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of Baby Kevin*

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# Houston March of Dimes Ambassadors: The Jones Family

## *How Dads Can Make a Difference*

**A**s an Army veteran and the CEO of a leading multimedia consulting firm, Kevin Jones has been in plenty of stressful situations – but none as worrisome as the premature birth of his son, Kevin Christopher last March.

“I have never felt as vulnerable, not even in Panama or in the Persian Gulf, or even while jumping out of airplanes,” Jones recalls. He and his wife, Regina, an attorney, had been married for five years before they decided to start a family. After one unsuccessful pregnancy, the couple was elated when Regina’s second pregnancy progressed normally well into her second trimester.

### Excited About Being a Dad

Jones was looking forward to fatherhood—and he was especially excited about having a son. Growing up without a father in his own life helped him realize how important fathers are, and what a difference they can make in the lives of their children. He and his brother had made a commitment that when they had children of their own, they would strive to be the best fathers possible.

Jones believes that a good father is prayerful, patient, understanding and, above all, willing to consistently be available for his children and his family. Even before the arrival of his son, he began putting his “good Dad” theories into action.

In the midst of each busy

workday, Kevin looked forward to Regina’s regular phone calls updating him on their unborn baby’s development. “My wife closely monitored the baby’s growth and activity via her on-line Pregnancy Calendar and e-mail alerts,” Jones says. “Twice a day, she would call to let me know what the little one was doing or what organ was forming that week.”

### A Frightening Turn of Events

Feb. 26, 2003, started out as a normal, busy day. Regina recalls feeling healthy and happy as she entered week 23 of her pregnancy. She attended an early meeting before heading to her doctor’s office for a routine check-up.

Expecting to get the typical cheerful call from Regina updating him on her doctor visit, Kevin was stunned when he instead received a frightening request from her to go directly to the hospital. Regina’s exam showed that she was going into pre-term labor. Her obstetrician admitted her to The Woman’s Hospital of Texas, where she was placed on complete bed rest, and where she would remain until the baby was born.

With a normal, full-term pregnancy lasting from 37 to 42 weeks, Regina still had 17 weeks to go before her due date. Physicians at the hospital had to focus their efforts on stopping her labor and delaying the birth for as long as possible. A baby born too soon is at risk of having serious health problems, and



**As Houston’s March of Dimes Ambassador Family, Kevin, Regina, and Kevin Christopher Jones raise awareness for prematurity by sharing their experience with the community.**

PHOTO BY PREDESTINED EVENTS – ANDRE HUMPHREY

very premature infants have the highest risk of death, medical complications and long-term disabilities, such as mental retardation, cerebral palsy, lung and gastrointestinal problems, and vision and hearing loss.

Kevin Jones says he felt compelled to place the situation in God’s hands. Rather than succumb to worry and fear, he chose to help Regina by maintaining a positive attitude. Together, they concentrated on the future and engaged in hopeful discussions about which college their son might attend or what career he might choose. They charted their progress on a calendar by marking off each day as it went by.

“Having suffered a devastating loss just six months before, I didn’t think my wife could handle another miscarriage,” Jones says. “So, I focused my attention on being the strength that she needed to help us make it through whatever was in store. But nothing prepared me for the next two-and-a-half months.”

### Premature Birth: ‘Baby’ Kevin Survives the Odds

Despite everyone’s best efforts, Regina’s labor continued to progress, and on March 12, 2003, just 14 days into her hospital stay, Kevin Christopher was born. Weighing just over a pound and only 12 inches long,

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he was unable to breathe on his own and was placed on a ventilator in the hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). In spite of insurmountable odds, Baby Kevin's parents say his spirit was big and his will was incredibly strong.

The ensuing weeks presented enormous and difficult challenges, yet the baby continued to develop outside his mother's womb. Just two days after birth, he braved open-heart surgery to repair a faulty valve. A few days later, he was able to breathe on his own. By day 10, he was gaining weight, and by day 11, he was holding his father's hand.

## A Dad Who Made a Difference

"Throughout our ordeal, I was just so thankful that Kevin was my husband," says Regina Jones. "Even though he was dealing with the same situation I was, it wasn't apparent. He stepped up in every way imaginable. He supported and cared for me; he spent hour upon hour in the NICU with our son; he educated himself on all the medical aspects of our son's care. And he did all of this while running his company and maintaining his other professional responsibilities. He was and is a truly amazing person."

Like father, like son. After 79 days in the NICU, amazing Kevin Christopher went home with his amazing parents. Today, he is remarkably healthy. Other than his surgical scar, he has no apparent physical or mental effects from his prematurity. Still, Kevin and Regina realize that their son's outcome is uncommon for a child born so soon.

The March of Dimes, a national organization dedicated to saving babies by preventing prematurity, birth defects and low birth weight, estimates that each year, more than 460,000 babies are born too soon. Many can fit into the palm of a hand. They fight to survive and often struggle with lifelong health problems.

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As a March of Dimes volunteer for several years before the birth of his son, Kevin Jones never dreamed that someday his own child would benefit from the organization's commitment to saving babies. Now, Kevin and Regina are deeply committed to supporting Houston's March of Dimes as an Ambassador Family, raising awareness of its mission by sharing their personal story with the community and the media. Kevin Christopher often accompanies his parents to appearances, putting an adorable face with their story and illustrating the true significance of March of Dimes research and programs.

At this year's WalkAmerica® (March of Dimes' annual fundraising event, held on April 25 in Houston), Kevin Christopher and his dad Kevin thanked a crowd of tens of thousands of volunteers and walkers, who in total helped raise more than \$2.6 million for the March of Dimes. "It's so wonderful to witness what one family – like the Joneses – can do to inspire others to make a difference within our community," says Ernestine Pina-Sandoval, the Director of Communications for Houston's March of Dimes. "They are nothing short of amazing."

On Sunday, June 20, thanks to those who volunteer for WalkAmerica® and other fundraising efforts that support March of Dimes' extensive research and improvements to neonatal technology, Kevin Jones and countless others can celebrate Father's Day because their children beat the odds.

"The best part of being a father," Jones says, "is seeing the excitement on my son's face when I walk through the door at the end of the day."

That welcome wagon will soon expand with the arrival of a new addition to the family. The Joneses are expecting another son, Dylan, who is due in July. As

a precautionary measure, Regina is once again on bed rest, and once again, Kevin is right by her side, supporting her, caring for their son and being the best father possible.

Jessica Rush is a freelance writer in Houston. She also works with Camp for All, a camp and retreat for children with special needs.

## Resources

### Premature Birth Organizations

- **The Alexis Foundation** – 877-ALEXIS-0 (253-9470); <http://pages.prodigy.net/thealexis-foundation/THEALEXIS1.html>.

- **JT's Hand** – 317-705-1530; [www.jtshand.org](http://www.jtshand.org).

- **March of Dimes**, Houston Chapter, 3000 Wesleyan, #100, Houston, 713-623-2020; [www.marchofdimes.com/texas](http://www.marchofdimes.com/texas).

- **Parents of Premature Babies Inc. (Preemie-L)** – [www.preemie-l.org](http://www.preemie-l.org).

- **Premature Baby/Premature Child** – [www.prematurity.org](http://www.prematurity.org).

### Books

- **Caring for Your Premature Baby**, by Alan Klein, HarperResource, 1998.

- **Kangaroo Care: The Best You Can Do to Help Your Preterm Infant**, by Susan Ludington-Hoe, Bantam, 1993.

- **Newborn Intensive Care: What Every Parent Needs to Know**, by Jeanette Zaichkin, Nicu Ink, 2002.

- **Preemies: The Essential Guide for Parents of Premature Babies**, by Dana Wechsler Linden, Emma Trenti Paroli and Mia Wechsler Doron, M.D., Pocket Books, 2000.

- **You Are Not Alone: The NICU Experience**, Children's Medical Ventures, 1998.

- **Your Premature Baby and Child: Helpful Answers and Advice for Parents**, by Dianne I. Maroney, Berkeley Publishing Group, 1999.

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