

## MEET ALISON SMITH:

Alison was born in Ch-Ch in 1950 and was the youngest in a family of one older brother and 3 older sisters. Alison's Dad worked for the Tramways as an administrator and payroll officer while her Mum was a stay-at-home mother and the family home was in Richardson Terrace, Woolston. When she was born, her legs had never formed properly and the only explanation given to her parents was the thought that the umbilical cord may have wrapped around her lower body causing the disability. Alison was left with a short stump on the left and nothing at all on the right. The medical fraternity advised her Mum & Dad that the chances of survival were slim and recommended that Alison be sent to the Sisters of Compassion Home in Wellington to be cared for. For 4 ½ years, her mother and oldest sister used to visit once a month by catching the ferry from Lyttelton to Wellington but because she had "survived", her parents took her back home to Ch Ch to live the rest of her childhood with the family unit. While in Wellington, she received her first set of prostheses which were strapped around her waist and held on with a leather strap over the shoulder. The legs themselves consisted of a wooden peg with rockers as the feet and she could stand up but needed crutches to walk.



Alison started primary school at Woolston when she was 5 ½ years old and her Mum used to push her to school in a pram. She started attending the Limb Centre which was situated in the Returned Serviceman's Rehabilitation League in Riccarton Rd that some more mature amputees may recall. Her parents decided that Cashmere H/S would be a better fit for Alison and she was taken to and from school each day in a taxi. School was not a great experience and she left at age 16 whereupon she completed some voluntary work for CCS in the office for around 6 months where she learnt how to operate a punch card machine. This



experience led to Alison being offered a punch card operator's position at The NZ Refrigerating Co where she ended working for around 20 years. She was promoted and at the time of leaving, Alison was a data supervisor travelling all over NZ training staff. She had saved enough money to purchase her first car, a brand new Mini off the showroom floor and a gentleman from Kaiapoi did the work to adapt the car for Alison's needs.

Alison recalls at the age of 20, she joined the Paraplegic Association and every Saturday morning she attended the activities. This was where she formed a close friendship with a lady, Neroli Fairhall, the champion archer who had a distinguished sporting career

## ALISON SMITH CONT:

culminating in her becoming the first Para athlete to compete at a full Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1984. Around this time, she met a gentleman from the Richmond Smallbore Rifle Club who offered Alison the opportunity to "have a go" at Air Rifle shooting. This man, Len Smith, later became her husband and they married in 1981. They started their married life living in Alison's flat before purchasing a house in Kearneys Rd, Bromley where they lived for 33 years. Her passion for air rifle shooting resulted in attending many national championships and culminating in Alison being chosen to represent NZ at the 1984 Para Games in Los Angeles. Her event was actually held in Long Island, New York and Alison is extremely proud of her achievement in winning the bronze medal.

The 2011 Ch-Ch earthquake severely damaged the family home and Alison recalls being without water & power for the first few days. The electric ramp lift in to the house could not be used so Alison had to sleep in the car while Len slept in the BBQ area until they got power and water restored. Len & Alison spent the next 4-5 years in the damaged house "fighting" their insurance company before an agreement was reached to have their home rebuilt. The couple moved in to a flat in North Avon Rd, Richmond while the rebuild took place but it was during this time that Len became quite unwell after a cancer diagnosis. He went through the treatment but opted out when it became too hard for him to handle. Sadly, Len passed away 3 weeks later and never got to move back in to the rebuilt family home. One of Len's very best friends greatly assisted Alison to get everything in order with the new house and this assistance has continued through to the present day for which Alison is very grateful and humbled by. Alison stated the friendship is so special that she calls him son and he calls her Mum.

In 2015, not long after moving back to Kearneys Rd, Alison sold the house and shifted to Rangiora to live with one of her sisters but after 1 ½ years, she decided to purchase a villa at Lady Dianna Isaac where she currently lives. Alison is rightfully proud that she has worked all her life despite her challenges. After being made redundant at the NZ Refrigerating Co, Alison was the office receptionist at CCS in Ch-Ch for around 10 years before retiring. Retirement did not last long as she then took up a part-time position at the Papanui RSA which was meant to be for one month. 8 years later, she finally did retire which was at the end of 2022.

**FAVOURITE FOOD:** Asian cuisine.

**FAVOURITE ACTIVITIES:** Loves doing jigsaw puzzles, word searches, Rummikub and in the past her smallbore shooting.

**FAVOURITE PLACE:** Mooloolaba. Sunshine Coast.

**MUSIC:** The Topp Twins. Music from the 50's-80's.

Alison & Len made the decision not to have any children for the fear that her condition may have been genetic and her ability to look after little ones would be too hard. When asked what was the greatest risk that she ever took in life, Alison responded, "That is a hard one to answer. My whole life has been a challenge but I have always found a way to overcome the many obstacles that I have faced. For that, I am proud of my courage and resilience. I never give up because I don't like to be beaten".

