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Making Lemon Aide from Covid Lemons

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Covid Lemon Aide

(File: CCC A covid tale 3_21_21)

Bill McConochie, Ph.D., alum of '61

At the invitation of Lucas Demetriades '22, who solicits diary entries for the Covid-19 year of 2021-22, in the winter volume of Voice, here's my tale of life during the "Covid Curfew of '20-'21".

I was 81 years old a year ago in March of '21 when I got the word from my two government agencies that evaluations as a clinical psychologist had to be put on hold to protect clients from exposure to the Covid-19 virus. Because I was financially secure and could continue my private practice on my own, I felt relieved.

To keep busy, I decided I was in a unique position to build a battery of tests for screening applicants for the job of police personnel. I had built several such batteries over the years and additional brief questionnaire measures of traits related to violence and political attitudes. I realized that with a few additional new sections I could probably equip police departments or the city councils directly overseeing the departments with a tool for screening out violence-prone personnel such as the ones responsible for deaths of George Floyd and others.

I started by reviewing the literature on psychological assessment of police candidates and related federal employment regulations. Then I assembled and wrote the questionnaire sections. After almost a year of effort I had my product, a 616-item battery that takes a bit more than two hours to complete. It will be administered and scored by web site computer and generates a written report of several pages of scores for about 60 measures.

I am now working with the Oregon Research Institute office of for-profit organization activities, in my home town, Eugene. They will explore the possibility of getting an SBIR grant from the federal government to do pilot studies and then marketing the testing service to cities across the nation.

I have also used this free time in the past month to build a 102-item measure of embezzlement-proneness, based on prolific data available from a company in Austin, Texas that specializes in investigating fraud and helping companies guard against it. There are no pre-hire screening tests in their tool kit for this effort, but their research publications, which they were happy to send me, are full of personality trait and other data about fraudsters that made my work rather easy. I had been stumped in earlier attempts to develop a questionnaire to this end, for lack of detailed personality data.

I hope to work through the Austin company (Association of Certified Fraud Examiners) to do validation studies and then market to their thousands of customers around the world.

So, in retrospect, I can say I've made lemon aide out of Covid lemons. And I've decided not to continue clinical work face to face, which is a relief. I hadn't figured out how to gracefully

glide into semi-retirement. Now that I've had my two shots of vaccine, I feel delightfully free to explore with a couple of new products ways to help humanity with the scientific skills CCC got me started on.

Indeed, my first job as a psychologist in '65, after 3 years in the Army, was at a juvenile detention facility in Joliet, Ill. I was shown how to do the Wechsler I.Q. test for children and worked for a year as a Psychologist I. This cemented my interest in the profession, and I started graduate school in '66. In a few years I had my masters and doctoral degrees and was off and running. With G.I. Bill benefits helping me through grad school, I was able to begin practice without a penny of school debt. Thanks to CCC for getting me off to a good start with my major in psychology!