

## **My First EMDR Experience – published December 14, 2014**

By Theresa Hubbard

After I remarried, 12 years ago, I was surprised to find that I had similar emotional reactions during disagreements with my spouse.

In my first marriage we went to four different counselors over a six year period. Unfortunately the counselors we saw never explained to us where our reactions to more intense emotional experiences come from and how they are strengthened over time, let alone what we could do to actually change those reactions. It was easy to continue blaming our unhappiness and struggles on each other and those around us.

After getting over that similar emotional experiences (being dismissed, not protected, intimidated, anger, and many others) came up again in my second marriage, I felt very fortunate that I was able to see, even a glimpse, that there had to be a connection that focused on "me" having a part to play in this experience.

My current husband had been married before as well, and was experiencing similar things. We made a promise to figure out whatever was happening for both of us. And thus began this journey of intentionally exploring what is happening inside our brain and body.

I sought out a therapist for us and we hit the jackpot! Janis was patient, compassionate, direct, and knowledgeable. She suggested that we try a trauma technique called Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). She explained that going through the process would help my brain reprocess current intense life events, connecting them to negative beliefs about myself, and possibly connect them to other life events. This reprocessing would move these memories out of the flight, fight or freeze part of my brain and allow my whole brain to process those events. Having my whole brain process these events would allow my body to calm down and not to feel so threatened, and provide me the ability to respond without the emotional capability of a 10 year old.

As I sat facing Janis, she asked me recall a recent event that I felt was traumatic for me. She asked me to hold in my mind the most difficult part, the emotions that I felt, and where I felt them inside my body. I also needed to hold on to the negative belief that I held about myself (in this case, "I am not safe"), and then utilizing a scaling method, recognize how much it bothers me and how true is that negative belief to me.

Then she asked me to follow her fingers, which were placed directly in front of me about two feet from my face at eye level. Then she moved her fingers from side to side, asking me to hold my head still while I followed them. After a few minutes she would stop and say, "What do you get now?" and I would briefly relay what was happening in my mind, then she would say, "Go with that". After about 20 minutes of this process, I noticed that my body and mind were not as anxious when thinking about the event. I also noticed that it was difficult to stay focused, that I felt that I was doing it wrong, and I was curious about whether it would actually be helpful.

I still very clearly remember the experience of the next disagreement that I had with my husband (though I do not remember what it was about). I was sitting on the stairs, looking at him, and noticing that my body was not reacting at all. I was shocked, amazed, and hooked!

While I am sure that there were other times in my life that I had the experience of neuroplasticity, this was the first time I was actually aware it was happening.

This experience, no doubt, set the stage for what was to come. This experience was the intentional beginning of a life long journey of healing, and the chance to experience authentic connection to myself and others.