

Reminiscing

Betty Lynn (Barney Fife's Thelma Lou) Is Keeping Mayberry Alive

*By Nick Thomas
Contributing Writer*

It's just after noon on the third Friday of the month, and 89-year-old Betty Lynn is preparing to take her seat behind a small brown table in the main room of the Andy Griffith Museum in Mount Airy, NC.

Visitors are already beginning to flood into the 2,500-square-feet building to meet the actress best known to 1960s TV fans as Barney Fife's girlfriend, Thelma Lou, from "The Andy Griffith Show" set in the fictional town of Mayberry.

"Over 500 people come through," says Betty of a typical day when she sits throughout the afternoon once a month at the museum greeting fans. They come from all over the world to meet a former cast member of the popular show and to see the large collection of Andy Griffith memorabilia, assembled by Griffith's life-long friend Emmett Forrest (see www.andyg Griffith-museum.com).

In 2007, after being twice robbed in her Los Angeles home, Lynn left

Hollywood for the quiet, secure life in Mount Airy, which was also Andy Griffith's hometown.

"I'd been coming here for the Mayberry Days festival for ages, so it seemed like the perfect place to settle," she said. "Everyone has been so kind since I moved here. It didn't take long for me to feel like a local rather than a visitor."

"The Andy Griffith Show" ran for eight seasons throughout most of the 1960s. It won six Emmys, including five for Don Knotts. "Andy was fun and a bit of a tease off camera, while Don was sweet but very quiet and nothing like his Barney Fife character. But that just illustrates what a good actor he was."

Lynn also appeared in some 20 films and over 40 other TV shows, including many westerns.

"I enjoyed westerns, but filming in the hot Californian summers wearing long dresses and petticoats was rough," she said. "During one show, I think it was 'Texas John Slaughter' we sat

down to lunch and these huge bugs swarmed all around us. We were told to just ignore them and eat around them."



Photo by Hobart Jones, Surry Arts Council

Betty Lynn, at the Andy Griffith Museum, in Mount Airy, NC

plained Lynn. "Recently, I saw the episode again, where he picked me way up in the air twice. I laughed because I looked like a rag doll."

Throughout her career, Lynn worked with some Hollywood greats.

"My first film, 'Sitting Pretty,' and then later 'Cheaper by the Dozen,' were with Clifton Webb, a sweet man with a good sense of humor," she recalled. "I also did two films with Bette Davis who got everyone to call me Boo, after one of my characters, so it wouldn't be confusing when they called 'Betty on the set!'"

She also worked, at one time or another, with almost all the cast of "Gilligan's Island."

"Alan Hale Jr. was on an episode of 'The Andy Griffith Show,' and played a mountain man looking for a wife," ex-

plained Lynn. "Recently, I saw the episode again, where he picked me way up in the air twice. I laughed because I looked like a rag doll."

As she does on each of her visits to the museum, Betty braces for a long afternoon as enthusiastic fans are already forming the meet-and-greet line.

"It's a little tiring by the end of the day, but it's the least I can do since people may stand for hours to take a picture, get an autograph and a hug," she says. "There's a lot of love coming my way."

*

Nick Thomas teaches at Auburn University at Montgomery, AL, and has written features, columns, and interviews for over 600 magazines and newspapers.

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Editor & Publisher
Harry G. Armstrong

Assoc. Publisher/Sales
Alex J. Augunas

Opinion
Barbara Murphy

Advertising Sales
Alex Augunas

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Opinion

New Year's Is Time To Reflect On The Good, Gross And Greedy

The days before and after New Year's Day are not only a time for looking forward, but also a time for looking back.

As a journalist, I remain particularly impressed by three news stories that broke just before Christmas. One was a story about courage; the second a story showing how good journalism at its best can be; and the third, a story about corporate villainy at its worst.

Medals for valor go to the people who are volunteering to take part in a study of two drugs that target amyloid, one of the errant proteins that accumulate in the brains of people with Alzheimer's Disease.

The recruitment effort is being conducted by GeneMatch, a new organization created by the Banner Alzheimer's Institute (BAI) in Phoenix, AZ.

GeneMatch is looking for people ages 55 to 75 who live in the United States, who do not have a diagnosis of cognitive impairment and who will be found in the study to have two APOE4 genes.

The APOE gene is the strongest predictor that in the future an individual may be afflicted with Alzheimer's. There are three types of the APOE gene: APOE2, which protects against Alzheimer's; APOE3, which somewhat raises the risk of getting the disease; and APOE4, which raises the risk the most. The risk of being afflicted by Alzheimer's is 30 to 55 percent for people with two APOE4 genes. That's why the researchers want to find people with two APOE4s.

Here's where the courage comes in. Participants in the actual drug studies may be told if they have two APOE4s. The way I see it is that if you're picked to participate in the actual drug studies, you can pretty much deduce that you're in the high risk gene category.

Dr. Jessica Langbaum, principal investigator for GeneMatch, said that "studies recruiting from GeneMatch may require volunteers to learn their APOE genotypes."

According to a *Philadelphia Inquirer* report, Dr. Angela Bradbury, a University of Pennsylvania oncologist, will direct the Alzheimer's genetic counseling program. Dr. Bradbury was quoted as saying that while some people may find it hard to live with knowing they are at a higher risk, anyone who has watched a family member die

with Alzheimer's is likely already worried.

I will be enormously grateful to those volunteers who decide to participate in the actual drug studies and then live with the knowledge that they are at high risk for Alzheimer's. I definitely wouldn't have the guts to volunteer for

GeneMatch. I am comforted by the fact that at age 83, I am too old to be eligible for GeneMatch, so my courage — or lack of it — won't be tested.

The news story that I praised for showing how good journalism at its best can be was the *Associated Press*'s new investigation into the fact that much of the shrimp we eat is produced by slaves working in Thai processing plants.

The AP reported that poor migrant workers and children are sold to factories in Thailand where they are forced to peel shrimp that ends up in global supply chains, including those at Walmart and Red Lobster.

The workers are paid next to nothing. They spend 16 hours a day with their hands in ice water, ripping the guts, heads, tails and shells off shrimp. The workers are always watched and never allowed to rest.

After a previous AP investigation into the Thai shrimp industry, more than 2,000 slaves were freed and there were dozens of arrests, millions of dollars worth of seizures, and proposals for new laws.

But the abuses continued, leading to AP's latest investigation and the hope that this time there will be reforms that stick. Kudos to *The Philadelphia Inquirer* for running the AP's Thai slavery story as its lead story under a banner headline on Dec. 15.

The story of corporate villainy that left me grinding my teeth was the announcement that the DuPont Co. and Dow Chemical Co. plan a tax-free



Murphy's Law by Barbara Murphy, 82, appears monthly in The Golden Times. The column represents the opinion of the author and is not necessarily the opinion of the publisher. Likewise, guest columns appearing on these pages represent the opinions of the authors. If you have a different point of view, please share it with our readers in the form of a Letter To The Editor. Letters can also be e-mailed to news@thegoldentimes.com. Letters must be signed.

merger to be followed by a split of the new company, DowDupont, into three separate firms.

The companies reportedly plan to cut at least \$3 billion in yearly expenses and will lay off thousands of workers as a result of the merger/split-up. DuPont has already announced the lay-off of 1,700 of its 6,100 employees in Delaware, as part of a plan to eliminate 5,000 of a worldwide staff of 54,000.

Top officials at the two company talked about advice from hedge fund groups and stressed that the merger presented the opportunity to deliver "long-term, sustainable shareholder value...."

And an extraordinary opportunity to push the city of Wilmington, DE, where DuPont is now headquartered,

into major decline and to potentially leave thousands of DuPont workers who live in the area jobless. Company officials had nothing to say about the fate of Wilmington or of DuPont employees who may soon be unemployed.

Vic Barron, a Philadelphia writer who grew up in Wilmington, probably put it best when he wrote in *The Inquirer*'s commentary section that over many years DuPont's "presence and philanthropy supported Wilmington....

"More recently," he wrote, "DuPont senior executives seem to have danced on the strings held by Wall Street speculators and the company has been steadily losing its traditional identity."

Barbara Murphy, 83, writes about controversial topics each month.

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Opinion

Congress Must Provide An Antidote To Medicare's COBRA Trap

By Janet Trautwein
Guest Contributor

Medicare has strict rules for enrollment. Most seniors are automatically signed up for Medicare Part A, the portion of the program that covers hospital care, when they turn 65, as long as they're collecting Social Security.

Enrollment in Medicare Parts B and D — which cover physician services and prescription drugs, respectively — can be delayed if a person is still actively at work and covered by an employer-sponsored plan related to their employment.

However, the enrollment process for those who delay

can be confusing — and can lead to costly mistakes. Here are a few seniors who were forced to reckon with just those kinds of mistakes.

One is a 67-year-old schoolteacher who held off on enrolling in Medicare Part B to ensure that his younger, ailing wife could keep the health coverage they'd enjoyed for years.

Another is a cancer survivor who, having met her deductible under her employer-sponsored plan, wanted to complete her chemotherapy regimen before switching to Medicare.

Then there's the widow who found herself uninsured

for months after not moving quickly enough to sign up for Medicare Parts B and D in the wake of her husband's death.

All three of these seniors decided to delay enrollment in Medicare Parts B and D to stay on their employer-sponsored insurance under the terms of a federal law called COBRA, which permits people to extend their health benefits after leaving a job by paying the premiums themselves.

Unfortunately, all three seniors also ended up facing significant financial penalties and delays in securing Part B coverage. That's unfair and has to change.

The number of seniors subject to this COBRA trap is growing. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, seniors have surpassed the young and middle-aged as the fastest-growing segment of the workforce. They now account for over 16 percent of U.S. workers — up from 12.1 percent in 1990.

For working seniors with employer-sponsored plans, it may make sense to delay enrollment in Parts B and D to

avoid paying premiums for coverage they don't yet need. Others may defer enrollment so that a younger spouse can stay on an employer-sponsored plan.

Medicare allows seniors to delay enrollment without penalty if they have coverage through work. But once they retire and coverage ends, they have an eight-month window — or "special enrollment period" — to enroll in Medicare

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Opinion

Lawmakers Should Confront Medicare's COBRA Trap

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Parts B and D without incurring fines.

If they miss that window, they could face late enrollment penalties of up to 10 percent for every year late — and have to pay higher premiums for the rest of their lives. They could even have to go without insurance while they wait for the next sign-up period.

The open enrollment window closes even faster for seniors who keep their employer-sponsored coverage through COBRA.

Medicare does not recognize COBRA as "creditable coverage" — that is, coverage as good as or better than Medicare. So a senior who chooses to continue his or her workplace coverage through COBRA begins racking up late enrollment penalties almost immediately.

That makes little sense. The only difference between employer-sponsored coverage and that obtained

through COBRA is who is paying the premium — the employer or the former employee.

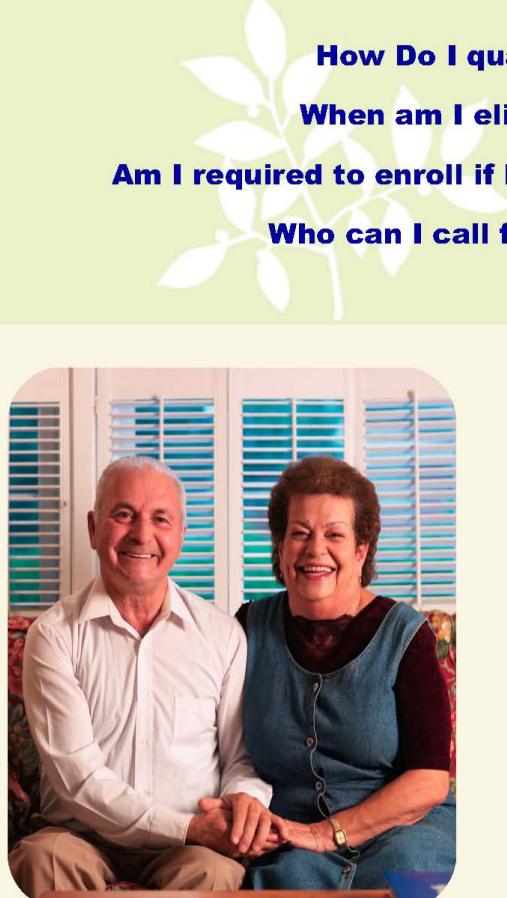
Medicare has its reasons for these strict rules. Limiting enrollment periods to two or three months a year and imposing late penalties helps discourage patients from waiting to sign up for coverage until they're sick and need care.

But the seniors using COBRA are not looking to pull one over on the system. They're still paying premiums on the plans they were covered by through their employers.

At most, they made an honest mistake — one for which they'll pay for the rest of their lives. And it's a mistake that will grow more common as seniors work later and later in life — unless Congress dismantles this COBRA trap.

Janet Trautwein is CEO of the National Association of Health Underwriters.

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