

Celebrating Mother's Day Baby named Melissa Joy for a very good reason

By KATHY FARRISH

Don Horn bought his wife Linda a Mother's Day card last year. But when she miscarried — for the fifth time in four years — he threw it out.

That card would have come in handy Sunday. The Clawson couple spent this Mother's Day showing off the newborn daughter they'd almost given up hoping for.

"A year ago I didn't think I'd ever be a mother," recalls Mrs. Horn, who had good reason for naming the baby Melissa Joy. "We felt pretty lucky to have our little girl."

When Michigan State University students Linda Wester of Troy and Don Horn of Garden City became engaged in November 1973, they planned to start a family after a year of marriage. "It was another step out of our love," said the new mother. "It just seemed part of it all."

But a month after the engagement, Linda learned she had acute leukemia. The Avondale High graduate spent Christmas in protective isolation in Crittenton Hospital where she received 161 units of blood and chemotherapy treatment.

Expected to live less than a year, she decided to cancel the wedding. "I didn't want to put Don through that," she remembers.

BUT HER FIANCE refused to give up hope. He insisted on planning for the future, even bringing a Bride's magazine to the hospital so she could pick out a wedding gown.

Linda was so weak it took her four hours to go through the magazine. "But he sat right there flipping the pages for me," she said. "He kept me going."

After five weeks of treatment, Linda went into remission. Her doctor gave permission for a wedding, which was moved up from June to March 8, 1974. While feeling better, the Michigan State grad was not allowed to keep house so they moved in for a while with her parents in Troy. And plans to use her degree in delinquency and crime prevention were out.

"There is no cure for leukemia, so the doctors would rather I not work. I might go into remission," explained Linda, who hoped to work for a police department.

During the first year of marriage, Linda became pregnant. She miscarried and learned she could not carry a baby full term while taking chemotherapy drugs.

But she couldn't take birth control pills because of the additional risk of combining them with the drugs.

After three more miscarriages, her doctor suggested she have a tubal ligation to prevent further pregnancies. But she refused, choosing to go off her medication instead.

THE DECISION was "scary" for Linda, who desperately wanted a child but was afraid she might become ill again. The couple had been reassured through genetic counseling that her leukemia is not hereditary.

Her health remained stable, but she lost another baby last April. "I didn't want to go through it again," she said of the miscarriage, especially upsetting because there seemed to be no reason for it.

"The emotional thing is so great when you lose a child — even at just eight weeks. It's very hard to handle."

Linda did her best to relax during the next pregnancy, despite worried friends and relatives. Watching closely were couples she and Don had met through their volunteer work for the Children's Leukemia Foundation of Michigan.

Both serve on the state board of the Southfield based foundation. She is past president of the South Oakland CLF Chapter and Don is current president.

Linda received a Heart of Gold award from United Foundation in 1979. Both Horns were given the Sandra Ann Brown Award for outstanding service to the CLF.

"A lot of leukemia patients were watching my pregnancy," explained the new mother, who said many doctors discourage them from having children.

"THEY FEEL we should just be grateful we're still alive. But you can't live like that."

The Horns sold their small house in Royal Oak and moved into a larger one in Clawson with a nursery.

Baby Melissa Joy arrived March 2 by the Lamaze-LeBoyer method, with her dad cutting the umbilical cord and giving the infant her first bath.

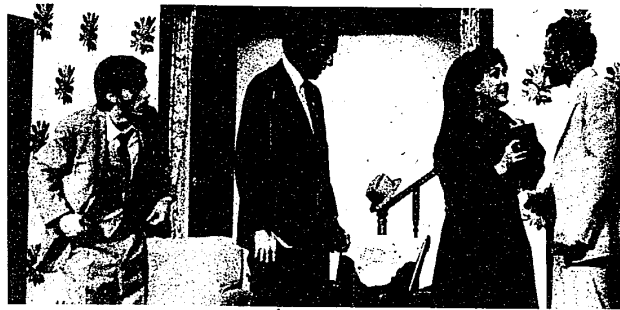
"How is it?" then "What is it?" were

understandably Linda's first questions of Dr. Reza S. Mohajer.

Although the baby is now nine weeks old, presents still arrive for her every day from friends and relatives who shared the Horns a family.

And Linda and Don have a name picked out for their next child, who made this a very special Mother's Day for the couple.

"We wanted her for six years and finally got her," said Linda, who feels motherhood is like having a career "although sometimes more frustrating." "She really brought joy into our lives."



At the barn

"Arsenic and Old Lace" continues in the Farmington Players Barn with Doug Buckley (at left), Stu Orman, Nancy Harrower and Stephen Kachmarczyk in the leading roles. The classic come-

dy-mystery is staged Thursday through Saturday May 15-17 for the last of its three weekend run. Tickets are available through the players box office, 477-1066. (Photo by Susan Torres)

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