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Family understands having faith in small things is where faith lies

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By Leon Lagerstam, llagerstam@qconline.com

A Davenport family's adopted daughter didn't come into the world in the most gracious way.

She was born in a toilet, and needed to be resuscitated and flown to a Peoria hospital by helicopter, J.R. and Lena Marxen said. The 20-month-old, now named, Anna Marxen, weighed a little more than a pound at birth.

Mrs. Marxen said doctors debated whether other attempts to save the baby were merited, because she was so premature, but save her they did.

Discussing her unglamorous start is testimony about how strong she is to have survived, Mrs. Marxen said.

The Marxens will receive the 2012 Ruth Evelyn Katz Adoptive Family of the Year award on Nov. 1 for the "personal tremendous personal sacrifices" they made to "ensure their adopted daughter, Anna, could thrive," according to a news release from Joscelyn Stone, communications coordinator for Bethany for Children and Families in Moline.

The family awards celebration will be held at 6 p.m. at the Arsenal Island Golf Club.

Anna was born four months premature and has required extensive medical care since then, according to the news release. "Even though they were warned by medical staff that Anna might not survive, the Marxen family welcomed Anna into their home and hearts, and have never questioned their decision to adopt her."

Anna spent four months in the hospital, requiring many trips to Peoria for the Marxens, and their other kids, Kara Jakubsen, 13, and Shawn Jakubsen, 10.

"Kara and Shawn are from a previous marriages. J.R. and I can't have children," Mrs. Marxen said, adding that she wasn't sure she wanted any more kids. "And when I had Kara and Shawn, I have to be honest, I didn't know if I could ever care as much for a non-biological child."

Anna proved she can.



[More photos from this shoot](#)

Photo: Todd Welvaert

J.R. and Lena Marxen hold their adopted child, Anna Marxen, while brother and sister Kara Jakubsen, 13, and Shawn Jakubsen, 10, look on at their house on Oct. 22. The Marxens will receive the 2012 Ruth Evelyn Katz Adoptive Family of the Year award on Nov. 1 from Bethany for Children and Families in Moline.

"Now, even with all of the trips to the hospital and everything, we would do it all over again to have her," Mrs. Marxen said.

"We wouldn't trade it for the world," Mr. Marxen added.

Their names were on a "well-baby" list of potential adopters, "but when Bethany told us about Anna, we didn't have any doubt about accepting her," Mrs. Marxen said. "How could we live with ourselves if we hadn't."

Still, it's been a struggle to make ends meet while raising a family and caring for Anna's medical needs, Mrs. Marxen said.

About the same time Anna had an open-heart surgery, Mrs. Marxen's place of employment closed, forcing her to find a new job.

Mr. Marxen already had left his job as a MidAmerican Energy customer service representative to become a stay-at-home dad to care for Anna, and get Kara and Shawn to school and sporting activities.

The family also was in the process of buying a ranch-style house to make it easier to perform an oxygen-tank relay race with Anna.

"We had to keep her on oxygen, so if we had to run upstairs at our old house, we had to unhook her, run upstairs with her, and put her on another tank," Mrs. Marxen said. "We had tanks all around the house, until May, and we've been oxygen-tank free since then."

The Marxens also couldn't find a daycare that would accept Anna, because of her health and special needs.

They said the last thing they expected was to be rewarded for their efforts. "We didn't even know such an award existed, and then thought there had to be so many other families deserving the award," Mrs. Marxen said.

Shawn said he was more excited about having a baby sister, than attending the awards program. He and Kara were at a babysitter's house when their parents told them about adopting Anna, and were excited, they said.

"And 'Kara' was Anna's first word," Mr. Marxen said.

"As you may guess, we're always running around somewhere," he said. "Shawn's a soccer player, and Kara's a volleyball star at Sudlow."

Anna, however, takes much of the spotlight at home, and seems to always be on the move, they said.

She weighs 16 1/2 pounds at 20 months, Mrs. Marxen said.

They're reminded of a saying by Mother Teresa that they included as part of an annaadoptionjourney.blogspot.com site.

The saying is: "Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies."

Look at little Anna Marxen's life.