

1/8/2019

Dear Portia Nelson,

If someone looked back into my life up until a couple years ago, they would see many things. They would also see one thing that got repeated over and over again — blaming my actions and feelings on others. The problem was I didn't realize that I was doing this until I read your poem, *Autobiography in Five Short Chapters*.

I found your poem in a book one day that my mom gave me. It was a slightly interesting book, the type I would usually read when I was bored. In this book I came to find your poem. When I first read your poem my mind was blown. I was surprised that such a simple text could make such a large effect. This short poem with the metaphor of falling into a hole in the sidewalk made me look at my whole life in a totally different way. I was very shocked and also embarrassed when I realized that I could relate to your poem. In fact, what I had been doing my whole life was exactly the first two chapters of your poem.

Just like your poem, I would blame my actions or feelings on someone else, either thinking that it wasn't my fault or pretending that it wasn't. I would blame my sister for my actions and feelings when I got mad at her, or I would blame a group member if I didn't get a good grade or have a good performance. This didn't happen in every situation. When it did, I didn't say it to the person directly, but I thought about it and would even talk about it at home sometimes. Also, like your poem, after I blamed someone, I would normally end up with more problems, more work, or in more trouble.

When I saw myself in your poem, I knew I had to change something. I didn't want to fall in that trap of blaming people again when I was older. It could mess up my life and chances, or worse, somebody else's life and chances. I asked myself again and again what I needed to do to stop myself. I couldn't just tell myself to never blame my actions on someone else starting right then. I knew that was near to impossible. Then it came to me. Being proactive. If I could try my hardest to be proactive, I wouldn't even go into the direction of blaming. I learned that it was very, very hard to be truly proactive. But little by little, I have gotten better. And little by little I see myself moving to chapters three, four and finally chapter five of your poem.

In chapter three of your poem you see the hole and still fall into it, but realize it is your fault that you fell in. Your poem made me see the hole in the ground and realize that my actions are my choices and they therefore are my fault. When I realized that, I moved on to chapters four and five — moving around the hole and then walking down a completely different street.

Your poem didn't just give me insights about myself, but also about the world. If everyone would take responsibility for their actions, the world would have a lot less problems. Every day you can hear people blaming someone else for their actions. All the time in class you hear kids saying that it is their teacher's fault they got a bad grade. You hear people lie to cover up their actions. You hear people complain and blame someone for the make up work they have to do because they were procrastinating. Those are only a few examples of what people do.

I believe that almost everyone can relate to your poem even if they don't realize it. Its simplicity and metaphors help explain the trouble that I am constantly trying to stop. If only people could see the hole they are falling into, then they could start to change right away. The world would have less problems and people would be proactive. But for now, they will have to either read your poem or

will have to figure it out themselves. People just don't understand everything they are told. That is why we need poems and stories like yours to tell us. Your poem has certainly helped me see the hole and get out faster.

I still make mistakes like all humans, but I try not to fall in the hole. If I do, I remember what your poem has taught me — to take responsibility for my actions. Thank you for giving me a new perspective that changed the way I live and see things now.

Sincerely,  
Clara Libby Winkel