

Staying strong for our baby girl as she underwent two life-threatening open-heart surgeries

Healing Quinn's Heart

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Quinn, recovering after one of her open-heart surgeries

After a couple of years of trying to get pregnant, my husband Matt and I had turned to in vitro fertilization to fulfill our dreams of being parents. We were thrilled and amazed when we got pregnant on the first time out with boy and girl twins, whom we named Ryan and Quinn. It was during a routine ultrasound that my obstetrician's office first detected a problem with Quinn's heart. We were immediately referred to Texas Children's Hospital, and the pregnancy took a dramatic turn.

A Life-Changing Diagnosis

When I first heard the words, "Your daughter has a congenital heart defect," my head started spinning and my stomach was full of knots. I alternated between trying to concentrate on what the doctor was telling us and holding back a floodgate of tears. After a 2.5-hour ultrasound, the fetal cardiologist confirmed the diagnosis: double outlet right ventricle with pulmonary stenosis and ventricular septal defect.

Without open-heart surgical intervention, Quinn's condition meant we might lose her before she was even 3 years old. Although I didn't understand a lot of what the cardiologist was saying, I knew that the 24-week-old baby in my belly was sick - very sick. Matt and I were told that I needed to carry to at least 34 weeks to give Quinn the best chance of survival.

Preparing for the Twins

The next few weeks passed in a blur, and I went through the motions of preparing for the twins. Yet in the back of my mind, I couldn't help but wonder if I was lovingly hanging precious pink clothing for a child who would never wear them. I spent the time on bed rest researching her condition and the best doctors and connecting with other parents of "heart babies." We were so thankful to find that Texas Children's Hospital had one of the highest-rated pediatric cardiology units in the

nation, with one of the best surgeons, Dr. Charles Fraser. And I continued to clutch onto what an ultrasound tech had told me about Quinn while in utero: "You're going to have your hands full with this one. She's a feisty one." God, let it be.

By His grace, we made it to almost 36 weeks before the twins were born. We anticipated that Quinn's first open-heart surgery would be imminent. At first, it was predicted for 2 months of age, then 4 months, then 6 months, but Quinn kept fighting. The surgery team decided to hold off until the fall of 2011 to give her petite frame some more time to grow.

Quinn's First Surgery

We finally scheduled her open-heart surgery for Sept. 27, 2011 with Dr. Fraser. Our amazing support group rallied to form Team Quinn, complete with green T-shirts emblazoned with our favorite Bible verse, Jeremiah 29:11. On the outside, I looked confident, but my own heart was starting to break. Our daughter had to undergo a very complicated, but necessary open-heart surgery. I couldn't fix it. I couldn't kiss her tiny heart and make the "boo-boos" go away. All I could do was pray. My engineering husband, with his excellent analytical skills, could understand a lot of what the doctors were explaining, but he, too, was helpless.

The morning of her surgery, we signed intense consent forms, acknowledging the very real risk of death, organ failure, cognitive development issues, and more. And then we did the most difficult thing we've ever done as parents: We handed Quinn over to



Quinn (center) is now a happy and healthy toddler, who loves spending time with her twin brother Ryan and mom and dad Meagan and Matt

almost virtual strangers, entrusting them with her life and praying for God's anointing of their hands. When we returned to the family room, a sea of green shirts awaited us with open arms. As we sat that day, pictures of friends near and far began to pop up on my Facebook page, all wearing green in honor of Quinn. The sheer number of phone calls, texts, and comments was incredibly humbling.

Finally after about seven hours, we got the news that Quinn's surgery was complete and they were able to repair the defects. The first sight of her after the surgery took our breath away. Heavily sedated, she was connected to multiple machines and had tubes coming out from every direction. But all I could see was her beautiful skin, now perfectly pink with full oxygen flow. We spent the next six days in the hospital recovering, and then we were released. It seemed picture-perfect.

Suffering a Setback

When we got home, Quinn started to go downhill. She wouldn't eat or drink and she moaned constantly. We were readmitted to the hospital twice, until they discovered the problem. The main patch used to repair her pulmonary artery had begun to leak.

Heart Resources

It's My Heart
1775 St. James Place, #130
Houston
itsmyheart.org

Fraser's Friends
Started by Texas Children's Hospital
cardiologist Dr. Charles Fraser
waystogive.texaschildrens.org

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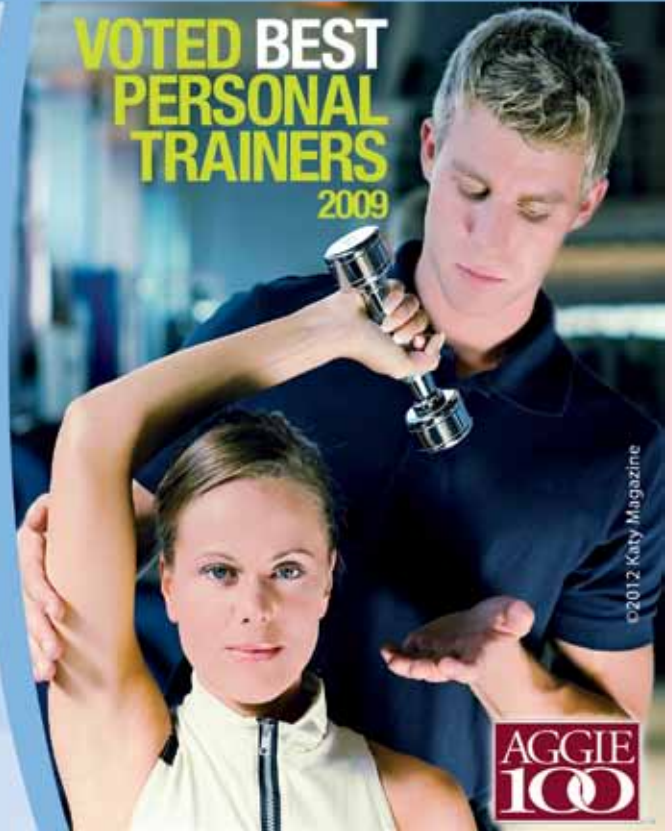
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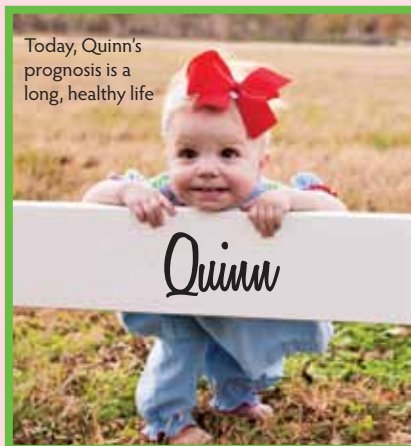
Now, the pressures in her heart were running rampant, enlarging her liver and forcing large pockets of fluid to fill around her heart and lungs. She was headed into heart failure. Quinn was rushed back to the hospital for a second open-heart surgery.

This time, all I felt was an unnatural peace wash over me. Quinn would be healed. Only God could provide that comfort. And yet again, Team Quinn lifted up thousands of prayers to the heavens for her recovery and for our family. Several days later, she was released from the hospital for the final time!

Getting Back to Life

All told, Quinn spent 21 days in and out of Texas Children's Hospital. Matt and I passed each other every morning for a few minutes as we took shifts to go home and care for Ryan. We discovered how strong of a bond there was between the two of them. Ryan spent many a day in a bit of a funk, missing his playmate and best

friend. When she finally came home for good, she walked over to where he was sitting and laid her head in his lap, while he lovingly patted her hair. They spent their mealtime that evening holding hands and just chatting with each other in "twin speak."



Through this journey, our prayer was that God would be glorified somehow through the difficult times. As I still

hear stories of entire workplaces and even classrooms full of kids dropping to their knees to pray for Quinn, I know that He was. Matt and I are immensely thankful to everyone involved in Quinn's care, including her amazing surgeon and his team, the cardiologists, our pediatrician, and her wonderful dietician.

Quinn is now a happy and healthy toddler. Her prognosis to live a long and full life is fantastic. At some point, she will need another surgery, but it could be years or even decades away. And the best news? She should be able to spend her life doing whatever her little heart desires - playing sports, dancing up a storm, or doing research projects! A parent could not ask for much more. **KM**

EDITOR'S NOTE: We would like to thank Meagan Clanahan for sharing her family's story of hope, faith, and encouragement. If you have an inspirational story you would like to share, email editor@katymagazine.com.

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