

# Australian woman dies after 60 years in iron lung

October 31 2009

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An Australian woman who spent a record-breaking 60 years confined to an iron lung after contracting polio died Saturday in a Melbourne nursing home, aged 83.

June Middleton was paralysed when she entered the respiratory chamber in 1949, aged 23, and doctors gave her a slim chance of survival.

Family friend Robyn Butterworth said Middleton, who was thought to hold the world record for the longest time spent in an iron lung, was an inspirational [woman](#).

"She went through a lot but she had a great sense of humour, liked to tell a joke," Butterworth told state radio, confirming Middleton's death.

"She just loved life. Whatever was given to her she lived it day by day."

Middleton said she had no idea how she contracted polio, which was at epidemic levels at the time, but never felt pity for herself.

"I went to get out of bed to go to the toilet, which was down the other end of the flat. I couldn't get further than putting my legs over the bed. It's no respecter of age," she said in a 2006 interview with ABC television.

"The doctor came and said, 'I'm sorry, we've got to put you in a [respirator](#) for a rest.' I couldn't have cared less by that time.

"In the morning when the doctor came to do the round I said, 'Can I get out of this thing, please?' And he said, 'I think we better keep you in there a little bit longer, dear.'"

The iron lung, an antiquated device which uses pressurised bellows to force the lungs to breathe, was Middleton's best treatment option.

She was permitted limited weekly outings free of the lung with the use of a portable chest respirator, and an automated page turner meant she could still read while confined.

The virus responsible for polio has been eliminated around the world except for Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan.

The Gates Foundation, Rotary International, Germany and Great Britain in January committed more than 630 million dollars for the fight to eradicate polio.

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