

Corning woman commences second century



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Mary Krebs, who turned 102 on Feb. 1, spent most of her life among the friendly faces and familiar sights of Corning's south side, known to some as "Catholic Hill" for its predominantly Irish Catholic population.

By Richard A. Kiley
News Editor

MONTOUR FALLS — Mary Krebs believes in putting her all into everything she does.

As a student at St. Mary's School in Corning and then at the former Corning Free Academy, she was an incessant studier. She later became a well-respected businesswoman in Corning, where her career spanned more than four decades until her retirement in 1973 at the age of 85.

But Miss Krebs, who turned 102 this Feb. 1, really doesn't know why people continue to fuss about her embarking on a second century of life.

If you ask her, she'll say she had nothing to do with it.

"Whatever I've done in life is nothing of my own doing," said Miss Krebs, a resident of The Falls Home for Adults. "It's all done through the grace of God. I don't have anything to do with it. I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow."

Miss Krebs was born in Corning on Feb. 1, 1888, to Henry and Catherine Krebs. She was the second oldest in a family of nine — seven girls and two boys. Miss Krebs' parents also came from large families; her mother was one of 10 children, and her father was one of eight.

After living at the corner of Second and Walnut streets for two years, she and her family moved to the home her father built

make sure you did your homework. We had a regular routine and you had to keep up."

Miss Krebs believes strongly in the discipline and the education that she still carries with her from her days at St. Mary's. "I believe in Catholic education; it's something you carry with you all the days of your life."

After attending CFA for two years, she entered the Elizabeth McNamara Business School to learn shorthand and stenography.

At the tender age of 15 she began her business career as a secretary in the business office of the Greig Department Store, earning six dollars a week.

She later became a corporate secretary for the Hunt Glass Co. in Corning, where she worked from about 1915 to 1937.

In 1942, she took a job at a Corning dress shop called Cain's Store, where she worked until she retired at age 85 in 1973.

Throughout her life, Miss Krebs has not done anything half-heartedly. As a lifelong parishioner of St. Mary's Church in Corning, she was active in the Sacred Heart League, Rosary Society and Legion of Mary.

She still attends Sunday Mass in The Falls Home library every Sunday morning at 10 a.m. In addition, she also attends a service every Wednesday afternoon.

"My faith is very important to me," said Miss Krebs, who added that both of her



Miss Krebs shares a joyous moment with Anne Mathews, assistant activities director at The Falls Home for Adults.

at 109 W. Second St. in Corning.

Miss Krebs' father was an engineer for the Fallbrook and New York Central railroads. She and her siblings were brought up in the house on West Second Street, where Miss Krebs continued to live until she injured her hip in a fall two years ago.

"I lived all my life in that house," Miss Krebs said. "I miss home. You knew everybody on the block ... People were very friendly on the hill."

The hill Miss Krebs grew up on and spent almost all her life was commonly referred to "Irish Hill" or "Catholic Hill." She recalls that the area was settled by the Irish who came to Corning prior to the Civil War.

She has fond memories of her childhood on the hill. Her proximity to school and the theater enabled her to walk everywhere. And she loved to spend her Sunday afternoons riding the street car up to Painted Post and back.

Miss Krebs also remembers fondly her years of attending St. Mary's School and the old Corning Free Academy.

"It (St. Mary's School) wasn't too strict," said Miss Krebs, who especially enjoyed mathematics and spelling. "The Sisters of Mercy from Rochester were very competent teachers. You always had to

parents were strong Catholics.

She once considered joining the religious life when she was younger, but she didn't believe she could devote herself fully to God because of her father's illness. Several of her nieces and nephews have entered religious life.

"She would have made a great nun," said her niece, Jean Bernas, who lives in Elmira Heights. "She is a very religious person. She prayed for everybody when we were growing up. If anybody needed something, she was always there. My aunt would do anything for anybody."

Bernas said that she and her sister, Joan Cotter — who still lives in the family home in Corning and who lived with Miss Krebs for 12 years — loved to walk to their aunt's house for breakfast when they were growing up.

Another niece, Alice Till of Rochester, said her aunt has had a strong influence on her life. "She makes old age not so frightening," she said.

Perhaps Till said it best when asked to describe her aunt, who has been cited in a number of books throughout her lifetime, including *A Century of Grace*, which was written by diocesan archivist Father Robert F. McNamara.

"I perceive my aunt to be a century of grace plus two," Till said.

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