



**FAIRYTALE FIND
 LOST WORKS OF
 CHILDREN'S BOOK
 CREATOR TO
 FETCH FORTUNE
 PAGE 28**

All together now



Picture: SAM WUNDKE

LONG ROMANCE: Don and Meredith Hood (left), Bernice and Wal Grant and Beryl and Hayden Dye are three married couples living in aged care at McCracken Views, Victor Harbor.

Breaking up is hard to do - and aged care doesn't have to mean less time with your soulmate, writes Jill Pengeley

MERV Hugo still recalls the day his wife of 51 years was taken from him, with a day's notice, and moved to a nursing home three hours away.

A lot has changed since that day, 10 years ago, when it was not uncommon to hear of bed shortages tearing lifelong couples apart.

Industry insiders say aged-care is now a buyer's market and consumers usually can make their pick of what they want and where they want it.

Mr Hugo, now 84, says he left his Whyalla Norrie home and moved into a caravan in Kadina to be near Dot, who was 76 and had dementia. "I had to go down there. I loved her too much not to," he says. "She didn't seem to know anything any more but I was there every day and I would take her out in the wheelchair and around the town. The night before she died,

she grabbed hold of my hand and said 'Merv, I love you.'"

Mrs Hugo died in 2008, aged 78, and her grief-stricken husband returned home to Whyalla.

ACH Group chief executive officer Mike Rungie says much more support is available now to keep people at home.

This government-subsidised support may have allowed the Hugos to remain together in their Whyalla Norrie home.

Dr Rungie says that because people are staying at home longer, there are more vacancies in nursing homes, allowing people to choose where they want to be.

Increasingly, couples also are able to find nursing home

accommodation together, although Dr Rungie says this is still "not entirely resolved".

"It would now be easier to shop around and find a facility that has two rooms but that would have been much harder 10 years ago," he says. "If people want to stay together, it's awful if you have a system that doesn't let them."

Some nursing homes now offer adjoining rooms and some couples choose to share one room and turn the other into a living room.

In other homes couples may be several rooms apart if the rooms between them are already occupied.

Southern Cross Care chief executive officer Andrew Larpent says keeping couples connected in residential aged care has a range of benefits.

"We find this can improve their overall health and outlook on life by having their partner by their side," he says.

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NURSING HOMES | Tearful husband vows to fight

Couple torn apart by bed shortage

JILL PENGELEY

AFTER 51 years of marriage, Merv Hugo and his wife Dot have been forced to separate with just one night's notice because there are not enough nursing home beds in Whyalla.

After his Whyalla Norrie home, he tried to be taken to his beloved wife who was taken from him yesterday and sent to a nursing home three hours away in Kadina.

"It is the saddest time in my 51 years of marriage. Bed shortages have been going on for years in Whyalla. We've never been parted in 51 years of being together," he said.

"It's terrible. I can't get her back. The old car is so old I can't get it. I can't get her back."

Mr Hugo, 74, said he was told on Tuesday night that his wife, 76, would be sent to a nursing home in Kadina for 10 days.

He promised, unconsciously, to be allowed to come to her at home, as he has for 20 years. He said his doctors believe his diabetic condition is deteriorating and he is no longer capable of caring for her.

"I don't want to see her in a nursing home, so when it was 20 years ago, I said, 'I'll be there when you get out of the hospital. We just fell in love.'" Mr Hugo said.

Together for 51 years, Merv and Dot are separated by 300km.

From The Advertiser of Friday, February 26.

He said he would consider living in the local caravan park if necessary.

He said he had left messages for Premier Mike Rann and Prime Minister John Howard, but had not received a return call.

If necessary, he said the Queen of England, he said.

Last Friday, The Advertiser told a similar story of Wally and Beryl Wade, who were separated because no bed could be found for Mrs Wade, 92.

Mr Wade, 87, said yesterday he had been taken to Kadina to stay in the unit and Dorothea Care had offered to pay for the petrol.

He said she was well, but he would not be allowed to see her in Whyalla. "If we had a nursing home bed



SAD NEWS: How Boomer editor Jill Pengeley broke the story of the Hugos' forced separation in March, 2006.

"This is aligned with our philosophy to assist older South Australians to live well in a place they call home and

where they are connected in relationships, activities and communities that have meaning for them."

The organisation has five couples living in its McCracken Views Residential Care property at Victor Harbor, including Wal, 92, and Bernice Grant, 90, who have been married 71 years.

"There is a common misconception that couples can't stay together when they move into residential care," Mr Larpent says. "On average, these (five) couples have each been married for over 60 years so it's important these relationships continue to flourish when they move out of home and into residential care."

"We are challenging traditional perceptions of aged care and where possible, we make a special effort to find suitable care for a spouse whose partner resides at one of our centres."

Despite leading a large aged-care organisation himself, ACH Group boss Mike Rungie recently employed the services of a broker to help find the best place for his mother and says it was "a thousand dollars well spent".

Continued Page 28