

# THE TIPPING POINT

There is life after mental trauma



By **TAMMY CHATMAN**  
Flight for Life, NIOA Region 5 Director  
and  
**BETSY RANDOLPH**  
Oklahoma Highway Patrol

**TAMMY:** This is the story written by and about my good friend Betsy Randolph's journey through PTSD. It was brought on by the accumulation of years of trauma on top of trauma until Betsy reached the "tipping point" that nearly sent her to the place of no return.

The encouraging part of Betsy's story is that she finally realized that reaching out for help was not a weakness but rather a sign of strength.

Thanks to Dr. Tania Glenn and her use of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), a technique that has been extensively researched and proven effective for the treatment of trauma, she found her way back to a normal life from the PTSD that nearly destroyed her.

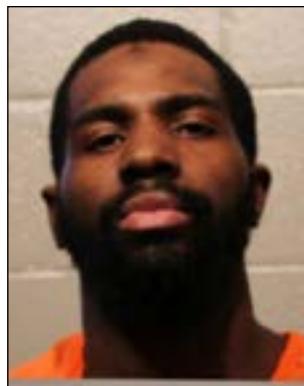
**BETSY:** "There is life after mental trauma," Tania said. I studied her hazel eyes. They flashed gold as they held mine, never wavering, never feigning her interest in why I'd traveled to Austin from Oklahoma City to see her.

Her gaze was steady, as were her hands. Her thin fingers rested easy on her jeans. That threw me off guard a little — seeing her in jeans. She was laid back, cool; my kind of cool.

I consider myself modest, but if forced, I'll



**LT. BETSY RANDOLPH**  
OK Highway Patrol



**ALTON NOLEN**  
Convicted of beheading  
one, attempting to kill  
another

produce an impressive resume. Trusting people — head shrinks especially — isn't something you'll find on my resume. So then why, why did my eyes start to leak every time I opened my mouth to talk to this cool cat across the coffee table from me? I'm talking every freaking second my mouth opened; my eyes were dripping like a sieve, while at the same time I cussed this weakness within me for showing itself to this stranger, to a doctor—no less. I'd driven eight hours at the request (nagging) of my friend Tammy Chatman who obviously was mistaken about me being "broken."

Tammy insisted that I needed to see Tania. She didn't come right out and say it, but I knew she thought, "I'd gone 'round the bend" was going to harm myself or worse.

**TAMMY:** One night, I happened to be on Facebook and one of my PIO friends who also knows Betsy, sent me a private message. In that message was a news clip from CNN with an interview of Betsy by Geraldo Rivera. I watched the clip and couldn't believe my eyes. There was my friend Betsy, a vivacious, sassy and fun-loving person, looking back at me with that "1,000-mile stare."

I reached out to Betsy after that, over and over again, trying to get her to see my friend Dr. Tania Glenn, a clinical psychologist in Austin, who works with first responders, military and others who suffer from PTSD. She is also a certified practitioner of EMDR.

I had met Tania a number of years prior through our work with the Survivors Network for the air medical community.

I talked to Betsy about Tania and EMDR and she agreed to see her but then, at the last minute, Betsy backed out of the appointment. She told me she was going camping and she was OK, which was not the case as the months that followed would reveal.

I was disappointed that Betsy did not follow through with seeing Tania but I still kept reaching out to check on how things were going. I could see Betsy was losing interest in the things she loves such as gardening, writing, and life in general. There were no signs of hope or joy in her voice when we talked and the feedback on Betsy's

See TIPPING POINT, page 8

# EMDR

## What is EMDR?

EMDR, or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, is a method of treating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

## How does it work?

The patient recalls a traumatic event while simultaneously undergoing bilateral stimulation, which can consist of moving the eyes from side to side, vibrations or tapping movements on different sides of the body or tones delivered through one ear, then the other, via headphones.

## What does that do?

EMDR enables people to heal from the symptoms of emotional distress that are the result of disturbing life experiences.

EMDR therapy shows the mind can heal itself much as the body recovers from physical trauma. The brain's information processing system naturally moves toward mental health. If the system is blocked or imbalanced by the impact of a disturbing event, the emotional wound festers and can cause intense suffering. Once the block is removed, healing resumes.

SOURCE: [WWW.EMDR.COM](http://WWW.EMDR.COM)



Oklahoma Highway Patrol Lt. Betsy Randolph discusses her encounter Oct. 1, 2010, with Alton Nolen, at the 2015 NIOA Annual Training Conference in Clearwater, FL. Nolen had a suspended driver's license and warrants for his arrest the night Randolph stopped him. Nolen overpowered Randolph, and ran into the woods. After a 12-hour manhunt, he was arrested and taken to jail. Four years later, Nolen decapitated a former co-worker and assaulted another hours after he was fired.

## TIPPING POINT, cont.

condition from my other PIO friends in the area was not positive. I feared that she would not survive this.

Then out of the blue another opportunity presented itself where I thought that I could convince Betsy to seek help. She was on the agenda to speak at the NIOA Annual Training Conference in Clearwater in August 2015. I was so happy to see Betsy but knew immediately that things were worse than I had suspected. Gone was the confident and vibrant person I knew and in its place was someone full of pain and fear as she faced the prospect of talking about the Nolen encounter in front of her peers.

Betsy barely managed to get through the presentation. After it was done I talked to her again, hoping to convince her that life was not going to get better unless she reached out to get help. Betsy promised me she would go see Tania.

So I called Tania and asked (begged) her to give Betsy a second chance. To my relief she said yes. I called, texted, sent private Facebook messages and emailed Betsy to make her promise that she would go. Betsy made the appointment with Tania and kept promising me she would show up but I was afraid she would cancel at the last minute. The day she was to drive to Austin I contacted her; she was on her way! I sent a text to Tania and asked that she let me know if Betsy showed up for the appointment. What a wonderful feeling when Betsy texted me that night after her appointment and said "I wish I had done this a year ago!" I thanked God for opening Betsy's mind and heart so that she would accept the assistance that she so desperately needed.

**BETSY:** "Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional," Tania interrupted my thoughts.

A nod of my head was my only response. I didn't trust my voice for the moment, but in my head the voices were screaming — like they had been for months.

"You deserve to suffer," the voices shouted. "This is all your fault, you coward. You should have killed him when you had the chance." Tania prodded me to speak. I think she got tired

See **TIPPING POINT**, page 9

**Betsy Randolph credits friend Tammy Chatman with encouraging her to seek help for the guilt and anger she felt after learning Alton Nolen killed a woman and assaulted another. Of Chatman, Randolph says, “A truer friend, I have not.”**



## TIPPING POINT, cont.

of watching me blow my nose and boohoo like a baby. She reached a hand out and gently touched my arm. So I told her the story of how I’d come to be sitting in her office. I started from the beginning, finally sharing with her — the consuming guilt that nearly killed me began as a bungled arrest.

On October 1, 2010, I’d just started back to work in Logan County, OK. I’d been off work for most of 2009, for a line-of-duty injury, requiring a reconstruction of my right wrist. So when I stopped Alton Alexander Nolen, his girlfriend, and baby around 6 p.m. on State Highway 33 west of Langston, I didn’t want to fight. I just wanted Nolen to comply with my requests. I’d stopped him for what I believed was a fake paper tag and, when his license came back suspended, I told him he was going to jail as he was sitting in my front passenger seat.

I came around the car and got a handcuff on his right wrist before he assaulted me, broke my finger, tearing ligaments off the bone when my fingers were caught in the handcuff. He ran away but after a 12-hour manhunt, the OHP tactical team brought my prisoner back to me, and I transported him to jail with additional charges.

Nolen could have gotten away any time before he assaulted me, but he likes to hurt people, especially women. He knew his license was suspended before he even walked back to my patrol car. And he knew there were two felony warrants for drug possession and possession with intent to distribute against him. He heard the dispatcher say that Oklahoma County wanted him and there was no bond. He was going to jail and there was no getting out. Still, he sat in my car and didn’t try to get away. He was calm, so I was calm. That was my mistake. One of many I made that day.

Fast forward four years. I was in Public Affairs and heard a woman had been killed at a food processing plant in Moore; it didn’t affect me

because it wasn’t a Patrol issue. I didn’t take any calls. Not until the next day, at least. That’s when a buddy from one of the news stations called and told me the guy that beheaded the woman at the food processing plant on September 25, 2014, was the same guy who assaulted a trooper back in 2010 in Logan County.

I still remember the goose bumps that covered my body as I realized what I was hearing and what it meant ... to me.

But what kept eating at me was the fact I didn’t do my job properly. In my opinion, I didn’t protect Colleen Hufford, the 54-year-old mother

*‘...what kept eating at me was the fact I didn’t do my job properly. In my opinion, I didn’t protect Colleen Hufford, the 54-year-old mother and grandmother Nolen beheaded. I didn’t do what I was sworn to do.’*

and grandmother Nolen beheaded. I didn’t do what I was sworn to do. Four years before, I’d struggled with a known felon who had two felony warrants and I’d let him hurt me. I’d allowed him to break my finger and run away. He even looked back over his shoulder as he ran because he knew I wanted to shoot him. He knew I wanted to kill him.

I let him hurt me and that I can deal with. But I let him kill and behead Colleen. I let him hack away at her co-worker Tracy Johnson’s neck, too. Those jagged, jugular scars she’ll see for the rest of her life ... those are

See TIPPING POINT, page 10

## TIPPING POINT, cont.

my fault.

Even though Nolen is on Oklahoma's death row now, his punishment will never be enough to relieve the guilt I feel.

I handled that guy (maggot) with kid gloves, partly because of all the racial controversy that was going on around the country concerning law enforcement. I was kind when I should have performed a felony arrest per policy, per my training. I spoke to him like he was human when he was anything but. Colleen's death weighs heavy on me, day in and day out. Tracy Johnson's mental struggles plague my heart. That's what I told Tania in her office that day.

I'm not going to lie. When Tania explained that she was going to use EMDR to help me I thought it was hocus pocus nonsense. But at this point I was willing to do it, partially so Tammy would leave me alone. I'd also gotten crossways with the brass at work for saying on national TV that I wished I had killed Nolen when I'd had the chance. I was angry all the time. I wanted to punch people in the face on every traffic stop, and even though I love Jesus — the F-word had become my go-to word for everything. So I knew something had to give. I wasn't me any longer. "Whatever Doc' — let's just get it over with," I thought.

"Relax," said Tania. "I just want you to breathe."

Afterward, I spent a couple of hours with one of Tania's associates, ate dinner then crashed at the hotel. I checked in with Tania before driving back to Oklahoma the next morning. What I told her was something that to this day still amazes me. "I didn't have any nightmares! I slept like the dead. That's the first night's sleep I've had without nightmares since this whole thing started."

EMDR was an emotional experience for me, one that was the key to unlocking the door to healing and recovery from trauma. We embraced, I didn't even cry, and I drove the speed limit all the way home. OK, that last part was a lie.

**TAMMY:** EMDR is the most proven intervention for healing trauma. EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a psychotherapy that enables people to heal from the symptoms and emotional distress that are the result of disturbing life experiences.

Repeated studies show that by using EMDR therapy people can experience the benefits of psychotherapy that once took years. It shows that the mind can heal from psychological trauma



much the same way the body recovers from physical trauma.

EMDR therapy combines different elements to maximize treatment effects. It gives attention to three time periods: the past, present and future. Focus is given to past disturbing memories and related events, then to current situations that cause distress, and finally to developing the skills and attitudes needed for positive future actions.

EMDR therapy uses an eight-phase treatment approach. The length of treatment depends upon the number of traumas and the age of PTSD onset. Generally, those with single-event adult-onset trauma can be successfully treated in less than five hours. Those with multiple traumas may require a longer treatment time.

**BETSY:** Tania and Tammy were both available to me any time I needed to text or call. Throughout the beheading trial, which gained international attention, when I was nauseous, angry, or anxious, Tania and Tammy were always available. They both have been beacons of light on a rocky shoreline as I felt myself being tossed to and fro, used and abused by the legal system I'd sworn and given my life to.

There were dark, stormy days that lingered for weeks — where I feared I'd never see land again; Days, where without my faith in God, I'd never have survived. I know He sent His angels to protect my feet from slipping; Angels in the

forms of friends and family who love me in spite of me. Angel/Warriors — like Tania and Tammy — who've linked arms with me to present a unified front against the enemy.

From the beginning, when I arrested Nolen, to when I came to NIOA to present in August 2015, "When a PIO Becomes the Story," I've learned that PTSD is about cumulative events, not just one event. I've learned how someone in law enforcement for more than 20 years can suffer multiple traumatic events — and those need to be addressed properly.

Think of it as carrying a backpack and every time you experience trauma it goes into the backpack. It gets heavier and heavier over time until you can no longer bear the weight. Eventually, you will experience a trauma, which becomes your "tipping point." You don't have to wait until then to seek help. If you seek help sooner, the backpack becomes lighter and easier to carry, but if you try to ignore the weight, you will seek other means in which to rid yourself of the pain. Those behaviors typically are negative. They can and do destroy families, lives and careers.

It's important that law enforcement professionals, other first responders and dispatchers get professional help to get past the mental trauma that holds us hostage and robs us of our peace. Mental trauma lies to us about who we are, about the good we do every day and, sometimes, it makes us want to harm ourselves — as if that will help anyone.

Only you can choose. You can decide to medicate yourself, ignore the symptoms and claim that you don't have a problem or need help or you can call someone who is certified and practices EMDR, like I did. I didn't want to keep on hurting or hurting my loved ones.

If suffering really is optional, I chose not to do it anymore. I'm living proof; there is life after mental trauma. There are grandbabies to spoil, motorcycles to ride, flowers and trees to plant, books that need to be read and written. Life is good and it is worth living.

There's no way I can ever thank my friend Tammy for caring so much for me and insisting that I get the help I needed, but I'd like to try. You see, I have this mental image of Tammy's tiny frame, kneeling at the front of the stage with her mammoth camera — cheering me on as I presented in Clearwater. She wasn't taking photos, she was being present. She was there when I needed her. And I desperately needed her.

So, thank you, Tammy. A truer friend, I have not. ●