

## Two Steps Forward, One Step Back (Yes, Relapse is Part of Recovery)

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When people are working towards changing something about their behaviour or lifestyle that isn't working for them, such as patterns of over-functioning or caretaking in their relationships (otherwise known as "codependency"), they sometimes find that their change process involves taking two steps forward and, frustratingly, one step backward.

Often people are hard on themselves about this, but it's helpful to remember the saying in the recovery field that "*relapse is part of recovery*." This concept applies to more than just substance abuse or addiction. Old habits die hard sometimes, and we have to integrate our new selves mentally, physically, emotionally, and energetically/spiritually in order for changes to stick. This takes time, and involves practicing new and sometimes uncomfortable behaviour.

I find this poem by Portia Nelson to be a useful piece to help people see where they are in the change process. Seeing their own evolution in this poem helps give them hope and faith in their development.

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN FIVE SHORT CHAPTERS

by Portia Nelson

#### I (One)

I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk  
I fall in.  
I am lost ... I am helpless.  
It isn't my fault.  
It takes me forever to find a way out.

#### II

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I pretend I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe I am in the same place  
but, it isn't my fault.  
It still takes a long time to get out.

#### III

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I still fall in ... it's a habit.  
my eyes are open  
I know where I am.  
It is my fault.  
I get out immediately.

#### IV

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.

#### V

I walk down another street.

People often come for help when they are in "chapter" (or stage) 1 or 2 of their process, and *as their self-awareness and ability to take self-responsibility grows*, they usually begin to move into the third stage where they recognize where they are when they engage in old behaviours, and they get out immediately.

People often aren't really ready to recognize themselves in this poem until they are at "Chapter 3" in the process, *because before that they are still feeling like the victim of their experience and their choices*. **Now, they can begin to take more responsibility for their lives.**

Whether we are choosing a different lifestyle, or a more healthy partnership, there is a process that has to evolve in order to completely make the change. *During this time, we may find ourselves making less-than-healthy choices even when we know we "shouldn't."*

The benefit of these "relapses" is that they usually underline to us why we want to make the change and increase our commitment to following through and doing things differently the next time--in other words, moving into chapter 4 and then, finally, to chapter 5!

**Where are you in the change process?** If you want to move to the next "chapter" you could ask yourself some questions, such as *where do you blame others or feel like a victim? Is there a place where you pretend you don't see the hole? Are your old habits getting in the way of transformation?*

If you're struggling to make a change in your life or your relationship, and could use some support in the change process, please call me at **1 888 504 4111** for a **free 20 minute consultation**. If you don't live in Victoria, please remember that I offer phone counselling and clients find this option very effective.