

Six Months to Get a Life

Wednesday 26th March

My decree absolute came through today. I am officially divorced.

I have never been divorced before. I thought it would feel different – either like being released from the proverbial life sentence, or maybe in my more pessimistic moments like being a discarded cigarette, cast adrift with the life sucked out of me. I didn't know whether to celebrate or cry. In the end I just changed my Facebook status to single and went off to work.

Despite my divorce, the world seems to be proceeding as usual. It is raining, the Russians and Ukrainians are arguing, the Northern line was packed and my fellow commuters were determined to get to work before me. Most managed it too. No one congratulated me on my divorce. No one seemed to notice that I wasn't wearing a wedding ring. Oh well, life goes on I suppose.

But what will life look like for a 42-year-old newly-divorced man with two kids? Am I destined to grow old alone, bitter and twisted with only the telly and the occasional visit from family I don't really know to keep me going? Or can I make a new life for myself that involves being a proper dad, going out, meeting new people and even getting the occasional bit of sex from time to time?

Tempting as it is to wallow in self-pity, spending the months to come immersing myself in soap operas and made-up dramas rather than acting them out myself, I have, this very day, decided that I will not feel sorry for myself. I will not be 'done to'. I won't mope around.

In exactly six months' time, on 26th September, I will be 43 years old. Birthdays aren't normally a big thing for me but this one will be. I am going to throw a party and invite everyone I know. Well, maybe everyone except my ex. And my friends are going to celebrate my new life with me. I am going to get a life in the next six months.

There, I have said it. If I say it enough times I might start believing it; which is why I am writing this diary. I am making myself a commitment, setting it down in black and white, that I will take control. I will get off my backside and make things happen. I will forge a new life for myself, one with my kids, with new friends and, who knows, maybe even a new love. I will sort my life out and I will do it by my birthday.

I am going to commit events to writing whenever I can, to make myself push on rather than letting life pass me by. And you, my mythical reader, can assist me. You can let me rant without interruption. If you like, you can be my therapist but I am not paying you. Feel free to kick me up the backside when you are reading this and you notice too much negativity. Don't go easy on me either. If you'll forgive me a football analogy, don't be Phil Neal to my Graham

Taylor; 'do I not like that'. I don't want your loyalty. I want you to push me to get over my divorce and achieve a new life that is fulfilling and fun for me and my kids.

Just so that you get to know me a bit, and maybe even empathise with me, I will tell you a bit about me and my situation. My name is Graham Hope. I am a 42-year-old divorcee with two kids – Jack, fourteen, and Sean, twelve. I did have a wife but I haven't got one now. I did have a great house in Raynes Park on the edge of leafy Surrey but I haven't got that now either.

I am no Brad Pitt or Harry Styles in the looks department, or any other department for that matter. I have a more 'lived in' look, with a big nose and teeth that belong to a 42-year-old man rather than a Barbie doll. I am no ugly fat mug either, mind.

I am currently living with my parents in Morden, at the end of the northern line and just past the end of civilisation. That's a double whammy if ever there was one. I am living with my parents. And I am living in Morden.

Am I bitter about my situation? Well, if truth be told, yes, sometimes I am. My divorce has forced a radical rethink of my dreams. Gone are the thoughts of growing old with my ex, travelling the world, seeing the sights and occasionally popping home to hear about Jack's latest move during the football transfer window and Sean's latest century for England. Now I have resorted to dreaming about my chances of pulling Kylie Minogue. OK, so the dreams still aren't too bad but the problems start when I wake up and realise my future isn't as mapped out as it used to be.

You will notice that I keep referring to 'my ex'. I have this thing about telling you her name. She is a person and until recently she was important in my life. I suppose as the mother of our children she is still important. But this diary is not about her; it is about me. If you want to read her diary then you are in the wrong place. If you want to sympathise with her then feel free but I won't be giving you any help. She does actually write a diary; at least she used to. I flicked through it once when I came across it when I was looking for her car keys in her handbag. The one comment that stuck in my mind was, 'Graham has a big ego and a small dick. I wish it was the other way around.'

Back to me; in the wake of my divorce I'm a little bit lonely, missing my kids when they aren't with me, worried about money and petrified about how long it will be before I feel loved again. In short, I have a long way to go to sort my life out. But on the positive side, I have some ideas. I might try internet dating as it could be a bit of a laugh, I am looking forward to saying 'yes' a few more times when my mates ask me out for a beer and ... actually I can't think of anything else positive at the moment.

My mates didn't ask me out for a beer tonight. There was no football on the telly either. So tonight I stayed in with my dad and drank London Pride out of a can, which is pretty much how I have spent most evenings since my wife and I went our separate ways (she didn't go anywhere but I came here). My

dad has fallen asleep with his head on the table now, so I have been left in peace to give myself a pep talk.

Taking control of my life is a start, but if you take control of a car and don't know where you are going, you may well go round in circles or worse still end up in Morden. So I need to set some goals. The therapists on the telly are always telling people to have goals. So after much thought and another can of London Pride, here are mine. By my 43rd birthday I will:

- 1) Be a good dad
- 2) Get somewhere else to live
- 3) Get a social life
- 4) Get a more interesting job
- 5) Get some decent bottled lager in
- 6) Get fit

Now the more observant of you will have noticed that goals 5 and 6 might be somewhat conflicting. In my defence, I am not striving for perfection, only a normal life.

And I have six months to get it.