

How EMDR helped me.

On September 30, 2013, I received a phone call from my Dad. "Jennifer, the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia just called me. Kathy has been missing from her resort bungalow for seven days and no one can find her," he said. I was in shock and confused, "Kathy, our Kathy, as in my sister?" Dad hesitated and then replied, "Yes."

Early the next morning my mother called. Her tone was faint as she said, "You need to sit down." She paused, there was an eerie silence. I panicked with anticipation, "Kathy's dead isn't she?" I could feel my mom's pain through phone, "Yes.....she is." Suddenly my mind went numb and my body became limp as searing heat penetrated my heart. I screamed in disbelief, "Why God, why did this have to happen to her?" Life stopped at that moment and hell on earth began for my family.

We soon learned from the embassy that Kathy was brutally murdered while vacationing on a beautiful island in Cambodia. My mind replayed her brutal attack over and over again and the tremendous fear and agony that she possibly endured during her violent ambush. Gut wrenching pain, shock and heartache physically resonated through my mind and body as I imagined her death over and over again.

Not only was I feeling my own pain, but it was unbearable to watch my parents go through the tragic loss of their oldest daughter; witnessing their agony when I hand delivered my sister's ashes. On top of my grief was anger that I carried towards the Cambodian authorities for trying to cover up her death as "natural causes" and the lack of support that I received from our embassy to help locate her killer. Months passed but I still could not shake the grief away; I was not able to wrap my head around her killing. Her death seemed surreal.

I tried to find relief through prayer. I hoped that by physically going through these motions of clearing out her condo and closing her estate, it would help me process the pain. But nothing seemed to alleviate the deep heartache that I was suffering. Finally after almost a year and a half of sleepless nights and feeling like a walking "zombie", I knew that I needed to take action.

Desperate for some relief, I went to Hospice of Santa Barbara. I was willing to try anything to ease my sorrow. I knew that EMDR was for people suffering from PTSD and possibly it would help me. My counselor explained that we all "file" experiences inside of our brain but with trauma there is nowhere to store atrocities; instead these anguishes are buried in the back of our brain causing lifelong havoc. EMDR helps release those disturbing tragedies by unblocking intense emotional wounds allowing healing to occur.

She talked me through the details of my sister's death. As I verbalized my pain, the

bilateral stimulation helped to release the traumatic images that haunted me. After a couple of sessions the dark cloud that was hovering inside of my brain almost cleared completely. I felt "lighter" with a sense of calmness.

EMDR has by no mean been a cure-all at easing the gut wrenching pain, shock and heartache of my sister's murder, but it has helped in my healing process. Although I will never have complete closure and there will always be a hole of emptiness in my heart, EMDR made the hole a little smaller.