

CHRONICLE



2015

Andrew Woodmaker

**As 2015 dawns,
so do new opportunities.**

In this second year's worth of entries from a diary stored on a futuristic recording device found after a house fire, Andrew Woodmaker's life takes an unexpected turn.

2015 is the year he will find new challenges, both personal and professional. He will fail, and he will succeed, both beyond his expectations. And he will experience first hand the damage one man can cause to further his own despicable desires.

Nobody knows if it is a work of fiction or a true record of how things happened, and will happen. By reading the diary, some things may have already begun to change, and the future is not what it was.

But it could be that this is how it would have been.

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by

ANDREW WOODMAKER

Edited from recording device by

Michael Simms

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Dedicated to my mother

Who is there for us far more than she realises.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Thursday, January 1st to Saturday, January 10th 2015

So, here it is, 2015, a new year. Got a New Year's resolution, and it is to - yeah right, like I'm gonna put that in here. I'm hoping it'll be something I can put in here later though, as a successful resolution completed. We'll see.

The first few days of the new year were quiet and relaxing. We celebrated the new year by giving the cat a name. CoNN, an abbreviation for *Cat of No Name*. He's still pretty sedate, not really moving around much, but he's seemed to relax over the last few days. Just a little. We caught him sniffing round the bedroom, but as soon as he saw us, he bolted back to the beanbag, and wouldn't come off again. I think he's going to end up a really nervous cat.

The weather turned extremely cold, hitting -14 on several nights. The news reports came in over the following days of pensioners found dead in their unheated homes. The problem of the winter fuel allowance hasn't gone away, and it's now claimed its first victims. There's a lot of blame going around. The government blames the power companies, the power companies blame the government, and everyone blames the EU, whose conflicting law is preventing any headway being made. I don't think it's actually the fault of the EU, it's more that both sides have a convenient scapegoat that a lot of the country hates anyway, and so they'll capitalise on that whenever they can. In the meantime, old people keep dying. But they're old so I guess nobody cares. Grrr.

Thankfully my parents aren't that old. Taima's are, but they're actually quite well off, and I don't see them having heating problems. I expect they'll head off to a warmer country for a while. Must be nice to be able to do that.

The snow hadn't melted one centimetre by the time work started again on the 5th, but a lot of it had been trampled down over the previous few days. No more snow this year so far, but it hasn't once gone above zero. What's left of the snow is all hard and frozen, the kind you don't want to be hit with in a snowball fight. Oh yeah.

mentioning those, yeah I have to confess we had a moment of reverting to childhood and we had a big snowball fight on New Year's Day. I won. I won a lot. Then I didn't win. Snow is really cold when you think you've won and then on the way home it suddenly mysteriously gets dumped down your back.

Back at work, I did a story on the snow, and another on the danger to the elderly from the lack of heating. My article encouraged readers to check on elderly neighbours and see if they're OK, maybe invite them round for a cup of tea, that kind of thing. I had a pang of conscience too. I honestly have no idea if my neighbours are old or not. Our flat is the top floor of a house converted into two flats, and I don't think I've even seen my neighbours downstairs. We've lived in Didcot for what, nine months now, and we've never met them. I didn't want to go knocking on peoples doors just to see if they were old and cold, when I didn't even know if they were old or not. I'd feel silly if someone young opened the door, so I'll assume that they're OK unless I get evidence to the contrary. I'll keep my eye open though, and try and catch a glimpse of them, so I'll know in future.

I sometimes don't understand the boss, I really don't. He's often a right - well, some rude word that varies depending on what stupid thing he did this week, and then we found out that he'd decided to donate the entire profit from the first issue in the new year to one of the new heat for the elderly charities that have sprung up in the last few months.

I just don't know how to read him. He makes me angry so often, and then he goes and does something really nice. I hate that, if he'd only consistently be an asshat, I could hate him better. Now I suppose I have to try and see both sides of him. I still hate him though.

Taima's mood went right downhill again as soon as she had her first late night at work. I do wonder why she's a teacher if she hates the job so much and so quickly after getting it. She didn't hate her last job like this, but then that was a different school, and also one much closer to home, a quick twenty minute tube ride instead of a train and a bus in each direction, taking about two hours out of her day every day. I guess too, that each school, each class of every year, is

different. If you have well behaved classes it's got to be easier than a room full of kids who just want to cause trouble. I've tried cheering her up but she gets uppity at me if I try too much, so I'm inclined to just leave her to it, and let her work it out. No sense in getting my head bitten off just for trying to be nice.

On Friday, I went back to see Dr. Smith for the first time since the breakthrough session we'd had last year. We talked about the accident in detail for the first time. She said I needed to talk about the source of the problem so I could learn to get past it. I could see it all so clearly in my head though, I could smell it, see it, hear it, still so clearly. I left feeling worse than I arrived, but apparently, it was a good session. It doesn't *feel* like it was a good session, that's for sure.

Sunday, January 11th to Saturday, January 17th 2015

Well, this has been a week of big changes for me. On Monday, I was reading through last week's paper in the break room, and spotted a job advert for a position quite like mine, a junior reporter, at the Oxford Daily. I ummed and ahed about it for a bit, and then called them up, had a chat with one of the managers there that I'd gotten to know over the last year, and he seemed quite keen on me joining the team. On Wednesday I got a call from them, and I was expecting an interview, but they said what's the point, they've already met me, seen my work, and wanted to offer me the job right away. I was pretty stunned. In just two days, my whole job situation had changed.

The boss took it badly. I can't say I'm surprised. I'm to work my months notice period in the office and I'm now under all kinds of restrictions. I'm not writing new articles, I have to do filing, make tea, keep the place tidy, cover reception at lunch, and generally be a dogsbody with no real purpose. Oh how I love his little power trips. What a petty petty little man he is.

My last day here is on the 11th of February, and I start at the Daily on the 17th, so I get a few days off before I start the new job. I'm suddenly nervous all over again. I'd settled here at the Gazette, I knew what I was doing, my articles were usually good enough to

print, and now suddenly I'm paranoid I'll be fired a month after getting the new job. I know they know my articles, they bought one last year that they liked, but still, I can't help worrying. It was all done by phone, did they realise which me it was they just hired? Maybe they got me mixed up with someone else here. Yes, I know I'm being paranoid, but this is my diary so I'm allowed. If you didn't want my unadulterated feelings of inadequacy, you shouldn't have bought it, should you!

Sunday, January 18th to Saturday, January 24th 2015

Work this week has been hell. The boss is just trying to make me miserable I think, and he's succeeding. He had me sit and wait in a side room at the paper for a 'meeting' that never happened. He came in once an hour or so to make sure I was still sitting there, with absolutely nothing at all to do, and told me the meeting would start shortly, and then left again. It may have been the longest day of my life. At the end of the day he told me to go home, we'd do the meeting tomorrow. I almost punched him one, but the last thing I need is to get arrested over his little power trip, so I smiled and said I looked forwards to it. I think my smile and enthusiasm dampened his enjoyment of it, as the next day he didn't repeat the experiment.

The big news this week was a bit of a shock to everyone. Asda, the supermarket, was suddenly closed down without warning by its parent company Wal-Mart. Workers showed up for work to find the doors locked and management telling them to go home.

The news we have so far is that the company had been in the red for a while, and Wal-Mart decided that the UK market was just too tough to make an easy profit, so they just cut their losses. Nobody's sure if they're looking for a buyer, but if not, this'll be a disaster for the country, as Asda employs over 100,000 people. This would add significantly to the countries unemployment problems if nobody buys the company and re-opens the stores. I can imagine politicians are screaming down phones trying to get something done. I find the image strangely pleasing.

Thankfully I don't shop at Asda, and nobody I know works there, so this has no direct effect on me, but indirectly, I can imagine to finance an extra hundred thousand unemployed, some more austerity packages will be introduced and who knows what that will do, and who it will hurt. A quick bit of maths and I reckon it'll add at least another billion pounds to the benefits bill each year. I really hope this is a one-off blip, rather than the start of another round of big companies closing again.

CoNN, the Cat of No Name, finally got his cone off. He hated being put in a box and taken to the vet, but seems a lot happier now, and has spent all the time since the cone was taken off just lying on his beanbag grooming himself. He still flinches when either of us stroke him, though only at the start. He occasionally even purrs, but that's pretty rare. I take it as a good sign though, maybe he's finally warming up to us.

My latest session with Dr. Smith was a bit better. I've been doing the mind exercises she set for me to learn how to deal with the problem. She thinks I'm making good progress, which is what I want to hear. I don't call these sessions a waste of time any more, but I'd definitely like my Friday evenings back please.

Sunday, January 25th to Saturday, January 31st 2015

Watching the news about the Asda shutdown is like watching vultures fighting. All of the other big UK supermarkets are angling to buy up the stores, it would be a big boost to any company that manages to do that. Odds-on favourite is that Tesco will get most of the stores, and Morrisons will pick up whatever is left over, with the others left out in the cold, but that's just speculation, nobody really knows for sure.

In more interesting events, though, I'd love to be writing an article about the *Rosetta* spacecraft right now. It's just dropped its lander vehicle, Philae, onto a comet, the first time we've ever landed on a

comet. It's a pretty major event in space science. I know even if I was still allowed to write articles, I wouldn't be allowed to publish this which has 'no local interest'. I can hear the bosses voice saying it, but who can *not* have interest in something so cool! It was due to set the lander onto the duck-shaped comet, with the memorable name of Churyumov-Gerasimenko, back in November, but the whole thing went a bit wonky (that's a technical term, honest). Some software glitch that was never really reported in detail, meant that the lander failed to detach from *Rosetta*. It's taken them a couple of months to fix the issue, but they got it in the end. And best of all, this is a European mission, not a NASA mission. It's always nice when we get a first in Europe for the ESA, when NASA usually gets all the glory.

At the end of the week, I got paid. I wasn't sure they were going to pay me, but thankfully they did. First thing I did was to pay off that nasty payday loan I got last month, before the interest charges got too insane. I'm glad that's out of the way. Still in a fairly terrible state moneywise though. It'll take another couple of months before we aren't in the red by the time payday comes around each time.

Assuming no more emergencies or random stray cats show up.

Sunday, February 1st to Saturday, February 7th 2015

One of my favourite space projects, *Dawn*, was busy this week. It's the first NASA ship using an ion propulsion drive, and when I heard about it, it sounded so sci-fi I just had to love it. On Sunday it went into orbit around Ceres, the dwarf planet in the asteroid belt. It's due to spend about a year orbiting and studying Ceres, but they aren't sure if it'll be able to break orbit at the end, due to low fuel. There have been some pretty cool pictures released in the last few days, as *Dawn* got closer to Ceres.

Midweek was a bit weird, and came about because the landlord of this flat is a bit cheap, and we don't have double glazed windows. It was about 11pm, and we were in bed, and I was unsuccessfully trying

to interest Taima in more than just sleep. I kept just catching a buzzing noise out of the corner of my ear. I kept putting it out of my mind as I had better things to think about, but it didn't go away. Taima heard it too, and after that all hope was gone and so I tried to find the cause of it.

I hunted round the room, and eventually to the window, and that's when I saw one of those remote controlled quad-copters hovering a small distance from the flat, looking right into our bedroom window! There was me standing at the window with nothing on, with this snoopier pointing a camera right at me. I was furious, and Taima hid under the covers for about an hour she was so embarrassed. I waved my arms at it a bit, but whoever was controlling it didn't seem to care, just kept right on filming. In the end I had the bright idea of just closing the curtains, and not long after that the buzzing sound vanished.

I just know that one day, when I'm famous, this will end up on the internet, or as blackmail or something. Those things only have a range of a hundred metres tops, so it's someone close by. The next day, everyone I passed on the street was grinning at me, or so it seemed. I'm sure they weren't and it was just my imagination, but I still felt really uncomfortable. It wasn't helped that at work I was again just sitting in the empty room waiting for a meeting that would never happen, so I had absolutely nothing to distract me from it bothering me. I'm sure that the smug grin from the boss several times throughout the day was just because of having me in a room being hideously bored. He lives in Oxford, and so it couldn't have been him piloting the drone, but my paranoia level was pretty high by then.

After work I went over to the police station to report it. It sounds a bit petty, maybe even a waste of police time, but it isn't like these guys have much to do in such a low crime area.

It turns out that I wasn't the only one to have made a report, and so they added my name to the list. As they knew I was the local reporter, and obviously had no idea I'd quit the Gazette, they gave me a load of information that I guess they shouldn't have. The drone sightings had been going on for a week now, and they'd been trying to catch whoever it was by mapping the incidents and hoping they formed a circle with the guilty party's house in the middle. It was a good idea, and maybe it'll even work, but they hadn't got nearly

enough reports yet to make a good guess. Shame, though I bet it's just a kid messing around with their new birthday present or something, and he or she'll just get a slap on the wrist and told not to do it again.

The next day, despite being on reception all day, I watched the news of the latest Syrian press conference. The new president declared that Damascus was an atrocity ordered by former president Assad, and declared that the new regime did not support the action. They said that the official capital would move permanently to Aleppo, and that Damascus wouldn't be re-populated. It was to be designated a war grave, and given protected status within their country for the "martyrs of the civil war". Martyrs my arse, that was a million civilians, and just saying 'someone else did it, we didn't like it' doesn't make it any better. Looks like business as usual in Syria. As long as the leaders stay in power, it doesn't matter how many of their population are butchered. Disgusting, but then, I don't think they really care what my opinion is.

Sunday, February 8th to Saturday, February 14th 2015

Sunday

It was about midday when we felt what seemed to be a large truck go by. And it kept on going by. Taima is the one who recognised it was an earthquake, and she had us stand in a doorway for safety. CoNN yowled and raced under the bed, and wouldn't come out. Of course, when it had passed, first thing we did was switch on the BBC. After a bit, we went online when it was obvious that the BBC was being ultra-cautious in its news reporting as usual, and saying nothing until they had a few dozen sources of proof. Online reports were already making estimates, north-west England, magnitude around five or six.

Finally the BBC caught up, and had a report from Blackpool, where the reporter said that 'it seemed that the quake has caused a lot of damage,' and there was devastation. I felt a bit like I had when I saw the World Trade Centre go down back in 2001. I was only ten at

the time, but I remember seeing all those people jumping. It felt a bit like that. The Blackpool Tower was leaning at a bad angle. The building beneath it had partly come down, and we could see there were people on the observation deck of the tower. The cameraman there got some close ups through his camera zoom, and they looked so scared. He focussed on a blonde woman in a red jacket, and was clutching the rail and crying, you could see it so clearly. Then she went out of shot suddenly, and the cameraman zoomed back, and the tower was going down. It just went over sideways, not like the World Trade Centre, it was too rigid, and not tall enough to collapse in on itself. But it was tall enough. Nobody from the observation deck survived the collapse.

I don't know who the woman was. I expect it is known, but her name wasn't released to the media as far as I know. It was one of the worst things I'd ever seen. She was stuck up there with no way off for a good 20 minutes between the quake and the collapse. I know I'm focussing on one person, we got close ups of lots of people who were stuck up there, and some kids were up there too, but it was her that was in shot when the whole thing went down, and she'll stick in my mind for a long time.

Tuesday

Over the next couple of days, we got the final tally on the news. 17 died on the tower, another 10 in other collapses in the area. The final magnitude according to the BGS was a 6.3. Other places of course have much more severe earthquakes. In somewhere like California a 6.3 wouldn't even be in the news, but over here, where nobody does earthquake fortifications on buildings, it had a much greater effect. There were more fatalities from this one earthquake than there had been in total in all other recorded British quakes, and the recording goes back for a thousand years.

Wednesday

Today was supposed to be my last day at the Gazette, but in a last act of spite, the boss called and said I wasn't to come in today. The other staff had been planning to have a goodbye lunch for me, and it

was something I'd been looking forwards to. It was a bit stupid of him really, as I don't live far from the office, so come lunchtime the whole team, minus boss, showed up on my doorstep and we went out for lunch anyway. I'll miss a lot of these guys. Floyd the photographer and Debby my editor have been good to me. They've both stuck up for me against the boss, and they've both really helped to show me the ropes of the business.

We ate a lot that lunchtime, and we all bitched about the boss. I didn't even know that everyone else hated him too. I suppose as I've never really socialised with the other guys at work that I never got to talk to them about it. I wish I'd known sooner, it may have made work a bit better, but I guess it's a bit late for that now. Still I don't regret my decision to leave. The Oxford Daily is a bigger company, a bit of a pay rise, and much more opportunity to progress my career.

I don't know how many of them I'll see again after that lunch. Maybe none of them, but I'd like to think I will, at least I'm sure I'll bump into some of them out on the streets in the area, and I've got some email addresses to keep in touch. I did the same for people at university though, but I haven't seen a single one of them since I left. I don't know if that's normal or not.

Friday

My session today with Dr. Smith was a bit different. I told her about how I'd felt over the last week, and she went into the details of what I'd remembered about the quake. She told me she thought I was learning to deal with the difficult things like that better than before, which was nice to hear. I don't feel great about seeing people die on live TV, but, when it comes to it, this kind of thing is part of my job, if I'm going to make it in this industry, I'll see a lot of things I wish I hadn't seen, and I'll experience bad things. It isn't a sign of weakness to have a diagnosis of PTSD over this, but, for some people it's an indication that they may not be suited for this kind of work. No shame in it, many people aren't. I intend to overcome this problem though, I won't let it beat me, not when I've known since I was young that this was the job for me.

Sunday, February 15th to Saturday, February 21st 2015

Sunday

Well, I've had a few days relaxing. Taima has been really quiet, I think her job is really getting to her, but she never wants to talk about it. She seems to have some pretty bad mood swings, worse than I've ever known her to have in all the time we've been together. I think we need to sit down and have a chat, cos I don't know if it's her, her work, or something I've done wrong and she's just not telling me. Or maybe something else entirely, who knows. It seems to be work related though, as she rarely talks about her job, whereas her last job she wouldn't shut up about it. I'd have thought that London kids would be worse to manage than Reading kids, but who knows, maybe she just has some conflict with them, or some of the staff or something. I'll definitely talk to her as soon as I think she's in a receptive mood. Though I could be old and grey by that time based on the last few weeks.

New job starts tomorrow, I have to get up earlier to get into the office by 9, it's not a huge trip into Oxford, but I have to admit the last year of just rolling out of bed and landing on my desk a few streets away has been nice.

Monday

Wow, what a first day. Whereas at the Gazette they had me on a weeks induction course, at the Daily it was barely a day!

I was introduced to my editor, another Andrew, Andrew Parker, who seemed to be quite busy, but friendly enough to a new starter. The editorial boss, George Long, then had a quick run-down in his office with me about my job. And I have to say I think I'm going to like it.

I'm supposed to produce four stories a week for them, going up to five once I get into my stride. One of them must be local interest, so within a few kilometres of the town of Oxford. One of them is to be something from the wider Oxfordshire area, one is to be a national or

international story, and one is an opinion piece about anything I want to do, on any subject.

I was really surprised, complete freedom, and an opinion piece too, so I can be as biased as I like to tell the story I want. I asked if there were restrictions and was told to avoid the royals as they didn't want to get sued like last time (I need to find out about that, I didn't want to ask at the time), but as long as it wasn't slander or libellous, it would be fine. I suggested I'd like to focus on science and technology, and he liked that, he seems to be a bit of a science fan himself, but not many at the paper seemed too interested in covering it, and he's had to twist arms to get them to actually go out and write about the kind of stuff I find fun.

This is a good thing.

Later in the day I got to work on my first piece. News had come in from the news wires that the kids from the school shooting last year had been sentenced in court. While the judge had accepted they were not guilty of murder, by killing their teachers they'd taken the law into their own hands and were each sentenced to a year in a low security youth detention facility. I guess it kindof makes sense, you can't have kids just killing their teachers, but they really did have just cause, and they'd tried other avenues before they gave up and defended themselves.

The report carried on that the police who'd ignored the kids had all been arrested on suspicion of collaboration with the paedophile teachers. Even if they aren't guilty of that, they should certainly be fired for ignoring such a serious accusation. I don't know the exact facts of the case, so I can't really say much about it, but if the police ignore a kid who claims rape by a teacher, they don't deserve to be called police.

Rest of week

I didn't get all of my stories done the first week, but they didn't seem too upset though. My editor said it was expected that it would take some time for me to settle in, and I just needed to do my best until I got up to speed. I did a local interest story about a number of

dogs that seemed to have become ill and died after visiting a local woodland area, but nobody knows why. I then did my first international story, which was cool. I wrote about Syria, and how the uprising, which had all but been destroyed, was starting to gather new numbers, and gain a bit of momentum again. I expect the press conference about moving the capital and the martyrs of Damascus pissed off a lot of the populace. I imagine that most people had friends or relatives in Damascus, and I wonder just how many angry enemies the government has made. I expect that this time, if the opposition gets back on its feet, it won't be long before the government falls.

Sunday, February 22nd to Saturday, February 28th 2015

We made a bit of a snap decision this week. With my new job paying a bit more, and Taima having a job, we have some money coming in now, so we've booked a week off in Florida in September. Taima thinks it's too much money and seems really worried about spending, but she's always worried about money, a bit too much if you ask me. Sure it's important, but don't waste your life worrying about it! We're planning on spending some time at the theme parks, and then just some time relaxing. We really do need a break.

I got my first opinion piece out this week. It's been a while since I put one of my articles in here, so here it is, my first opinion.

New medical breakthrough leads to smiles all round

A team of doctors in Columbia University in New York have pioneered a breakthrough new procedure to regrow adult teeth, using stem cells taken from the patient's blood.

Since the advent of harvesting stem cells from blood, many of the objections of the groups who protested over the use of stem cells from foetuses or umbilical cords, have gone away, and the medical community has been embracing their new found freedom to forward

this exciting technology.

In the first major practical application, a biodegradable scaffold has been used to guide the stem cells to produce the correctly shaped tooth, and this has all been enclosed in a resin actually within the patient's mouth that, in two months time, will finish dissolving, and hopefully leave a fully formed tooth. While connecting to the nerve system is beyond current medical technology, the tooth should have the appropriate blood vessel connections as a natural tooth, and has an expected lifespan of up to 70% of that of a regular tooth.

The patient, who has remained anonymous, was injured in an accident, and lost eight front teeth. If this first regrowth is successful, he will then take part in the next stage of the experiment, to regrow the remaining seven teeth all at once.

While this procedure is a long way from appearing in your local dental surgery, it is a sign that maybe, in the not too distant future, a broken smile may be a thing of the past.

*

This technology really does interest me, I like to keep my teeth in top notch condition, but if something does happen, I know that there are options to fix the problem now.

I hope they also find a way to regrow fingers too, as CoNN is getting to be a vicious little bugger. He tried to gnaw my finger off this evening. I'm sure he was only playing but I made the mistake of pulling my hand away too quickly, and so he latched on with all of his claws and I got a whole load of new scratches for my troubles. Thanks CoNN, I feed you, I give you a roof, I give you toys to play with, and what do you give me? Second degree lacerations.

Sunday, March 1st to Saturday, March 7th 2015

I got a nice surprise in the office on Monday. Work has bought me