

# Man overcomes hurdles to become longest-surviving heart valve recipient

*Little did 11-year-old realize in 1960 he would set a 50-year record*

**F**ifty years. Half a century. Five decades. For some, it marks a lifetime of memories with a spouse. For Bob Baker, it marks a milestone in and of his life. On Oct. 27, 1960, Baker – an 11-year-old living in Wayne, Ohio – underwent a then-rare surgery to replace one of his heart valves. Surgeons in Cleveland removed the aortic valve ravaged by rheumatic fever two years before and replaced it with a plastic one. In 1960, such a procedure was still in its infancy. You were a candidate for the surgery only if you were considered near death. And rightly so. Before September 1960, no one had lived more than three months following surgery. But Bobby did. In February 1964, he got a second aortic mechanical valve when the first one basically wore out (“nothing was left”) and he was hit by a second bout of rheumatic fever. Eighteen years later, he got a 3<sup>rd</sup> mechanical valve after a stroke. In 2004, his mitral valve was replaced. Mechanical valves require taking an oral anticoagulant, warfarin. Warfarin is very sensitive: Take too much and your bleeding time is prolonged; too little and you risk a blood clot or stroke. In 50 years, Bobby has witnessed a wide range of gradually improved methods to evaluate the effective level of warfarin. Fifty years later, Baker is the longest-living survivor of a heart-valve replacement.



Top right, Bobby Baker with his dog, Rusty, on his childhood porch in a newspaper appeal for 30 blood donors before his first surgery in 1960.

Left, Bob Baker with his dog, Misha, today on the same porch with his four valves. Above, Bob's valves are Kay prototype Teflon leaflet valve, 1960-64; Starr-Edwards prototype ball-and-cage valve, 1964-1982; Bjork-Shiley monostrut valve, 1982-present; CarboMedics bi-leaflet mitral valve, 2004-present.

Top right photo from Bowling Green (Ohio) Sentinel-Tribune, 1960  
Photos at left and above copyright by William E. Brown, 2009  
Text by Marsha Z. Ammons.