

In Commemoration of Christa Meyer 20th Oct 1941 – 28th Oct 2018

After attending primary school in Kroondal and high school at Rustenburg High, Christa went on to study occupational therapy at the then Pretoria College of Occupational Therapy. After qualifying she worked at the Pretoria General Hospital (HF Verwoerd Hospital now Steve Biko Academic Hospital) where she became interested in the rehabilitation of people with spinal cord injuries (SCI). Vona du Toit realised Christa's dedication to rehabilitation of people with SCI and involved her in starting a Sport Association for paraplegics. Christa accompanied the first South African team to the Olympics in Japan. Thereafter, she travelled many times to international sporting events, as part of the management team.

The treatment of patients with spinal cord injury became a speciality for Christa and she later went on to work at Conradie Hospital in the Cape where she became an expert in orthotics and functional rehabilitation of the upper limb and developed a training programme using the Engen flexor hinge splint.

After the 1974 WFOT meeting in Vancouver Christa, together with Priscilla Stevenson visited Maud Malik at the Hammerville Rehabilitation Centre as well as Thorkild Engen himself in Houston. While in Houston she actually taught the American team how to train patients to use the splint with different levels of injury. In the same trip Christa and Priscilla learned about Jobs garments for burns patients and brought this information back to SA.

Due to Christa's expertise in splinting and in treatment programmes for quadriplegic patients she was invited by Maud Malik to work with her at the rehabilitation centre in Hammerville where she spent 2 years and co-authored books with Maud Malik on splinting. She later brought Maud Malik to SA to share her expertise on splinting.

Christa left Conradie to take up the post as Head OT at Grootte Schuur Hospital (after Moira Peart retired) where she was involved in the clinical training of occupational therapy students. In 1990 Christa took up a post to lecture at MEDUNSA (now Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University), a post that she held until her retirement in 2001.

While at Medunsa she became involved in community services for people with disabilities in the neighbouring areas, especially Winterville. She saw the extreme need for rehabilitation at the community

level as many adults and children were not able to access the existing hospital services. This resulted in her training a group of local women

as rehabilitation assistants at the community level (community rehabilitation workers). This pioneering work was done along with the training of similar workers at Alexander Health centre and that at Tintswalo hospital. It was a great sadness for her to see this type of the training being abandoned as she realised that getting rehabilitation to disadvantaged communities was going to be compromised. In spite of this she continued offering services at the community level until she retired. All OT students at Medunsa spent time during their training learning about community rehabilitation under Christa's guidance.

When Christa retired from Medunsa she spent one year in Kampala, Uganda to help the occupational therapists to develop OT services. Thereafter, she was invited to the Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre (KCMC), in Moshi, Tanzania where she spent four years training occupational therapists and helping to establish this training.

On returning to South Africa, she was often asked (even earlier this year) to hold workshops for therapists working with SCI.

Christa who had a disciplined attitude to life and a deep Christian belief spent her life unselfishly helping others. Many people's lives were greatly enriched by knowing her. Her positive approach to life helped her to overcome or live with many underlying medical conditions. Even when she was unwell, she still managed to help people in the retirement village at Kroondal where she spent her last years; and she was involved in Food Garden projects at the local school as well as the distribution of bibles to disadvantaged communities.

Christa always saw her life under God's guidance and she knew that God was beside her every step of the way.

Christa's legacy as an outstanding OT and friend will live on.

The Lord said: I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you to me.

Estelle Shipham, Priscilla Stevenson and Marj Concha
November 2018



Vale to Vivyan Margaret Alers

South Africa, and indeed the world, has lost a dynamic and prominent occupational therapist in Vivyan Alers. She had a degree in social work, and a Bachelors and a Masters degree in occupational therapy. She belonged to the World Psychodrama Association and trained in psychodrama and the Therapeutic Spiral in the UK, Jerusalem and in France. She was also highly trained and an expert in the theories of Sensory Integration and was a progressive leader in the South African Institute of Sensory Integration (SAISI).

As a clinician she had her own practice in the paediatric field and, typical of her generous nature and activist leanings, she took her expertise in psychodrama, trauma and bereavement counselling into disadvantaged communities where violent crimes are rife and the availability of such expertise is minimal. It was here that she developed her own NPO in the deprived township of Ivory Park, a poverty stricken township near Johannesburg.

She was a popular lecturer in occupational therapy at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and, together with Rose Crouch, advocated for the commencement of a coursework Masters in Group work at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal.

Viv was co-editor with Rose Crouch of the last three out of five editions of "Occupational Therapy in Psychiatry and Mental Health", an internationally respected textbook. Active in the latter years of Occupational Therapy Africa Regional Group (OTARG) conferences, and with a passionate love for Africa, Viv's determination to chronicle the unique role of OT in Africa was realised when in 2010 as principle editor, she produced the book "Occupational Therapy: An African Perspective," which is used extensively by OTs in Africa today.

Viv was a much loved, larger than life, and truly *fun-to-be-with* per-

son whose infectious laugh and humour made her great company at a party but equally, was the passionate gentle and loyal friend that would listen intently to the concerns of her colleagues and the oppressed. Many close friends have all lost a kindred and vivacious spirit that enriched their lives with her creativity, generosity and overwhelming presence. Many individuals in need of support globally, have benefited from her collaboration, teamwork and joint productivity.

Apart from her deep conviction for the essential contribution of OT to the health and wellness of humanity, Viv was a talented artist, and an excellent gardener (especially indigenous African gardening). She loved animals, had particular passion for bull terriers and horses, and rode very well.

Her husband Ian, and two children Luke and Cindy were the centre of her life. The children married and the family grew with the additions of a daughter and son-in-law Nicole and Ian, and then grandchildren, Kate, Chloe, Isabel and Alexander. It is thus in one sense a compounded tragedy that her life was so prematurely taken when she was at such a contented and happy place within it. But from another viewpoint, her death at such a time of occupational fulfillment and emotional contentment can also be viewed as a blessing in that she died in such a happy space within her life journey.

The OT halls will echo with the sounds of your laughter, and vibrate with the passion that your activist soul and conviction brought to those of us who sit in boxes and fear to get out of them. We will miss you deeply dear Vivyan.

Robin Joubert and Rose Crouch
July 2018