

The joy of being able to stay together

Couples needing both aged care and independent living are well catered for at Australian Unity's The Alba.

You can hear the emotion in Kerri Bradshaw's voice as she talks about the prospect of differing care needs separating her ageing parents, for Lorraine and Max McPherson had become partners as teenagers.

"They had one holiday apart, but otherwise have spent their whole lives together. They are a real team," Kerri says of the couple, both in their 80s.

When Max had a stroke 17 years ago, Lorraine happily became his carer. "The job she has done is incredible," Kerri says. However, things changed when Max had a fall earlier this year, and while in hospital it became evident he would need aged care.

"Mum did not want to be separated from him," Kerri says. Given "he's high care and she's no care", it was a difficult situation. What could they do? Full-time in-home care services were not available in Shepparton, where the couple had always lived, and regional facilities weren't suitable either.

During a walk around Albert Park Lake, Kerri noticed a construction site. It was The Alba, an Australian Unity community. She made an appointment.

"I cried when they showed me through. It was just so beautiful," she says. "When they brought up prices, I burst into tears and said, 'I think they can afford it!'"

Kerri's tears were also of relief. With both residential aged care and independent as-



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Kerri Bradshaw

Lorraine McPherson is welcomed to her "easy living" home at The Alba.

sisted living on offer at The Alba, it meant her parents wouldn't need to be "torn apart from someone they have seen every day for 65 years - they can still spend the rest of their life together". For that reason, the whole family is "over the moon; the only real comment any of us has made is, 'Isn't this wonderful?'" Kerri says.

Max gets the care he needs, while Lorraine lives two floors above him in her own premium, self-contained "easy living" apart-

ment, which comes with a range of in-house services and support.

"It's a beautiful scenario," Kerri says. "Mum can see Dad all day, every day, and everyone else is doing the heavy lifting for her. She no longer dresses or showers him, so what she's doing is the enjoyable part of their relationship now, like having meals together every day."

She says on Father's Day the couple dined in the rooftop restaurant, which has amazing views of the lake.

Lorraine says "easy living" at The Alba has given her a new lease of life. She was thrilled she didn't have to pack a vacuum cleaner when she moved.

"They're going to clean!" she told her daughter as she triumphantly threw her vacuum out. With meals also provided as part of her package, she's free of shopping lists, cooking and other household chores.

It's given Lorraine time to start a book club, socialise with her old friends and meet new ones, such as the wife of another aged care patient.

"She's meeting lovely, like-minded people who understand her situation because they are in the same boat," Kerri says. "The Alba have been really good at providing entertainment, too," she adds. "Previously, Mum would have had to go out, but now she just gets in the lift and heads to the relevant level."

While moving ageing parents can be emotional and stressful for the whole family, Kerri gratefully acknowledges the staff at The Alba for "going out of their way to eliminate the stress as much as they possibly can. It's been delightful that our Mum and Dad have been able to transition into such a beautiful facility with really caring people."

People considering retirement community living should seek professional, independent financial and legal advice.



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