

Paul Alexander, who spent the vast majority of the past 70 years in an iron lung and defied expectations by becoming a lawyer and author, died Monday afternoon at the age of 78, according to his brother Philip Alexander. His death was announced Tuesday on a GoFundMe page set up to help pay for his housing and health care. In March 2023, he was declared the longest surviving iron lung patient in the world by the Guinness World Records. It was the height of the polio epidemic; more than 21,000 paralytic polio cases were recorded that year in the United States, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Today, polio is considered eliminated in the United States thanks to vaccines that were developed in the late 1950s, according to the CDC. "Paul, you will be missed but always remembered. Thanks for sharing your story with us," Christopher Ulmer, organizer of the GoFundMe fundraiser, said on the page. Paul developed polio in the summer of 1952, at the age of 6. He was placed in an iron lung, a large metal cylinder that varies air pressure to stimulate breathing, according to his autobiography. "The doctors told us Paul could not possibly live," Doris Alexander, Paul's mother, said in his autobiography.