

# Death by Annuity

by  
Jerry W. Lennon

*Copyright 2010 by Jerry W. Lennon  
All Rights Reserved*

If only I hadn't let my curiosity get the best of me, I would not be a prisoner of my own making. This was the predominant thought that flashed through my mind as I looked out of the window for my Minder. He was assigned to me to make sure that I didn't become a victim of some freak circumstance before the appointed time of my predicted demise. As he entered my courtyard, he glanced up and waved for me to come down. My thoughts drifted back to that day. If only I had stepped out of the line, but I didn't.

*Yeah, it's time*, I said to myself as I inched forward a few steps closer to the door. I was in line along with the few who still wanted to know for their own reasons how they were going die. To stop this pondering, I drifted back to the fanfare when the machines were first put in operation. At first people were shocked by the idea of knowing what would cause their deaths, but not after a huge PR campaign by the Government had put a positive spin on the idea that it was to our advantage to know how we were going to reach terminality. At first, this reasoning drew huge brave crowds of people who would line up for hours to learn their fate. The promoters of the death machine said they were going to change our lives and make life worth living because then we would really know what we could do and what we had to avoid.

After ten years of service without so much as a single miss, the crowds had died down to a trickle. It's a real giggle to see myself where I am today. No way would I have ever imagined myself lined up to consult the "Death Diagnostor," as it is called in polite circles.

Before the medical exam, I really could have cared less about knowing how I was to meet my end, especially from a machine. I liked stumbling through my world not knowing what was next. I had avoided the death machine as if it were the plague. I never trusted in chance. I didn't even buy lottery tickets. I became instantly skeptical of a machine that would give a one-word response that could be interpreted many different ways. So, it was no surprise when the majority of people came around to my point of view. Yeah, sure, the machine changed the way we looked at life, but we all knew we were going to die eventually even before these things became as common as Starbucks'. However, a few years later, when the reality set in that these predictors were never wrong, people lost all zest for life.

Paranoid became the watchword. Carefulness spread like wildfire. Wars stopped. People avoided any and all possibilities connected to their death predictions, hoping to avoid by any means their fate. Life literally slowed to a cautious crawl. If the answer from the machine spewed out the word "car" as their fatal prophecy, people avoided anything remotely associated with the word. But very quickly people learned that the machine, like the devil, covered all contingencies. After a few years of seeing the futility of trying to avoid the prediction, people just gave up. After a while, people accepted their mortality and stayed away from the death predictors. It was best to be kept in the dark and enjoy life and let one's life take its natural course.

But over time, human nature won out and curiosity got the better of some people and they wanted to know what was in store for them regardless of the consequences. It was this inquisitiveness that kept the money rolling in and the machines in business. Soon the gruesomeness of death wore off. People began

to use the machines before undertaking any risky behavior. People who lived on the edge became known as the “Defiant” ones. Consulting the death machine became as common as going to an ATM machine. The insurers lost billions. People learned to game the system and insured themselves only when it was a sure thing. The insurance industry lobbied in vain to put a stop to the predictors regardless of what laws were passed. The parasitic industry could not beat the odds and wound up bankrupt and a footnote in history.

I was brought back to reality when I heard, “Hey guy, keep moving! It’s your turn next,” from somewhere behind me. But the reason why I was in line was forgotten as I stepped across the threshold of the doorway. I supposedly knew what to expect. However, reading and being told what to expect from the process was not the same as going through it. I was not ready for the sterile look of the place. No voice, no attendant to welcome you, just a screen set in a wall that read, “To begin the process, hold your Global ID card data side to the window with the yellow border.” I did just as the sign instructed. Nothing activated. No sound, just the click of the door locking behind me. I turned and the door had turned into a one-way mirror and I could see the others waiting in line outside. At least people had their privacy, while not feeling isolated during this process.

The text on the monitor in front of me flashed, “Accepted Mr. Fred Harper,” along with my familiar public ID string of numbers that was assigned to me at birth. The room blinked a bit brighter blue as the huge blue neon glowing letters instructed, “To verify DNA code, place your hand in the slot of the blue box below display screen. Hold your hand in position until you are instructed to remove your hand.” I placed my right hand in the slot and rested it against the pad inside. I was aware that I should feel a sticky, numbing mist that was to coat the underside of my index finger. I knew it was to take the sting out of the needle stick. I tensed my hand anyway, waiting to feel a slight stab or something. *One thousand, two thousand, three thousand*, I counted. I still had not felt anything until the pad under my hand silently retreated into the recesses of the blue glowing box. The monitor’s screen filled the tiny room with a blood red text that read, “Remove your hand and squeeze a drop of blood in the orange circle on the glass tray until it is covered. When the glass tray turns green, wave your hand in front of the screen. When the green arrow appears, step to where the green arrow points and wait for the results. When you see a flashing green box, touch it to print your results. Thank you for using the services of DDI.” I watched the tray recede into the box and the door closed as if it were never there.

*Well, it is done*, I thought as I slid over and punched the screen for the results. Of course, I already knew the results. I wondered how the machine would word my death. I said to myself, “Cancer, organ failure, liver?” I really didn’t care how it was worded. I already knew the “how” I was to die, but that was not why I was here. I just wanted a second opinion. What would be novel is how much time I had left, but that was wishful thinking because the Predictor had not yet evolved or been programmed to give that information. So I waited for the wording of my death. And I waited. “Come on, how long does this take? It’s not like I’m the only one facing this type of death.”

I began to wonder if the program had crashed. I grew more impatient as I willed the screen to print the results. Just as I was about to lose it and bang on the front panel, text appeared in stark white letters across the screen. “You will be contacted with details at a later date. Confirm your contact information by touching the screen.” I hesitated before confirming my information and then touched the glowing green “yes” box.

The door behind me clicked open and the room became dark but for the light from the monitor still displaying, “You will be contacted.” I looked to the slot below the screen, but nothing came out. I felt cheated. As if the machine could read my mind the screen displayed, “There will be no charge at this time. Your account has been credited in full.” Then the screen went blank and so did my mind as I stepped through the doorway.

A woman was next. She stood near the doorway waiting for me to leave the room. She averted her head downward so as not to look at me directly. I rapidly walked past her without paying any attention to her quick darting looks as she tried to read my face. I sensed she was looking for a hint of what to expect.

I moved by instinct. As I rounded the corner, I found myself in a mall devoted to mental health providers. Some were in white coats; some in tweed suits, all trying to look like caring, insightful psychiatrists touting their specialty and ability to help me cope with my death session. I ignored all of the various pitches and faces that jumbled together as one chaotic kaleidoscope of color and sound.

I was lost in a daze recalling the last few weeks hoping to come up with a reason why I was denied the results of my session. I know less now than I did before I entered the Death Evaluator.

Suddenly it hit me. Thinking back to the form I filled out weeks ago, my mind locked on the last part of the questionnaire. “Is there any reason you feel you are going to die? Have you been diagnosed with a terminal or fatal illness?” I answered “no” which was true at that time. I did not perjure myself because I was waiting for the results of the doctor’s tests when I filled out the form for an appointment. I just had a feeling I was terminal, but no real positive when I signed and sent the forms in for an appointment. Nothing out of the ordinary from the session arrangers that lead me to believe that they knew I had recently consulted a doctor. Just the standard recorded message left on my mobile telling me the date of my session and that I could go to any D.D.I. station of my choice. This eased my feeling of guilt a bit, but I still wondered why no results. I forced myself to let that wait until I got home.

As I stepped off the curb, I was rudely made aware of where I was when a car nearly ruined the rest of my day. *Fred, keep your mind on the task at hand. Just hold it together until you get home. There has to be an answer. Remember these things never miss.*

I was just about feeling my old self again as I closed the door to my flat. “Ah, sanctuary,” as I felt the day’s events start to slip away and thoughts of food became my main focus. As I turned toward the kitchen, the living room monitor blinked an alert of an e-mail that required my response ASAP. My craving for food disappeared as my anxiety level heightened. *Did the Predictor’s results arrive this quickly? Had they found out I was trying to scam the system? Did they know that I knew I was going to die before I asked for a session?* I know they frown upon that sort of thing. All thinking and speculation stopped as I stepped into the living room. The monitor was flashing bright yellow text, “ID Code required Fred Harper. For your eyes only.”

“What? Who would send a secure level e-mail?” I said out loud as I touched in my code. The screen flashed, “Place Global ID to the yellow box to verify addressee.” I dropped my wallet fumbling to get my ID card out. I left my billfold on the floor in case my response was time sensitive and I would be locked out for taking too long to respond. The only other sound in the room besides my heartbeat was the snap of my card as it hit the yellow-bordered box on the screen. “Verified.” And the screen filled with bluish text.

“Dear Mr. Fred Harper: The results of your Death Diagnostic, Inc. report was held back due to the uniqueness and timing of your session.”

“Oh no, I’ve been found out.” I groaned out loud and read on with dread wondering what would be the consequences of my actions.

*“During the past 15 years of operation, D.D.I. has been improving the process of its services. Thanks to a major grant from the Insurance Providers, D.D.I. has entered into Beta testing for the Time of Terminality program. The timing of your request for a D.D.I. makes you an ideal candidate. Reason being, you were recently diagnosed with your imminent death – major organ failure (liver). The Time of*

*Terminality pilot program tentatively predicts the time of your terminality in the year 2023, sometime between 01/01/2023 and 12/31/2023. D.D.I. expresses its condolences to you and your loved ones.*

*Of course, there will be a waiver of any and all fees for volunteering to participate in this preliminary Beta project. In addition, all costs and expenses for the rest of your life will be borne by D.D.I. Again, thanks to a generous grant by Insurance Providers. This agreement with you will cease one day after 01/01/2024.*

*D.D.I. takes pride that its programs have never given a faulty reading. In order to continue with that record, and to not cause any false positives that could jeopardize the test results, D.D.I. requests that you remain under D.D.I.'s supervision and be fitted with a location chip to monitor your whereabouts. You will, of course, be free to come and go as you please. However, you must clear all activities and movements with D.D.I. prior to leaving your premises and always be accompanied by a Minder. Details of this Beta test process and all of your questions will be explained in the near future. In interest of Global Security, all documents and all communications are highly confidential in accordance with the Secrets Act, § 56,87607. You will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law for any breach of this Act and prior misuse of the D.D.I. process. Details of this Act can be downloaded and reviewed at [www.secretsact.govglobal](http://www.secretsact.govglobal).*

*Please click the "yes" box on the screen acknowledging that you understand the consequences of your prior action and that all charges are dismissed in consideration of volunteering to participate in this Beta test.*

*Mr. Fred Harper, you will be pleased to know that you are participating in a historic event that will benefit all Global citizens and future generations. When the Beta test is completed in the year 2024, a mandatory program will be set up for the general population in order to assure that people will live to their full projected Terminal Date. Health care providers will be able to plan and allocate resources where most needed and in the most cost efficient manner. You may also take comfort in knowing that your participation will aid Insurance Providers in establishing new actuary norms and provide annuity services at reasonable fees.*

*We at D.D.I. thank you for your vital contribution to a program that will make the world a better place.*

*Sincerely Death Diagnostic, Inc.*

*End of Message.*