

# peter goers



THE PEOPLE'S VOICE

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## Grant me last swish

### Five-star finery for the golden years



TEA FOR TWO: Val Speakman and Peter Goers at The Glenbrook retirement village in Glenside

**'Y**OU'LL never know I'm here," I joked to my roommate. I didn't tell her I had a racking smoker's cough to wake the dead and I'm vaguely impossible to live with.

Val Speakman is a brave woman. She kindly agreed to put me up for two nights last weekend in her attractive apartment at The Glenbrook in Glenside - one of Adelaide's most prestigious retirement villages. I made a new friend and I hope she did, too.

Val is a gregarious, nimble, bright, petite, elegant, fun lady of a certain age with a twinkle in her eyes. With titian air and big red glasses she's Auntie Mame. Just my sort of gal.

She's lived at this posh maximum-security twilight home for more than four years where she cared for her late husband, plays poker, does well in the footy tipping, loves a flutter on the neddies and watches DVDs of old Hollywood musicals. She's a great-grandmother.

We talk of old Adelaide families, some of whom remain part of her life at The Glenbrook. Mrs Speakman's tasteful first-floor apartment has a dress-circle view of a park and we have a relaxing time as I swan into her life to see what it's like to live among the privileged Burnside elderly.

God's waiting room can be five star if you have the wherewithal. Mrs Speakman hosts a meeting of selected residents in her apartment and, like the rest of Adelaide, we talked of the scandal of the footballers' wives.

I meet a lady who runs the Knit and Natter Group and is the lone Power fan among the 87 residents in 74 apartments. "When the Power won the flag I was particularly unpopular," she says.

Mrs Speakman graciously allows me to smoke in her apartment, and I do so in bed, transfixed by the smoke detector and the fire sprinklers hoping that I'm not going to set them off.

The residents joke they spend a lot of time thinking about the hereafter. They go into a room and wonder what they're here after. Boom-boom.

Mrs Speakman and I go out for a fish and chip lunch at Frewville followed by a nanna nap - I needed it more.

We have a pleasant dinner in the dining room accompanied by Frank Sinatra and Al Jolson on CD. Refreshingly, these people dress for dinner and I'm surrounded by grand old ladies and one lucky old gentleman who could be the sultan of a harem.

I bond with two nonagenarians; one is a former classical singer and the other is the most elegantly dressed lady I've ever seen. She's also blind. Her meal has been cut up for her and she's escorted to and from the dining room on the arm of a kindly carer.

Then Mrs Speakman and I had a date to see a movie at the Chelsea Cinema.

When is a five-star boutique hotel not a hotel? When it's The Glenbrook. This is the future of aged care for the rich. As to the poor, well, let 'em eat cake.

It's a place of dignity, respect, courtesy, manners, consideration and care. Here you buy the privilege of privacy or as much social life as you require.

The high security brings confidence for residents and loved ones alike. All the apartments have bay windows looking on to manicured gardens with roses and silver birches swaying in the soft gully breeze.

Realistically, it's also a soft landing - a beginning of the end for the Burnside bourgeois. Naturally, 80 per cent of residents will leave their apartments feet first to go to the great big Burnside in the sky where God is an Anglican Englishman and the angels serve Earl Grey tea and cucumber sandwiches.

The residents love the managing director of Omega SeniorCare, Bill McClurg, a sympathetic Irishman. They call him a "caring,

clever businessman" and he is. This is his second upmarket retirement village and he's full of plans to build an even bigger and better one at Ashford. They offer as much or as little medical care as the resident requires. The apartments are beautiful and no expense is spared, apart from a cheap acrylic carpet which Mrs Speakman dislikes intensely.

The corridors and communal areas are designed by Birgitte Valbo, clearly one of Adelaide's finest interior designers and a world-class corridor designer.

"They're wide enough for a race of four wheelchairs," says Mrs Speakman, and full of sunny nooks, over-stuffed chairs, fake flowers and a cosy library which is a museum of best-sellers past.

It's not cheap to live there but clearly not prohibitive and there's a long waiting list. Apartments cost between \$200,000 and \$400,000. The company keeps 20 per cent of the sale price when the residents leave. A car park in the undercroft costs \$18,500. You pay \$100 a week for rates, taxes and some services. The food is extra.

Amid all this money is a lot of empathy for others and there's also, naturally, gossip and intrigue but little suspicion. There's no need to lock your apartment but most, by force of habit, do.

I woke at dawn on Sunday. The silence was deafening. Not the silence of the grave but of time passing slowly.

Slowly the place stirred with a bird song, and bran and warm milk on stoves. I said a fond goodbye to my hostess who has a lot of life and a lot of living left to do in her velvet cage of old age.

She's younger than a lot of young people I know and as Oscar Wilde wisely quipped: "The tragedy of old age is not that one is old but that one is young." Perhaps I left her admiring her beautiful Meissen china. Of Meissen men.

**Peter Goers can be heard weeknights on 891ABC Adelaide**



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#### WHAT'S HOT

- The Vietnam War memorial at the Torrens Parade Ground - a superb tribute to brave men of two countries.
- Bill Johnson - fine young Riverland achiever.
- Gorgeous Glossop in the Riverland.
- The renovated Burra Town Hall.
- Greg Davey - champion baker and rising star.
- SA Government approves 40 per cent of the Cheltenham Racecourse as open space - a good compromise.

#### WHAT'S NOT

- The RSL in Sydney shows forgiveness to a boy who defaced its flag but then racist yobbos threaten to harm him.
- Ancient Aboriginal rock art under threat from mining in WA.
- Peter Vaughan from Business SA - does he ever say anything positive?
- Whatever happened to the pie cart on North Tce?
- Mobile phones for six-year-olds.
- Much more drought relief needed in SA.
- Madonna obscenely shops for babies in Africa.