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Nun's 100th birthday wish comes true

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Sister Cosma Graf gazes at an elephant, fulfilling her 100th birthday wish. (Jonathan Burton, The Witness)

Chelsea Pieterse, [The Witness](#)

Pietermaritzburg - Fulfilling her 100th birthday wish, an excited Sister Cosma Graf met an elephant for the first time on Thursday - after 81 years spent in South Africa.

Interviewed by The Witness on her 100th birthday last week, the diminutive Sister Cosma said her fervent birthday wish was to see an elephant.

"I want to see what an elephant looks like," she said.

The Witness joined up with Lion Park owner Brian Boswell to make the centenarian's wish come true. She was picked up at her home at Villa Assumpta and driven to the Lion Park by Boswell, where her lifelong dream was realised.

Wide-eyed

While driving down a dirt road, the car jolted to a halt as Sister Cosma sat wide-eyed, along with her two friends and fellow nuns, Sister Alexandra and Sister Natalie, as a group of elephants thudded on to the road ahead.

Lola the elephant, just as keen to see Sister Cosma as Sister Cosma was to see Lola, attempted a handshake with the awe-struck nun, waving her trunk through Sister Cosma's window. Sister

Cosma was speechless as the gigantic creatures gathered a mere three metres away from the car to stop for a snack.

With a huge smile on her face, Sister Cosma looked on as the elephants ate and trumpeted in delight at the sight of their food.

Boswell said he would have loved to have Sister Cosma feed one of the elephants, but was worried that the size of the creatures standing next to her wheelchair might have overwhelmed the small nun.

Lion cubs

Boswell said he had instead organised for Sister Cosma to meet two fluffy lion cubs who were just two weeks old.

As the car bounced along the dirt road to meet the lion cubs, Sister Cosma sat quietly, a huge smile on her face.

The cat-sized lion cub was placed in Sister Cosma's lap, and she immediately held the dopey-eyed cub up to her face to give him a kiss.

"I want to take him home with me. You stay with me," said Sister Cosma to the cub in her arms. Sister Alexandra and Sister Natalie stood around Sister Cosma clicking away with their cameras as Sister Cosma cuddled with the furry creature.

"I am very happy at how she responded today. She definitely took it all in," said Alexandra, while holding the other lion cub.

Boswell said he was delighted to have been able to help grant Sister Cosma's birthday wish. Sisters Alexandra and Natalie thanked Boswell and The Witness for making Sister Cosma's wish of 81 years come true.

History

Born in Germany in the early 1900s, Graf lost her father in World War 1, just three weeks after she was born. At the age of 20, Graf professed chastity, poverty and obedience in Neustadtam 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 Graf had learned to speak Zulu. "I speak isiZulu like a Zulu," said Graf.