

## Brian McNicholl's Polio Story.

---

Brian McNicholl, born December 1951 is a New Zealand-born Australian Paralympic powerlifter, weightlifter, wheelchair basketballer, and athlete, who won five medals at six Paralympic games from 1976 to 1996.

Brian was born in December 1951 in Christchurch, New Zealand, and became a paraplegic after contracting polio at the age of eleven months. He moved from New Zealand to Australia in 1978 to advance his sporting career.

Brian's first medal for New Zealand was silver at the 1976 Toronto Games in the Men's Slalom 4 event. Brian also competed and won medals in regional and other international competitions for New Zealand before moving to Australia.



After moving to Australia in 1978 he represented the country at five Paralympics and won three bronze, another silver and a gold medal, all in weightlifting and powerlifting.

Brian's experiences after contracting Polio were recorded by his Mother, and many of the events of that time will sound very familiar to many Australian Polio survivors.

### **This is Brian's story as told by his Mother.**

Brian contracted polio in November 1952 just 4 weeks before Christmas. The family was confined to the house for three weeks although his Dad was allowed to go to work. Nobody was allowed into the home which was very hard as it was so close to Christmas 1952. Maynas (Brian's Grandmother) was not going to have a bar of this.

The family took it very hard as I was such a fussy mother. After four weeks he was admitted in to Christchurch Hospital in isolation with no visitors allowed. His roommate was Graham Condon who also had polio and went on to become the Mayor of Christchurch.

Brian was sent home after three weeks in hospital and from then on until he was three years old, he had to attend hospital every day for hydrotherapy treatment and exercise. He was always picked up by the Crippled Children Hospital van and was away every day for two hours.

Then one day I was reading in the Woman's Weekly magazine about a hospital in Wanganui called the Duncan Hospital for polio patients and how they could treat people with polio. This hospital was given to the people of New Zealand by Sir Thomas and Lady Duncan. All the produce for the hospital was grown on their Huntly farm. This treatment at the Duncan Hospital was based on the Sister Kenny treatment.

The treatment and stay there were free for all patients. My mother (Maynas) and I travelled with Brian by ferry from Lyttleton to Wellington overnight then from Wellington to Wanganui by bus. Brian was taken straight to the Duncan Hospital for an examination which would tell us what they would be able to do for him. Their treatment was the Sister Kenny method. But he first had to spend 7 weeks in the Wanganui Hospital as he had developed a very bad bowel blockage. When that was cleared, he was returned to the Duncan Hospital to start his treatment.

He was at the Duncan Hospital for 9 months; in that time, he had 2 operations on his leg to reverse the muscles. After that he came home, with his leg always in plaster. Then he would go back monthly for treatment. He ended up having 7 operations on his legs. It was very

hard when he started school as sometimes other children can be cruel with slinging off about the frame (callipers) that he had to wear. He had a very protective brother with him for 3 years but some of the teachers thought he was a little over protective. He did miss out on a lot of school and could not take part in sport and some other activities according to the teachers.

As he got older, he became a very popular person. We always had a lot of support from friends and family from the very beginning. We were a very close family. He kept going to Wanganui up to the time he was 14.