

Javelin is no longer thorn on King's side

Troy King was 13 years old when a javelin pierced his chest at a Waikato secondary school sports day. Wintec journalism student Brad Mills asks him what he recalls.

MARCH 12, 1987, was an important day on the Waikato sports calendar.

It was the Hamilton secondary schools championships at Porritt Stadium, an event attracting the city's top young athletes.

Troy King, a 13-year-old student at St John's College, was scheduled to compete in the four-by-100m relay shortly after lunch.

His parents George and Dawn King, who were among the spectators, were excited for their son and hopeful the St John's team would do well.

A few minutes before the start of the race, Troy began his walk to the relay changeover point.

At some point, he saw his friend Sam walking on the other side of the arena and the two moved to greet each other.

At the same time, about 50 metres away, a javelin thrower began his run up.

As the thrower's spear began its arc down the grounds, a spectator screamed, "Look out!"

Troy remembers turning when he heard the shout. And he remembers feeling the force of the javelin as it entered his chest.

"I turned and bam. Bob's your uncle," he says.

The javelin, which is around 25mm in diameter and weighs about 800 grams, pierced his chest diagonally just to the left of his left nipple, penetrating 25cm into his torso. It would have been travelling at about 30m a second and spinning when it hit.

Troy's mother, a nurse, says she couldn't believe what had happened. "I was stunned."

She and George raced to their son's side and George rested him on his knee while Dawn tried to calm him and steady the tail of the two-metre javelin protruding from his chest.

Troy was conscious and remembers how the javelin appeared. "You can imagine the big thing waving around, sticking out of me."

He says he also remembers swearing as people crowded around him. "I was swearing my head off because I wasn't usually allowed to swear, so this was a perfect opportunity."

The fire service was called and cut off the protruding part of the javelin. Later experts claimed it was



LUCKY MAN: Troy King with the remains of the javelin that went through his chest 20 years ago.

"I was pleased to be able to report to his mother, who was a nurse in our ward, that I would expect that he should make a good recovery from his surgery."

Troy was in hospital for five days and spent five days at home before returning to school.

He underwent several months' physiotherapy, which he says was the most painful part of the ordeal, "even with the laughing gas".

Today, a scar shaped like a backwards No 7 is the only reminder of his near-death experience.

He says he doesn't think about the incident any more, "even when I see my scar in the shower".

"I used to think about it more when I was younger.

"On the anniversary of the day I would think, 'wow I may not be here if that had gone bad'. But it doesn't haunt me."

However, there were some long-term reminders.

fortunate no one tried to remove the spear, which would have caused a fatal loss of blood as a major organ had been penetrated.

Troy says his clothes were dripping in blood.

"I remember the pain wasn't as bad as I made it out to be; I think it must have been the shock."

He was taken by ambulance to Waikato Hospital. Surgeon Ross Blair was on duty that day and remembers the incident vividly.

"The javelin penetrated his left anterior chest through about the sixth intercostal space just where we would expect the apex of the heart to be.

"Fortunately it had passed through the sac around the heart (the pericardium) but had nudged the heart to one side so that it was not injured at all."

The operation was successful.

Ross says the repair was straightforward as the javelin had narrowly missed all major organs and veins.

He says, at school he earned the nickname "Javelin".

"The kids used to sing that song, Thorn in My Side, by the Eurhythmics."

Troy says some changes were made to track and field events as a result of the accident.

"I noticed they had fenced off the javelin area the next year."

He says he has no hard feelings towards the student who threw the javelin whom he understands was very upset after the incident.

But he has never met him.

"I don't think I'd want to. I've moved on, it wasn't his fault - he was just playing the sport." Today, Troy, 34, is a real estate agent in Te Awamutu. He is married to Riane and the couple has two girls, Danielle, 18 months and Alyssa, 4. He says his daughters are too young to understand how he got his scar. But when they are older he will explain. There is also a souvenir from the event. His mother still has the remains of the javelin.