

I'm looking back at my past year, and thinking about where I was precisely 12 months ago: it's the 11th of June 2018 now, and I came to Little Dale on the 16th June 2017. So a year ago, I was in a chaotic week in the run-up to rehab: fresh out of prison, fresh out of court seeing my daughters put under a care order because I couldn't look after myself, let alone look after them. I didn't think I'd survive that week: I'd spent the previous best-part-of-decade on a steady downward slide, progressing from 'a couple of glasses of wine at night to help me sleep' to, in that very final week, tearing apart the house and scraping together loose change to stay drunk for every waking minute: I hated it, and myself for doing it, but I just couldn't stop. In that decade I'd also lost my daughters, job, career, reputation, driving license, and a number of friends. It wasn't a straight-line slide - I'd cobbled together times of sobriety now and then, but it never stuck and the overall direction was one-way. That final week is hard to really remember: my body seemed to have gone into permanent 'fight or flight', I was panicky, confused and clammy, couldn't remember things from one minute to the next and felt out of control of myself and events. I thought I might die. I didn't much mind, if it got me some rest, excepting that I didn't want my girls to have to cope with that news.

One year on, things are pretty different. I'm a whisker shy of three months out, after a 9 month rehab. I'm healthier than I've been for a while. I'm still living near the Hall, whilst I make sure I can do all the stuff I've been taught in rehab now I'm 'out', with nobody checking up on me - and building up my resilience ahead of going home. I've got paid work, and it feels great to be useful - as well as to be rebuilding a career, so that one day I can support myself and my family. I've a little way to go before my daughters can come home, and we miss each other lots - today, I'm concentrating on proving I can stay sober, to myself, to my girls and to the people that keep them safe for now.

All this stuff isn't always easy - there are still problems, aftermath to sort out, and losses to grieve. All those bring difficult feelings. The big difference is I don't have to drink on those feelings: I've learned to handle them differently, and right now I'm healthy, sober and safe. And my girls and I have lots of hope. I didn't learn all this easily - I needed every second of my time in the Hall, and still get support there: but I got given a chance to do things differently at Little Dale, and I'm really grateful for that chance. I plan to put it to good use.