

## Moise Poirier back in action after open-heart surgery



Moise Poirier of Grand Étang, near Chéticamp, Cape Breton, is back in his garden—harvesting berries and planning next year’s crops—after valve replacement and bypass surgery .

After a lifetime of working outdoors and eating home-grown vegetables and fresh-caught fish, Moise Poirier of Grand Étang, Cape Breton, was full of vigour. A retired fisherman and World War II veteran, Moise continued ice-fishing for smelt and cultivating acres of produce well into his eighties.

By the time he reached 89, however, Moise was slowing down. He had a narrowing in one of the valves of his heart, a condition known as aortic stenosis that creeps up over the years as scar tissue and calcium deposits form in the heart. This, plus a minor blockage in one artery, was shrinking his blood flow and sapping his strength.

Although he had always been energetic and self-sufficient, Moise could no longer work in his garden or even prepare a simple meal. Without treatment, he would spend the rest of his dwindling life confined to his bed.

Not every 89-year-old is a good candidate for heart surgery, but Dalhousie cardiac surgeon Dr. Greg Hirsch was confident that Moise would be able to withstand a valve replacement and single bypass and resume his active life.

“We had several conversations about the potential risks and benefits of the surgery,” says Dr. Hirsch, who is launching a research initiative to develop ways of more accurately predicting how an older person’s fitness or frailty will impact their recovery and quality of life after cardiac surgery. “If patients truly understand their health and the risks that surgery may pose, they can make decisions that reflect their own wishes and goals.”

Because Moise had always been active and was quite healthy apart from his heart, both he and Dr. Hirsch felt his outcome would be positive. They were right. Moise was able to return home from the QEII Health Sciences Centre a remarkable six days after surgery, on June 1, 2011. He began to walk, increasing his distance a little every day. Seven weeks later, he was able to reach his strawberry field to harvest the berries and prepare them for his wife, Elizabeth, to make jam.

“I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life in bed,” says Moise, who is now looking forward to bringing in the raspberries and planting next year’s vegetables. “I was willing to take the risk of surgery to get my life back. I’m not quite ready for the three-wheeler yet, but I’m doing very well.”

Moise’s family is delighted with his recovery. “He would have gone steadily downhill without this surgery,” says Moise’s daughter, Monique. “Now his energy and his strong interest in life are back.” For Moise and his wife, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, this means the world.