

WWII lovers will reunite for Valentine’s Day

BY SARAH KAPLAN
THE WASHINGTON POST

“All through my life,” Norwood Thomas said, “I had this little thought of, ‘what if?’”

What if he had been more serious about the beautiful girl he met in London while on leave there during World War II? What if he hadn’t lost track of her all those years ago? What if he had said something different in the letter, the one he wrote asking her to marry him, that might have changed her reply?

He’d had a good, long life, a wonderful marriage, three kids, a home in Virginia Beach, Virginia. He was happy with his lot. But still, the 93-year-old sometimes wondered, he told local TV station WTKR: “What if?”

He might still be wondering, if it weren’t for the fact that a woman on the other side of the globe was asking herself the exact same thing.

Joyce Morris, an 88-year-old divorcee now living in

Australia, also had lingering questions about the handsome paratrooper with the Southern drawl she’d met in 1945. What if she’d said yes to marriage? What if she had moved to America with him? What might her life have been like? Where might they be now?

The thought came to her a few months ago, while her son was sitting at the computer, Morris told the Virginian-Pilot. She asked him: “Can you find people on that thing?”

A search for “Norwood Thomas, 101st Airborne” turned up an old Virginian-Pilot article about a man who went skydiving for his 88th birthday. Morris’s son contacted the reporter, who called Thomas. He was shopping in Home Depot when he got the call.

“Joyce Durrant?” he said, struggling to place the name. Then he gasped: “Oh, my God.”

Soon after, they were chatting over Skype like teenagers, reminiscing about their whirlwind war-

Joyce Morris and Norwood Thomas met 72 years ago, just months before Thomas was due to parachute into Normandy. They spent all their weekends together. And then, without warning, it stopped.

time romance — “You were such a scalawag,” Morris joked; “I did enjoy beauty,” Thomas replied — and lamenting the miles between them.

“The only one big problem is, I can’t take you in my arms and give you a squeeze,” Thomas had said, according to the Virginian-Pilot.

“Well, we’ve got to get on that then.”

And they will. Next month, Thomas will fly the 10,000 miles from Virginia Beach to Adelaide, Australia, to hug Morris for the first time since 1945. He expects to be there for Valentine’s Day, according to CBS News.

“I’m numb,” Thomas told the Virginian-Pilot. “I have no idea what my emotions are going to be once we

meet face to face.”

Some of the funds for the trip were raised by Barbara McDonald, a Navy veteran who started a GoFundMe page for the couple after she read the Virginian-Pilot story about their Skype date back in November.

“We can’t say it was a beautiful Skype date, best of luck to them,” she wrote on the fundraising site. “This story can not end here.”

Her campaign brought in about \$7,500 for Thomas and his son Steve, who cares for him and will accompany him to Australia. Air New Zealand also has made arrangements to fly the father and son to Adelaide free, according to the Associated Press.

Morris and Thomas met 72 years ago, on the banks of the River Thames, just

months before Thomas was due to parachute into Normandy. They spent all their weekends together, laughing, taking walks, getting dinner at their favorite cafe. And then, without warning, it stopped.

“All of sudden instead of seeing her the next week, I just never saw her again,” Thomas told WTKR.

Thomas shipped out to France shortly after and wound up moving back to Virginia after the war. He wrote to Morris from there, using the address in Surrey she’d given him.

He can still recite it, all these years later.

But when Morris received Thomas’s letter asking her to marry him, she was confused, she told the Virginian-Pilot. Something he’d written made her think he was already married but wanted to leave his wife for her. Morris wouldn’t think of it.

“And that was the end of it,” she said.

“You broke my heart,”

Thomas accused.

But it mended. Just after the rejection, Thomas met the woman who would become his wife. They remained married until her death not too long ago. That’s when thoughts about Morris and the life that might have been began to creep back into his mind.

Morris, meanwhile, had also married and moved to Australia. She left the father of her two sons, she told Thomas in their Skype call, after 37 years. Since then, she also had been wondering.

The pair spoke for almost two hours, according to the Virginian-Pilot, reluctant to bring an end to their conversation.

“I just wish I could give you a hug and tell you good night,” Thomas told her. “But since I can’t, I’ll just say, ‘You take care.’”

Morris responded in kind, and Thomas lifted an uncertain hand to the screen to wave goodbye.

“Good night,” he told her, “for now.”

Aetna’s deal will push up costs for seniors, says report

BY DIANE BARTZ
REUTERS

WASHINGTON — Aetna Inc.’s plan to buy smaller insurer Humana Inc. for \$31 billion will mean seniors will pay higher Medicare Advantage premiums, according to a new report by the think tank Center for American Progress.

Aetna’s proposed deal for Humana would combine Aetna’s 7 percent of the Medicare Advantage market with Humana’s 19 percent, and make it the largest provider, according to CAP, which was founded by John Podesta who worked in the White House under Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.

Medicare Advantage is an insurance plan for seniors that is largely paid for by the government but administered by private insurers.

The deal is one of two giant insurance mergers announced in July. The other was Anthem’s \$45 billion bid for Cigna Corp. Deal values were calculated based on Wednesday’s closing stock prices.

CAP said in one analysis it found that in counties where Aetna competed with Huma-



BDN FILE

Medicare Advantage is an insurance plan for seniors that is largely paid for by the government but administered by private insurers.

na, Aetna’s average annual premiums were \$302 lower. Using a more conservative approach, it determined that Aetna’s average annual premiums were \$155 less if it competed against Humana, while Humana’s premiums were \$43 less if it competed against Aetna, CAP said.

Aetna said that seniors who are hit with price increases with Medicare Advantage could always switch to traditional Medicare, and that two-thirds of seniors are on traditional Medicare.

“This keeps downward pressure on prices and upward pressure on quality,” said Aetna spokeswoman Kristine Grow in an email.

She also said that Aetna and Humana combined have 4.4 million Medicare Advantage enrollees, about 8 percent of the 54 million people enrolled in Medicare.

“There will continue to be significant competition in Medicare Advantage, with many health plans and other new industry entrants,” she said in the email.

Ranks of US centenarians growing rapidly

BY DAVID BEASLEY
REUTERS

ATLANTA — The number of Americans living beyond their 100th birthday has surged nearly 44 percent since the turn of the century, a U.S. study released on Thursday showed.

Better medical care and healthier lifestyles helped to boost U.S. centenarians’ ranks to 72,197 in 2014 from 50,281 in 2000, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report said. More than 80 percent of the centenarians were female.

The numbers should keep rising, since the death rate for centenarians has fallen since 2008, noted the study’s author, Jiaquan Xu. Some projections show there could be 387,000 U.S. centenarians

in 35 years, he noted.

“People are more aware of their health, of the importance of staying active and eating healthy food,” Xu said.

Genetic research indicates that about 17 percent of the U.S. population has traits that increase their chances of living past 100, said Dr. Thomas Perls, a geriatrician and director of the New England Centenarian Study at Boston Medical Center.

“In the early 1900s and before, people could count on losing about a quarter of their children to infectious diseases and other public health problems,” Perls said.

But with improvements in fighting diseases, people who are genetically prone to live past 100 are now far more likely to survive

childhood, he said.

Baby boomers, born after World War II through the mid-1960s, are likely to swell the ranks of centenarians even further, Perls noted.

The top causes of death among centenarians in 2014 were heart disease, Alzheimer’s disease, stroke, cancer, influenza and pneumonia, the CDC study found.

Deaths from Alzheimer’s increased 119 percent between 2000 and 2014, which Xu attributed to greater awareness of the disease, resulting in more diagnoses.

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Monsanto sues to keep herbicide off California list of carcinogens

BY KARL PLUME
REUTERS

CHICAGO — Monsanto Co. stepped up its defense of a widely used weed killer on Thursday by filing a lawsuit in California seeking to prevent glyphosate, the main ingredient in its Roundup herbicide, from being added to the state’s list of known carcinogens.

The seed and agrochemicals company said it filed the suit against the state’s Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment and the agency’s acting director, Lauren Zeise, in California state court, according to the filing seen by Reuters.

California law requires the state to keep a list of cancer-causing chemicals to inform residents of their risks.

OEHHA said in September that it planned to add glyphosate to the list after the World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer classified it as a probable human carcinogen last March.

Monsanto has disputed assessment, citing decades of studies deeming glyphosate safe, including a 2007 study by OEHHA that concluded the chemical was unlikely to cause cancer.

“The IARC classification of glyphosate is inconsistent with the findings of regulatory bodies in the United States and around the world, and it is not a sound basis for any regulatory action,” said Phil Miller, Monsanto’s vice president of regulatory affairs.

Monsanto’s lawsuit argues



REUTERS FILE

Activists protest against the production of herbicides and genetically modified food products outside Monsanto headquarters in January 2015. Monsanto filed suit in California seeking to prevent glyphosate, the main ingredient in its Roundup herbicide, from being added to the state’s list of known carcinogens.

that listing glyphosate under Proposition 65, as the state’s law is known, based on IARC’s classification cedes regulatory authority to an “unelected, undemocratic, unaccountable, and foreign body” that is not subject to oversight by any state or federal entity.

Monsanto argues that the lack of oversight violates the company’s right to procedural due process under California and U.S. law.

A listing would also require Monsanto and others offering products containing glyphosate to provide a “clear and reasonable warning” to consumers that the chemical is known to cause cancer, damaging Monsanto’s reputation and violating its First Amendment rights, the company said.

OEHHA did not comment, as it had not seen the lawsuit.

The case is Monsanto Company v. Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, et al, case number 16-CECG-00183 in the Superior Court of the State of California, County of Fresno.

Roundup is used by farmers around the world, generating Monsanto \$4.8 billion in fiscal 2015 revenue. Genetically modified seeds designed to tolerate glyphosate are immensely popular among corn and soybean growers.

But questions from environmentalists and other critics about the safety of the herbicide have dogged Monsanto for years.

Since IARC’s classification last year, Monsanto has been named in numerous lawsuits accusing the company of knowing of the dangers of glyphosate for decades.

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