

100th birthday wish ... to see an elephant



CHELSEA PIETERSE

AFTER 80 years spent as a missionary in southern Africa, Sister Cosma Graf's wish for her 100th birthday is to see an elephant.

With selfless service to parts of southern Africa, Graf said she had never seen an elephant before. "I want to see what an elephant looks like," beamed Graf from her wheelchair yesterday.

Graf will be celebrating her 100th birthday today at Villa Assumpta in Piet-ermaritzburg.

Born in Germany in the early 1900s, Graf lived the first few years of her life surrounded by war and tragedy. Third child to Anna Georg Graf, Cosma lost her father in World War I, just three weeks after she was born.

At the age of 20, Graf professed chastity, poverty and obedience in Neustadt am Main, Germany, and left her family of 11 to teach in Manzini, Swaziland.

Graf said she taught at the first school in Manzini and was "so pleased and proud" to have been one of the first teachers in Swaziland.

Villa Assumpta advisor Henry Spencer said Graf had walked the hills of Swaziland, promoting education for girls in Swaziland. Fellow sister and friend Sister Alexandra said Graf spent hours teaching the children of Swaziland, and later South Africa, how to make rosaries out of berries. Alexandra said that many children in Swaziland had paid for their own school fees by making and selling the rosaries.

Graf moved to South Africa and began training young sisters at the Congregation at Oakford Priory, Verulam, in KwaZulu-Natal.

Graf's focus in her missionary work was education and independence, and through her work in Shakas Kraal, Oakford, Hlabisa and Hambanathi, she ministered with compassion wherever she was.

Alexandra said during her year's of service, Graf had learned to speak Zulu. "I speak isiZulu like a Zulu," said Graf.

A close friend of Graf's, Sister Paula, said she had known Graf for over 50 years and had always known her to have a good sense of humour and compassion.

When asked how she felt to be turning 100, Graf laughed and asked Alexandra if she thought she looked 55 years old.

Sister Cosma Graf celebrates her 100th birthday in the company of friends at Villa Assumpta today.

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