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### **Pillow comforts premature infant when mom's away** 02/06/2007

As an industrial engineer, Yamile Jackson's life was all about overcoming challenges. However, nothing prepared her for the challenges she faced when her son, Zachary, arrived three months early, weighing less than 2 pounds.

Suffering from chronic lung disease, Zachary spent weeks hooked to a ventilator during a five-month stay in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Memorial Hermann Hospital in Houston, Texas.



All Jackson and her husband, Larry, could do was watch and wait. "I had feelings of great impotence," said Jackson. "I felt powerless."

Jackson's lack of contact with Zachary - his big world now confined to a small incubator - was made worse by her constant departures.

Fernando Moya, M.D., Zachary's neonatologist and then director of neonatology at the University of Texas-Houston Medical School, recalled Jackson's despair.

"Yamile would always say, 'It's so hard to leave,'" he said. "I felt like I was just a visitor," said Jackson, of her time at the NICU. "I wanted him to know who his mother was."

Then, when Zachary was three weeks old, Tropical Storm Allison hit Houston, knocking out power, leaving nurses and doctors scurrying to keep Zachary and the other premature infants alive.

As the storm outside raged, Jackson turned inward to prayer.

"I said, 'God, if you let me keep Zachary, and he survives, I'll do something to help all babies,'" she said.

That was almost six years ago. Today, Zachary leads a boy's life running and jumping, none the worse for his experience.

As for Jackson, she kept her promise, using her engineering skills to produce the "Zaky," an ergonomically-designed infant pillow that mimics in size, weight and touch a human hand and forearm. The Zaky, named in honor of Zachary, provides comfort, support and proper positioning for infants in the absence of their mothers.

"I developed it from a want and need to bond with my baby," said the South American-born Jackson.

The Zaky, which also traps a mother's scent, is now used at several hospitals around the world, including NHRMC.

"I love the concept for a variety reasons," said Dr. Moya, now director of neonatology services at NHRMC. "One is that the tools we use to position babies are, for instance, rolled up blankets, and something we call the Froggy ... but it doesn't look human. The Zaky looks and feels very human."

Beyond bonding and positioning, Jackson said the Zaky was mostly about love and dealing with pain - Zach's and hers.

"Every child that hurts runs to his mother for comfort and love. Love is a painkiller," she said.

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