



# Stories are science: Celebrating 10 years of the *Journal of Community Safety and Well-being* and the advancement of narrative-based research

Jeff Thompson\*

There is a premise in qualitative research that “stories are science” (Muindi et al., 2020; Thompson, 2025a,b, 2026; Thompson & Launer, 2025). Our stories do more than recount our lives – they create them. Narrative-based methodologies explore how individuals make meaning through the stories they craft, interpret, and share, as well as through the stories to which they are exposed. The task of the researcher is to interpret participants’ meaning-making processes and to analyze how lived experience is shaped, understood, and communicated through narrative.

Within this narrative framework, the role of the researcher is both distinct and necessary. The researcher’s role is discerning, analyzing, and interpreting meaning that emerges through a uniquely collaborative relationship with study participants. The researcher weaves narrative threads into new and meaningful contributions that serve both academia and practitioners. However, without the support of a credible, empirical, and peer-reviewed journal, this still-emerging narrative scholarship would remain often hidden, limited to informal and non-scholarly publications.

For the past decade, the *Journal of Community Safety and Well-being* (JCSWB) has served as a vital fulcrum – a welcoming meeting place where researchers and practitioners can converge. It has helped establish narrative-based research as a rigorous and empirical approach among the other more traditional methodologies.

As an open-access journal, it continues to enhance personal knowledge, inform the development of policy, and challenge long-standing, and at times outdated, mindsets allowing for new paradigms to emerge. In doing so, the JCSWB has meaningfully contributed to advancements in community safety – particularly in policing – through approaches that honour the dignity and humanity of both the community and those tasked with protecting them.

While JCSWB is a community of inclusivity, it maintains rigorous standards. In my experience as a reader, author,

reviewer, and guest editor, I have witnessed firsthand the seriousness with which the editorial team fulfills its gatekeeping responsibilities. Ethical integrity, methodological rigour, and empirical strength are non-negotiable with submissions. Importantly, this commitment to excellence is consistently matched by compassion, practicality, and an appreciation for the human dimensions of research.

On a personal level, JCSWB provided a critical platform in my earlier stages of my research career. The Journal’s continued support has enabled me to share research exploring resilience programs (Thompson, 2020, 2022a), police leadership (Thompson, 2022b), narratives (Thompson, 2023a), and the role of awe as a resilience practice (Thompson, 2023b). What began first as a proposed concept has now evolved into a body of empirical work demonstrating that awe can serve as a gateway to other resilience practices, fostering an upward spiral of well-being.

I am especially grateful to the editors for their willingness to allow narrative research the space it needs to “let the stories breathe” (Frank, 2010; Launer, 2024) and not be hindered by conventional word limits (as a personal note, I will always have fond memories of those word count “negotiations” with Norm Taylor). Through sharing rich descriptive data, it became possible to illustrate how awe can emerge even in the most unlikely environments. The following story is just one of many revealing how awe can lead to many other resilience practices. In this case, there being a sense of agency and cognitive reappraisal where an ordinary moment can become extraordinary:

“I was once stopped in my footsteps – by a buttercup. I was working a [police] beat in a very tough inner-city area. Concrete and filth all around. This buttercup decided this was its home and it broke through the concrete. Maybe it was the situation – but I was so taken aback by its strength and its drive to LIVE.

**Correspondence to:** Jeff Thompson, College of Leadership and Public Service, Lipscomb University, One University Park Drive, Nashville, TN 37204 USA. E-mail: mediator.jeff@gmail.com

**To cite:** Thompson, J. (2026). Stories are science: Celebrating 10 years of the *Journal of Community Safety and Well-being* and the advancement of narrative-based research. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 11(Suppl 1), S27–S29. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.550>

© Author(s) 2026. Open Access. This work is distributed under the Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license. For commercial re-use, please contact sales@sgpublishing.ca.

SG PUBLISHING Published by SG Publishing Inc. **CSKA** Official publication of the Community Safety Knowledge Alliance.

It distracted me for a moment from what I was there for and it's stayed with me – the image of this buttercup breaking through the concrete under the most impossible set of circumstances – for more than 15 years (Thompson, 2023b, p. 199)."

I was also honoured to serve as guest editor, alongside my esteemed colleague Linna Tam-Seto, for a special issue dedicated to advancing police wellness and advocating for a new baseline to be set (Thompson & Tam-Setto, 2023). Contributors from diverse geographic locations and perspectives responded to that call including former NYPD Police Commissioner Bill Bratton discussing the innovative program "R U OK" (Bratton & Perez, 2023), Jackson and Theroux (2023) discussing the need for police wellness checks, Drew and Martin (2023) sharing their rich findings from the Fraternal Order of Police national survey, Rinkoff (2023) exposing the continuing negative impact of alcohol abuse in policing, and Edward's (2023) social narrative powerfully titled "I'm not faking being sick, I'm faking being well: The need for leadership in mental health for policing." There were others too showing the needed global approach required to bring forth a new baseline in terms of genuine and sustainable wellness changes.

Much of my published work in *JCSWB* focuses on policing, guided by a consistent objective: to illuminate the humanity within the profession. While officers are often called upon to perform extraordinary, "super-human" acts under immense pressure, it is essential to remember that they remain human. While these narratives can frequently be marked by trauma, pain, and suffering, space must also be made for professionalism, brother/sisterhood, resilience, and hope. The nobility of policing continues to thrive and thankfully the *JCSWB* is making sure the message is being dispersed far and wide. I am in awe of what the *JCSWB* accomplished this past decade, how I have been a small part of it, and in awe of what is still to come.

Even when identities remain unknown, individual narratives are essential threads in the broader tapestry of community safety and well-being. Through these individual stories, the dignity and shared humanity at the heart of this field continue to be revealed. Rita Charon, Narrative Medicine founder, reminds us that "there is a life in its unity that cannot be seen in its parts, yet one must see the parts in order to see the whole" (Charon, 2017, p. 180). Therefore, it is fitting, in closing, to return to a single story:

"Awe is something that causes you to pause and recognize that which is greater than oneself. [Awe is] something that creates a sense of peace in an otherwise turbulent world. Awe is that which makes what may be causing you strife seem much more insignificant. Awe for me is a pure perspective adjuster" (Thompson, 2023a, Table 2).

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

#### AUTHOR AFFILIATION

\*College of Leadership and Public Service, Lipscomb University, Nashville, TN, USA.

#### REFERENCES

- Bratton, B., & Perez, C. (2023). NYPD pathways to wellness: "R U OK". *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 8(Suppl\_1), S7–S8. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.304>
- Charon, R. (2017). A framework for teaching close reading. In R. Charon, S. DasGupta, N. Hermann, C. Irvine, E. R. Marcus, E. R. Colón, D. Spencer, & M. Spiegel (Eds.), *The principles and practice of narrative medicine* (pp. 180-208). Oxford Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med/9780199360192.001.0001>
- Drew, J. M., & Martin, S. (2023). Mental health and wellness initiatives supporting United States law enforcement personnel: The current state-of-play. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 8(Suppl\_1), S12–S22. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.298>
- Edwards, G. (2023). I'm not faking being sick, I'm faking being well: The need for leadership in mental health for policing. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 8(Suppl\_1), S50–S56. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.294>
- Frank, A. W. (2010). *Letting stories breathe: A socio-narratology*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Jackson, L., & Theroux, M. (2023). Police need wellness checks too: Embedding a culture of wellness and resilience in policing. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 8(Suppl\_1), S4–S6. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.311>
- Launer, J. (2024). John Launer: Letting patients' stories breathe. *BMJ*, 384, q83. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.q83>
- Muindi, F. J., Ramachandran, L., & Tsai, J. W. (2020). Human narratives in science: The power of storytelling. *Trends in Molecular Medicine*, 26(3), 249–251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.molmed.2019.12.001>
- Rinkoff, P. B. (2023). Prevalence, pattern, and a leader's intervention—The impact of alcohol abuse in police and public safety organizations. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 8(Suppl\_1), S46–S49. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.299>
- Thompson, J. (2020). Enhancing resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic: A thematic analysis and evaluation of the warr:or21 program. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 5(2), 51–56. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.134>
- Thompson, J. (2022a). Enhancing resilience: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of The Awe Project. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 7(3), 93–110. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.265>
- Thompson, J. (2022b). Awe: Helping leaders address modern policing problems. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 7(2), 53–58. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.239>
- Thompson, J. (2023a). Narrative Health: Examining the relationship between the phenomenon of awe and resilience and well-being. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 8(2), 85–98. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.321>
- Thompson, J. (2023b). Police well-being interventions: Using awe narratives to promote resilience: This article is related directly to the First European Conference on Law Enforcement and Public Health (LEPH) held in Umea, Sweden in May 2023. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 8(4), 197–204. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.337>
- Thompson, J. (2025a). NASA leadership: Utilizing awe-narratives to enhance well-being. *Frontiers in Space Technologies*, 6, 1652557. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frspt.2025.1652557>
- Thompson, J. (2025b). *Narrative psychology: Examining the science of awe stories in fostering resilience and well-being* [Doctoral thesis]. Edinburgh Napier University, School of Health and Social Care, Edinburgh, Scotland. <https://doi.org/10.17869/enu.2025.4920106>

Thompson, J. (2026). Why we “craft”: The significance of narratives in aerospace healthcare and beyond. *Space Education & Strategic Applications*, 6(1), 35–41. <https://doi.org/10.18278/sesa.6.1.4>

Thompson, J., & Launer, J. (2025). Illuminating humanity: Narrative medicine practices for crisis negotiators. *Journal of Police and Criminal*

*Psychology*, 40(3), 524–528. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-025-09756-4>

Thompson, J., & Tam-Seto, L. (2023). Resetting and informing a new baseline for wellness in policing. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 8(Supp\_1), S2–S3. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.309>