Park murder (Posthumus report) and was part of the investigation and identification team for the Tripoli air disaster. Carina’s career in the police force got off to a relatively late start: because of her short stature, she was only able to join when the minimum height requirement was scrapped. She has also been a successful writer for several years and she is currently working on the third book in her ‘Crime Scene Unit’ series. Working in the police has changed her view of people and of society. When she realized that during her free time she was avoiding going out in the city where she works, she decided to take some walking tours with city guides. This solved her problem of seeing ‘suspicious types’ wherever she went during her free time.
Everywhere I went, I’d see suspicious types and potential criminals...

Carina van Leeuwen – Police Inspector and forensic expert

“I asked myself what resilience meant to me. In the dictionary, the definition is ‘the ability to spring back into the original shape after being stretched or compressed’, or more simply, ‘the ability of a person to recover quickly’. The first description interested me the most – being stretched and compressed and then reverting to your original shape or condition. Because I wondered if that would actually be a good thing in the type of work that I do, that we all do. By ‘we’ I mean police officers, and in my case the Forensic Investigation Division. Would it necessarily be good to return to exactly the same condition that you were in previously? When might it actually be good to be changed by the events that you experience – possibly permanently? I looked back at my 25 years in the police and I tried to evaluate those years using the same expectations that I had at the start of my police career, and then with the standards that I have developed since then. How have I changed and why? Have those changes benefited me? Or have I actually lost something because of them?

Before I joined the police, I spent 15 years working in the healthcare sector as an operating theatre assistant. Moving to the police was a great adventure for me, but it was also a major culture shock. I went from dealing with patients – who were generally grateful for the work that we did and happy with me, and whose health problems I did everything I could to help them with – to facing people who would only see the uniform I was wearing. And usually their response to that uniform was not a positive one. There were people who didn’t want me to be there, or who didn’t see the need for me, and sometimes people who actually wanted to cause me physical harm. That was a radical change for me.

My first few months in uniform in an unknown city were like a roller-coaster ride through civilization. I realized that I was changing, and – luckily, in hindsight – I realized that the change was not a positive
one. The move from one world to the next was too quick and the change was too great. My view of society and people flipped from one extreme to the other: from always assuming the best about people to making very negative assumptions about those same people. Everywhere I went, I’d see suspicious types and potential criminals. I even stopped going out into town during my free time. I wanted to avoid the area that I worked in. I quickly became aware of this and I solved the problem by starting to learn more about the culture, architecture and history of the city – I really threw myself into it. I went on walking tours with guides who taught me the beautiful history of the city and pointed out all the details. During my free time, the ‘potential criminals’ that I’d been seeing everywhere disappeared.

After a few years of patrol work, I decided to move to the forensic investigation division. I couldn’t have made a better move, even though those around me took a different view and asked me why I wanted to do it. Dealing with death and suffering all the time, having to examine dead bodies and witness post-mortem examinations, piecing bodies back together after train accidents – everyone was convinced it would be awful. But I stuck with it and I haven’t regretted it for a moment. When I think back to some of the things that I’ve investigated and experienced, the work has changed me in a way that actually makes me more grateful for the happy life that I have. I do see dead bodies regularly, and the violence that has been inflicted on them, or that they have inflicted on themselves or suffered as the victim of an accident. But that is exactly what makes me stop to think about the little things that make life beautiful, but which are not always obvious.

For me, resilience means searching for who you really are, reflecting on what you would like to change and what you want to keep. If the ways in which you change and adapt give you a new-found appreciation of the beautiful things in life, however small, then I believe that’s actually a positive change.”
Fred de Graaf (Master of Laws, 1950) was a member of the Dutch Senate representing the VVD Party until 9 June 2015. From 2011 to 2013 he served as the leader of the Senate and until October 2015 he was the deputy mayor of Enschede. De Graaf previously worked as a civil servant at the Ministry of Home Affairs and later became the mayor of a number of towns and cities in the Netherlands, including Leersum, Vught and Apeldoorn (1999 - 2011). He also served as deputy mayor of Bronckhorst in Gelderland (2013) and Amstelveen (2014). When tragedy struck in Apeldoorn on Queen’s Day 2009, he was the mayor of that city. It was then that he first realized that experienced police officers know what to do immediately.
Never be ashamed of what you feel.

Demi Lovato
I have no problem at all with other people seeing my emotions...

*Fred de Graaf – former leader of the Dutch Senate and former mayor*

“I believe that I myself have a fair degree of resilience. Somewhere along the way, I realized that my heart rate actually goes down in situations of tension. I become very calm. That’s what happened on Queen’s Day 2009 – I could feel my head becoming clear during those critical moments. It wasn’t until the next day that it all hit me. Of course, I’d had a very late night and I was due to give an interview the next morning. But as I sat eating my muesli and saw the newspapers with five, maybe six pages of awful photos, that’s when it all struck home. Fortunately, the tears only lasted a few minutes. I felt a comforting arm around my shoulder and I was soon okay again. But what if you can’t let those emotions out...? I’m an extravert, but not everyone is. When I go to a concert, I’ll often have tears rolling down my cheek as I listen to the beautiful music. I have no problem with other people seeing my emotions, even when I’m the one in charge.

I saw so much professionalism on the part of the police on Queen’s Day 2009. It all happened so quickly, that day in Apeldoorn – it was over in an instant. There was a huge number of police officers in the area. We had already tightened our security because of events like the assassinations of Theo van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn, and because of the wider tensions in society. And also, the Queen was only scheduled to visit Apeldoorn that day, instead of the two municipalities that she would normally go to on Queen’s Day. So her programme was longer than it would normally have been. Apeldoorn is an open city, easily accessible to the public, and so we had put a raft of extra security measures in place. There were many trainee police officers and military police along the route. I witnessed what happened with my own eyes because I was sitting with the royal family on the open bus.
That day I realized for the first time that experienced police officers know what to do immediately. You probably will have witnessed that too – that female officer on the bicycle who was able to get out of the way of the car, but only just, and who otherwise would have been caught between the stone obelisk and the car. It was really incredible. She did it with such skill! You try to plan for every eventuality, of course, and we had decided what to do in a hundred different scenarios, but this was the 101st and it wasn’t part of our system. Nobody expected anything like this. But that female officer on the bicycle got straight into the back of the car and sat behind the perpetrator, because he was still alive immediately after the collision. It was her who managed to get him to say what had happened. It’s only because of her that we now know why he did what he did. He died the next day in hospital. The bravery of that female police officer was simply magnificent – there is no other word for it!

The emergency response plan swung into action immediately after the attack. For the first hour and a half I hardly saw anything of it because I was with the royal family at Het Loo palace. The Queen was very concerned – you could see that clearly in the television footage too. I had to announce the cancellation of the festivities that had been planned and ask everyone to return to their homes. And then I had to go all the way over to the police station in Europaweg to chair the response team there. My deputy had already held one such meeting. I spent the rest of the day preparing everything – what did we need to do? What were we not going to do? We had a lot to deal with. But later you realize that everybody managed to stay calm and conduct themselves very professionally indeed. Everything was arranged extremely promptly. In a word, it was quite awe-inspiring. I have so much admiration for all the people who were directly involved in the events of that day, I really do. There was immediate and comprehensive help for the victims and I realize that police officers were also traumatized by what happened. Some of them suffered for a long time afterwards and perhaps still experience problems today. Those were the professionals who happened to be in the area of the tragedy and did whatever they could to help. There were some very young police officers among them. Police officers are naturally tough and not inclined to talk too much about traumatic incidents. They are not so quick to show it if something has got to them – because that’s part of their job after all. But that can easily get you down, and your home life suffers too. You shut the door to everyone, including your partner and children, your family and friends. There is a lot of hidden suffering. It’s hard to do anything about that if people don’t make the first move themselves.
It’s quite a tricky business to provide support for employees who have been traumatized, especially when you’re dealing with such large numbers. And those officers came from all over the country, too. It was not only our local police force in North-East Gelderland that was involved that day. We had assistance from several other police forces and there were staff from the Police Academy and the Royal Military Constabulary too.

My chief commissioner, Annelore Roelofs, took care of the people in her constabulary, of course. But going down to South Limburg or up to Groningen to look for people who might have PTSD – that’s a different matter. When you were there yourself, standing among them, and when you experienced the events yourself, it feels different. If you’re a police chief in Groningen and you get some people coming back who were there on the day, you would keep an eye on those employees for the first weeks but that would naturally start to fade away after that.

Police officers are issued with a handbook on how to intervene in such cases. They say that you may not cross certain lines, because that is always the danger. I’ve noticed in recent years that we are increasingly developing a culture of blame here in the Netherlands. People don’t ask themselves which circumstances have led to a particular situation, or why a certain course of action was or wasn’t taken – the first response is that heads must roll. As a public servant, a newspaper can have you out of your job within a week, and now the social media are in on the act too. The power of those processes is immense and the government’s response has so often been to ‘evade as much of the responsibility as possible’. You see this at the top among government ministers, local authorities, representatives and mayors, but it happens in the police too. And because those people duck their responsibilities, public officials also wonder why they should not do the same. As a result there is an awful lot of evasion of responsibility and people covering their own backs.

To give just one example, about five years ago, I began my New Year’s speech in Apeldoorn by saying: ‘Before I wish you all the best for the New Year, I would like to make an announcement: as from today, I will no longer be reading e-mails that are cc’ed to me.’ Everyone looked at me open-mouthed. They all knew that I’m useless with computers and thought I might have got confused, so I repeated: ‘Guys, there are 1,400 of us in this organization, and if each of you cc’s me one e-mail every day, that’s 1,400 e-mails in my inbox.’ The message was clear: ‘Please stop!’ Well, 700 of them did stop sending me e-mails and the rest
would just send me a direct e-mail instead. After all, I had only said ‘no more cc-ing’. So we got half-way there. Before we all had computers and I-pads, it was difficult for people to do that because they would have to write notes or letters. But sending a cc to everyone, you can do that with the click of the mouse. But I would say it is an evasion of responsibility.

I think that generally people are less aware of one another. It’s related to being overworked. Every senior officer in the police has piles of papers waiting to be dealt with on their desk that they are constantly struggling to keep on top of. Colleagues could look after each other better and that would probably increase their productivity, because they always work in a team of at least two people, and it’s true what they say – a problem shared is a problem halved. I really think people should keep a closer eye on each other. When there are two of you, you have someone to share everything with. Actually, everyone in the police has to be alert to what is happening around them, from trainees up to the most senior officer. Awareness of what is going on within the organization needs to be much greater.

Police officers do not have to compete with each other all the time – they can also form a united front and help one another. I think that’s crucial and senior officers need to understand that. It should be made part of training for senior officers and space should be made to develop those aspects. Someone who has not finished a police report on time because he or she has spent two hours talking to a colleague who is feeling low deserves bonus points.

The pressure of work can always be used as an excuse to avoid thinking about things that have got out of balance. ‘I’m too busy for that.’ Really? As a parent, would you ever say I’m too busy to raise my children? That would be tragic. That extra time and space is essential. My family always comes before everything else. That basic attitude needs to be the same among senior officers – the health and well-being of other officers must be made a priority. Because the police is a kind of family too. That means, specifically, that senior officers need the capacity to empathize. Otherwise, he or she is just not suitable for the job. They’d be much better off doing something on their own. Leaders make people feel welcome, comfort them and empathize with them – that is their most important task.”
After obtaining his law degree, Johan Severs (Master of Laws, 1953) began working with the national police (Rijkspolitie), in the district of Alkmaar (Noord-Holland North area). He worked with the police for seven years, after which he spent eight years with the Criminal Investigation Department. During that time, he witnessed and experienced a great deal of distress, fear and trauma. In 1991, he decided to make the transition to the Public Prosecution Service and he has now been working as a prosecutor in the North Netherlands district for almost 25 years. His everyday work involves serious crimes and investigations in relation to cold cases. He believes that it is important to be able to communicate openly about things when they trouble him and to acknowledge vulnerability without losing authority.
Die Ehre ist das aussere Gewissen, und das Gewissen die innere Ehre.

(Honour is the external manifestation of conscience and conscience is the inner manifestation of honour.)

Schopenhauer in *Parerga and Paralipomena*
Keep your head cool and your heart warm...

Johan Severs – public prosecutor

“I can remember it like it was yesterday – the first time I was guided through the incident room with a police colleague to attend an RTA ‘with injury’. It was the first day of the school holidays. A girl of around ten years old had been on her bike and crossed the road without noticing that there was a car coming. The car couldn’t stop in time and had clipped her. Fortunately, the girl’s injuries were limited to a broken leg, but I can still remember how hearing her sobbing was like being grabbed by the throat. The thing that upset her most was that she’d have to spend the next six weeks with her leg in plaster. As a rookie, it didn’t occur to me that I wasn’t the only one who was emotionally affected by it. I didn’t share my feelings about it with other colleagues at the time – and neither did anyone else.

When I started work as a section commander with a mobile response unit in 1980, I experienced real fear for the first time ever during the riots in Vondelstraat in Amsterdam. Until that point, the training and deployment of the mobile response units of the national police had always been focused on securing a given area as part of a terrorist response procedure – in the event of a train or plane hijacking, for example. Responding to urban unrest demanded a whole different set of tactical skills, equipment and networks, and the units were struggling to cope. It was my first proper deployment. I was afraid for my own physical safety and I had my doubts about whether I’d be able to carry on doing my duty in the face of a barrage of bricks and stones. Naturally, I was also worried about the other members of the unit. My head was full of questions... Would I be able to control my fear? Would I be able to maintain an air of confidence and authority in front of my team? What would it feel like to be hit in the face by a paving stone? What should I do if we got to the point where a quarter of the unit was injured? At what point should officers decide that it is necessary to draw their firearms and shoot? But even then, we did not talk about our feelings. At most, we might talk to those in charge about the new
tactics and formations that were being improvised as we continued to fight.

We didn’t talk about our fear and anxiety – they were not even acknowledged. It was only after the dramatic events of the coronation riots on 30 April 1980 that attention was turned to standardizing equipment and improving the skills of the mobile response units. And even more importantly, as far as I’m concerned, the question of better support for police officers who suffered physical and psychological trauma during large-scale physical violence. I remember how it felt when, as a commanding officer, I felt the arm of a colleague around my shoulder and was able to talk about my fears and insecurities without undermining my own authority. Before that, there had never been any room for any of that in the police force – none whatsoever.

In 1985 I joined the Criminal Investigation Department and before long I was assigned to the pool of team leaders for the Interregional Investigation Assistance Team for Noord-Holland-Kennemerland. It was a team of detectives that was used to investigate murders, a similar structure to the one we have today for large-scale investigations. I investigated dozens of murder cases in that position. It was the kind of work that tests your resilience to the limit, in my experience. Especially in cases involving children – regardless of whether they are the victim, the survivor or the perpetrator. When I had started working for the police, I sometimes used to wonder how I would react when I saw ‘my’ first human remains. In retrospect, it wasn’t as bad as I’d expected; they contacted me while I was on-call to tell me that a corpse had been found in a ditch. It was a ‘fresh’ corpse and afterwards it turned out to have been a suicide. I remember that it didn’t look awful, it didn’t smell bad – it was just a person who I hadn’t known and who had put an end to his own life. Later I was exposed to victims who had died in road traffic accidents, people who had jumped in front of a train and mutilated bodies. I experienced a lot of painful and harrowing situations.

Of course, the story behind the incident is often a very sad one, but I was able to stay distanced and things would almost never affect me at home. That changed when I began investigating murder cases. During the investigation I’d have to get into the minds of the victims and the perpetrators. I’d often get to know them very well and get right into the depths of their souls. I’d discover secrets that even their closest companions had not known about. And I learned that humans are capable of more terrible things than I had ever imagined. The cases that I worked on would often involve malice, sadism, deranged minds and a
total absence of conscience. At the time, when I started detective work, we didn’t wear white suits and blue shoe covers. It was quite normal that as the leader of an investigation, you would turn up at the crime scene while the victim’s body was still there. Some crime scenes leave nothing to the imagination – you could still see the violence and hatred, the anger or even madness with which the offender had committed the crime. You would see the surprise, the suffering and the fight to the death at the crime scene, and the smells of rot and decay would really affect me. But at the same time I realized that I had to keep my head, because it was my expertise and experience that could make all the difference to catching up with the perpetrator and solving the case. At times like those, it’s also vital that you continue to motivate your team so that they do their work accurately and methodically, because sometimes lengthy and meticulous search operations are involved. Fortunately, most detectives who are assigned to a murder investigation are very highly motivated.

During my time as a detective, I had plenty of scope to reveal my own vulnerability because of the close relationships I had with colleagues. I was able to express my doubts, anger and grief about what we saw in the cases that we were investigating. On a number of occasions, I have seen detectives specifically seeking each other out in order to give each other a hug or let their tears run freely. But I can also recall at least one case in which a detective who had been assigned to interrogate a serial child killer – and did so successfully incidentally – broke down completely after the investigation was over. He managed to get over it under his own steam, but in his case I think that he received very little care and support from his superior officers.

As a prosecutor, I still have a lot to do with detective work and I still have a lot of exposure to traumatic cases. I’ve also been on the receiving end of verbal threats and intimidation from suspects on a number of occasions. I never found it necessary to ask for help with this or discuss it with my superiors. I do sometimes talk about the violence that is directed at officers in general with colleagues that I get along well with. The 2013 study entitled Threatening and Intimidating Conduct towards Police Personnel and Public Prosecutors: A study into the frequency, nature, consequences and possible ways of tackling the issue\(^\text{17}\) shows that different divisions handle it in different ways. Maybe it’s because I worked for the police for many years, but I’m not that easily intimidated. And if necessary there are people that I can pour my heart out to, like colleagues.

\(^{17}\) Also see Outcomes in the book Resilience Investigated (2010-2015).
or people at home who understand what I’m talking about. They’re on the same wavelength and usually understand what I’m saying. Often, all you need is someone to listen to you and understand you, and then you’re able to carry on again.

I think it’s very important to have a good outlet outside the workplace too. I’ve been playing the saxophone for several years, for example. I’d always wanted to start, ever since I bought a record by Cuby and the Blizzards as a teenager that included a track with a beautiful saxophone solo. I wanted to be able to play it one day but I never got round to it – my studies took up all my time, and later my work and career, family and children. That was until one day a neighbour of mine, who also plays the saxophone, invited me to go to see a performance by the orchestra that she plays with. I was so impressed and a few weeks later I was given a few trial lessons with her music teacher for my birthday. Since then I’ve been hooked and now I play in a band myself. Playing music creates space in my head.

Even though I no longer work for the police, my commitment to police officers, and detectives in particular, remains undiminished. I am capable of taking hard decisions (in both legal and moral terms) with the appropriate degree of detachment in relation to an investigation – or in other areas – and yet keep the relationship warm. Or as a chief detective recently put it: ‘Keep your head cool, but your heart warm, and make your own choices.’ In larger investigation teams, I try to make important decisions unanimously with the team leaders. But I always like to add: ‘If we can’t agree together on what to do, I’m the one who will make the final decision, because that’s what I’m paid to do.’ I’ve never regretted taking that attitude because it means that I can communicate openly about what’s bothering me, and I can show my vulnerability without losing my authority.

I once headed a murder investigation into a case where a man was suspected of killing his best friend. According to his girlfriend, the man had arrived home ten minutes before the fatal shot was fired, so he couldn’t have done it. During the course of the investigation, we came to suspect that his girlfriend was giving him a false alibi. We decided to search the girlfriend’s house to see if we could find a weapon or used clothing. In the end, what we found were several diaries in an upstairs closet. I’d already experienced cases where information about a murder had been recorded in a diary, so we wanted to take them away. The girlfriend made an awful fuss and burst into tears. She explained privately to a (female) magistrate that she had been the victim of incest in the
past and that the diaries contained details of this. In the end I was able to persuade the magistrate that we needed to take them with us nonetheless. We gave her our assurance that they would be treated with the utmost discretion. The diaries yielded no clues about the murder. But meanwhile our other investigations had revealed that the suspect had been having sex with young girls aged between twelve and fourteen years old, as well as with his girlfriend. We could also tell from the diaries that his girlfriend didn’t know anything about this. After a lot of deliberation – because there were extremely divided opinions in the team about it – I decided to test the alibi by telling the girlfriend about her boyfriend’s sexual exploits. This worked in one sense: she admitted that she had created a false alibi for her boyfriend by saying that he'd been with her at the time of the murder, because he had panicked after killing his best friend. But there was a double moral dilemma in this case: was it worth violating the suspect’s ultimate privacy in order to obtain information that might help our investigation? And was it worth destroying the relationship between the suspect and his girlfriend in order to get her to admit that she had given him a false alibi? In retrospect, I’m glad that I decided that the answer to both questions was ‘yes’. Because if this had not been the case, I would have struggled with my conscience for a long time.18
Final remarks

Jannine van den Berg – former member of the police force management, current head of the national police unit and nationally responsible for the topic of resilience

“I immediately saw something familiar in all the personal stories in this volume. On the one hand there is a common theme that runs through all the stories – they all concern humans in uniform. On the other hand, all the stories are different. The events described are varied, as is the way that people handled those events. The beautiful thing about these stories of vulnerability is, I think, that all the walls and defences have been taken down. What remains is the unadulterated truth, straight from the heart. That’s when you see how police work really affects people. I have real admiration for the people who have shared their stories in this book, because I know that not everyone is able to do this. And I hope that others who may be less comfortable with telling their own story, will be encouraged to do so.

The moving and distressing events described in this book are typical of the work done by the police. It is work that affects you deeply as a person. It involves harrowing experiences that these individuals have not sought out, but that they have simply encountered while doing their job. It’s inevitable that things will affect you sometimes, but that experience can be so raw that it temporarily affects your whole system. It’s quite remarkable that there are people who do this kind of work at all. Ideally, you would want to spare them from the things that they are sometimes faced with. But unfortunately that’s not possible. The nature of the job is that sometimes officers will be confronted with shocking and disturbing scenes and events. What also strikes me is that police personnel continue to strive to help civilians who have witnessed those same events. Protecting and caring for people is part of who our officers are.

The nature of basic police duties means that police personnel will encounter situations that can impact on their state of mind. That is the core of our work – where it all begins. It involves a certain degree of
distress, which the rest of the organization then needs to be able to deal with. In recent years, we have come to understand this much better, but our work is far from finished. The focus on resilience in policing is still in its infancy.

The fundamental way in which we approach the human aspects of policing needs to take centre-stage. I see the insight that we have gained in this area as just the first step along a long road. There is still a great deal of work to do.”
Marion Brepoels (1965) studied journalism at the Fontys University of Applied Sciences in Tilburg and forensic science, criminology and law at the Maastricht University. She also took a postgraduate course in forensic psychological assessment and counselling in Antwerp (Belgium) and a postgraduate course in forensic research in Brussels (Belgium). She worked at the Council for Child Protection for 24 years, and also as a freelance journalist. In 2012-2013 she spent nine months doing practical training at the Forensic Investigation Division of the Limburg Police Force. She witnessed the minutiae of police detective work and heard some very unusual, and often very compelling life stories from the police officers who worked there. In April 2014, she began working for the Professional Resilience Improvement Programme, developing two books about resilience. For a period of sixteen months, she brainstormed extensively with her two colleagues about professional resilience in all its facets and talked to police officers and experts from home and abroad about their personal perspectives on resilience. Since January 2015, she has been working as a reviewer for the Limburg Cold Case and Missing Persons Police Unit.

Nanette Slagmolen (1985) studied sociology at Erasmus University in Rotterdam. In 2011, she completed a Master’s degree in Urban Issues and Policy. During her studies she became involved in organizing cultural festivals in Delft. Here she discovered her enjoyment and satisfaction in exploring and creating through team work. In 2012 she started work as a researcher within the Professional Resilience Improvement Programme. Her primary interest was the quest for what constitutes resilience and how insights derived through research can be applied in police practice. A sociologist regards societies as networks of connections and it is from this perspective that she has helped to define and understand resilience within ‘police society’. For her, being able to contribute to this process of exploration, which puts people centre stage
within the organization, is what makes conducting applied research meaningful and essential.

Annika Smit (1975) was awarded a PhD in Biological Psychology at Radboud University Nijmegen in 2004. Her doctoral research was in the field of Physiological Psychology, and focused on ‘cognitive energetics’: vigilance, attention and information processing. Her dissertation revealed, particularly through the story hidden away on the inside cover, about a transcendent experience on the part of a young researcher, her inquisitiveness regarding the unknown. Her great love is the enigmatic, the unknown, and the undefined. Having reached the limits of the rather rigid world of experimental research, she left the world of academia that she had come from. She then embarked on a journey through the field of applied medicine (Cambridge, UK) and intelligent systems (D-CIS lab in Delft) – a journey that ultimately led her to the Dutch police force. In 2009 she started work at the Police Academy where she drew up the first version of its strategic research agenda. It was then that she, along with a number of others, first encountered concerns about the vitality and well-being of police personnel. A deeper exploration of these concerns then led to a quest for the human aspects of police professionalism, which are examined from various angles in two books about resilience (Resilience Investigated (2010-2015) and Stories of Resilience). In January 2016, when the Professional Resilience Improvement Programme came to an end, she was appointed to the position of Chair Resilience at the Police Academy.