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# Medical Buddies characters help kids ease fears

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In 1999 Theresa LeDay-Freeman's son, JeReese, was born severely premature at 24 weeks and was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Rather than facing typical parenting issues such as colic and sleepless nights, Ms. LeDay-Freeman and her husband grappled with caring for a special-needs baby.

"Before I could hold my son, before I could feed him, before I could even touch my son, we had to check his heart rate," says Ms. LeDay-Freeman, who lives in Arlington. "He had a [tracheotomy] for a year-and-a-half. We had to use every medical supply you would find in a first-aid kit."

As JeReese grew older and endured numerous surgeries, Ms. LeDay-Freeman most dreaded seeing him in pain.

"So many times as parents, when our children are hurting, we think, 'God, if I could only take the pain.' And, as parents, we know we can't take the pain."

Instead, she came up with another idea to ease his pain. She took the medical supplies she used most often and transformed them into friendly characters called Morning Buddies-Medical Buddies.

Ms. LeDay-Freeman sketched Temp, the thermometer, and all his friends (such as a stethoscope, scissors and a first-aid kit). She started writing music and putting together storyboards for a video. Even though she had written songs for Motown and worked on commercial jingles, she says, "I was creative, but never this creative!" With the help of friends and family, she put together a five-minute DVD, *The Rescue*, featuring the Morning Buddies-Medical Buddies characters. She explains their purpose as "a lesson to lessen parent and child medical fear."

But why the morning?

"Everything I did with the medical supplies started in the morning," she says.

"We were awakened by a CPAP [breathing machine] every morning. As soon as we woke up, we had to check heart rate; we had to check breathing pattern; we had to check the trach."



MILTON HINNANT/DMN  
**Theresa LeDay-Freeman** was inspired to create Medical Buddies by her son, JeReese.

The Morning Buddies-Medical Buddies concept has grown beyond the short DVD. Ms. LeDay-Freeman started a company called Uth Full Learning that produces materials and products related to the characters.

"We have learning and activity books; we have the companion dolls; we have wall pictures for doctors' offices and hospitals. So that's what we're trying to do, get it into hospitals where it would make a difference, in the school system." she says. Ms. LeDay-Freeman already travels to about 21 schools in the area, using the buddies to teach children about medical supplies.

The Medical Buddies' biggest fan is the person who inspired them, JeReese, now almost 9.

"This child can sing the songs. He knows them by name," Ms. LeDay-Freeman says. "He would be so scared at times to put a Band-Aid on. He'd scream and cry; you couldn't even get close to him. Once he knew the Morning Buddies-Medical Buddies, he knew that Band-Aid was Bandio and he wasn't going to hurt him."

Ms. LeDay-Freeman is passionate about helping children, particularly special-needs children. She sees it as a responsibility given to her by God. "Why he placed it in my lap, I don't know. But I thank him every day." How to order

To order *The Rescue* DVD, \$5.25, and Morning Buddies-Medical Buddies dolls, posters or activity books, e-mail Theresa LeDay-Freeman at [tfreemanufl@yahoo.com](mailto:tfreemanufl@yahoo.com), call 1-877-884-3855 or 972-310-9857, or see [www.uthfull.com](http://www.uthfull.com)