



After overcoming a life-threatening heart condition, Ethan Mungovan, 2, is now on the path to a healthy future

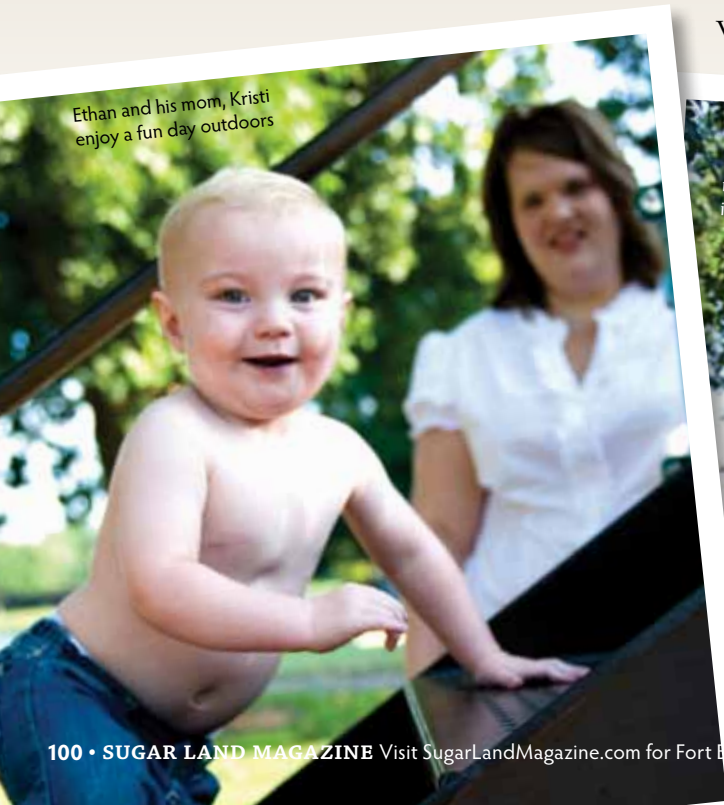


Ethan underwent heart surgery for the first time when he was only 1 week old

Helping Baby Ethan Heal

After Helping Their Newborn Son Fight for His Life,
the Mungovans Learn to Appreciate Every Day

Written by Kristi Mungovan Photography by Rhonda Kuykendall



Ethan and his mom, Kristi enjoy a fun day outdoors



Ethan's parents, Kristi and Michael Mungovan spent every minute they could by his side in the hospital

Kristi and Michael are thankful for how Ethan has changed their lives, teaching them to celebrate every day together



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After Ethan was born, doctors discovered he was suffering from an underdeveloped left side of the heart, a heart murmur, and lack of oxygen

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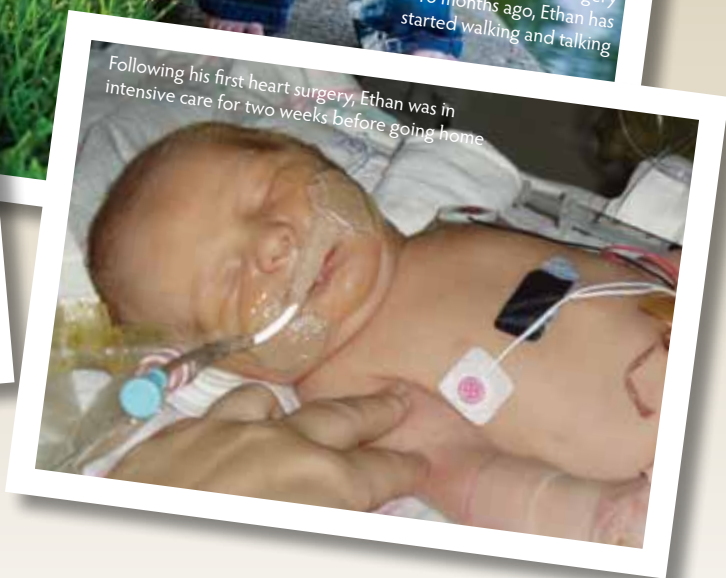
In October 2008, we were anxiously awaiting the arrival of our first child, Ethan. We thought we were so prepared. We had decorated his room, installed his car seat, baby-proofed the house, and picked out his future daycare. No one could have prepared us for what we were going to experience after his birth. On Wednesday, Oct. 15, 2008 our lives were changed forever. Ethan was born at 36 weeks at Memorial Hermann Katy Hospital. He arrived with 10 fingers, 10 toes, and a perfect nose. We could not have asked for more.

A Life-Threatening Condition

It was not until later that night that we found out he had a serious problem. His body was not getting enough oxygen. The neonatologist noted that he had a worsening heart murmur and he was not responding to the oxygen they had been giving him. The next day, an echocardiogram revealed he had signs of hypoplastic left heart syndrome, which meant he had an underdeveloped left side of the heart. We were told that he would die in the coming days without surgery. No words could describe our emotions that day. We were devastated.



Since his last surgery 16 months ago, Ethan has started walking and talking



Following his first heart surgery, Ethan was in intensive care for two weeks before going home

Ethan was Life Flighted to Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital in the Texas Medical Center. The physicians noted that he not only had a hypoplastic left ventricle, but four other cardiac anomalies. We were reassured that he would survive if a series of three open-heart surgeries were performed. He remained in the neonatal intensive care for a week before he was stable enough to proceed with the surgery. We spent every possible minute by his side, holding his hand and talking to him. The physicians and nurses became our new best friends. Three days after his arrival, we were finally able to hold him over his crib just long enough for the nurses to reposition him. We will never forget that day. We had waited for that moment for nine months.

The first of his operations, the B-T shunt, was performed just over one week after his birth. This procedure was designed to temporarily direct blood to the lungs so that his body could receive enough oxygen-rich blood to live. This operation was a success. Ethan remained hospitalized for two weeks in intensive care before we were able to take him home for the first time. We were terrified. We had never cared for a baby, much less a baby in critical condition like Ethan.

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Ethan will undergo one final surgery in the next two years

Taking Extra Special Care of Ethan

The first couple of weeks at home were scary and stressful. We had to feed Ethan through a tube in his nose, because he was still learning how to eat from a bottle. We had to do everything in our power to keep him calm, because his oxygen levels were still low. We had to be very careful not to let him get exposed to germs, because any illness could be devastating in his fragile condition. We were unable to take him out in public except to go to the doctor, which we did every two weeks for the first couple of months. This was a very difficult time for us, given the holiday season. We managed to make it through that time in his life thanks to the encouragement of his doctors and our friends and family.

After about five months, Ethan started showing signs that it was time for his next surgery. He was turning blue and having more difficulty breathing than in previous months. This surgery, the Glenn procedure, directed blood entering the heart from the brain and upper body to the lungs. Ethan recovered well from this surgery and we were able to be home just in time for Easter. Ethan was much more stable following this surgery.

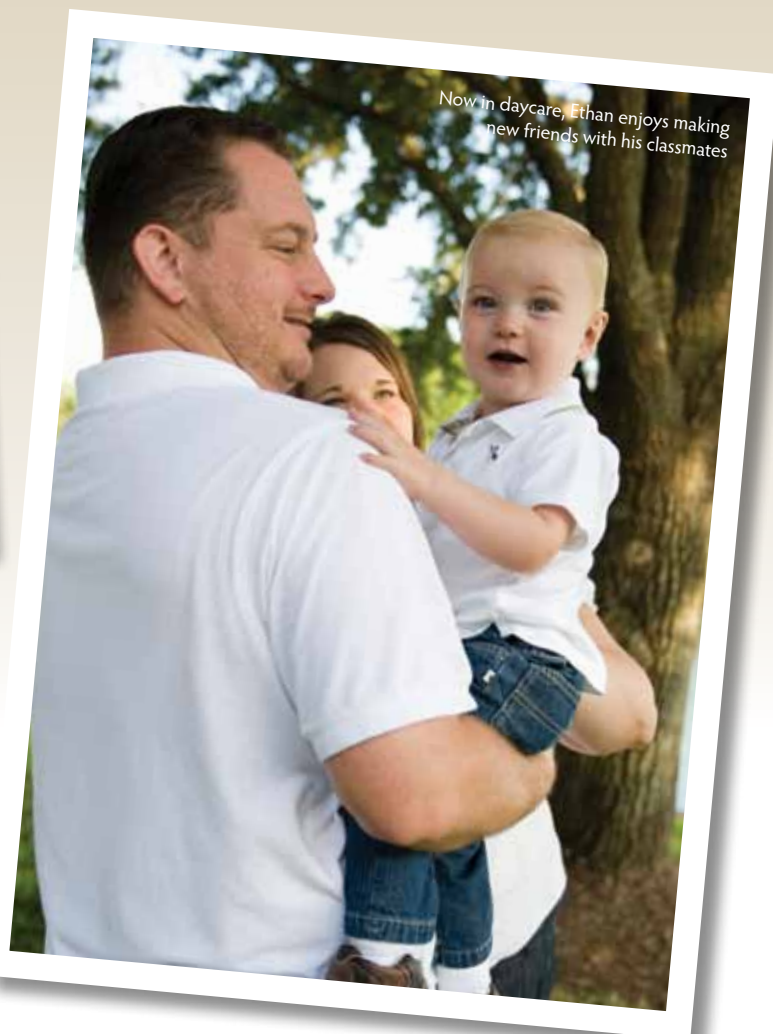
A Healthy Son with a Bright Future

In the past 16 months following the surgery, Ethan has been growing and developing normally. We were told that he will not be able to participate in contact or high-endurance sports because of his heart condition, but that he will otherwise be able to enjoy a normal childhood. He is now a walking and talking toddler. We were finally able to put him in daycare at 21 months of age. He is enjoying the time spent with other kids his age.

He is expected to have the Fontan procedure sometime in the next two years. This final surgery will direct blood from the lower half of the body to the lungs. We are nervously anticipating this next event in his life.

We are thankful every day for how Ethan has changed our lives. This life-changing experience has taught us to enjoy every day that we have with him, celebrate all of his accomplishments, and appreciate how precious life can be. **SLM**

EDITOR'S NOTE: We would like to thank Kristi Mungovan and her family for sharing their story of hope and faith. If you have an inspirational story you'd like to share, please email editor@sugarlandmagazine.com.



Now in daycare, Ethan enjoys making new friends with his classmates

If you have a poignant story to share with our readers, email editor@sugarlandmagazine.com

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