

Verbatim: Turner

Lauren Turner recently retired from a 30-year career as a resource manager with the U.S. Forest Service. She lives with her husband and three cats in Sequim.

“Our first grandson, Brooks, began life in a plastic box called an isolette in the neonatal intensive care unit of a hospital.

Life changed instantly for our son Brian and his wife, Jennifer, when Brooks decided he was entering this world three months early. It was both painful and heartening to watch them rise to this major challenge as their focus changed suddenly from their busy careers to absorption in the struggles of their tiny new charge.



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During the weeks following the birth, it seemed there was no time for the new parents to attend to feelings that naturally occur in this situation: grief over loss of the anticipated normal birth experience, jealousy of parents who have had their storybook births, the sadness of being separated from Brooks while waiting for him to be healthy enough to go home.

He was delivered by Caesarian section. Jennifer's healing from that major surgery hardly got noticed in the flurry of everything else that was going on.

Add worry to the web of emotions the new parents had to cope with. Complex health issues are common in premature babies and our grandson faced most of them. There are many resources on the Internet to learn about these. One of the most balanced and informative that I found was at kidshealth.org. While the information could be disturbing, it also was comforting to learn what we might expect and to know that there could be good outcomes.

The medical world has progressed since the days when premature babies were isolated in incubators with no contact with their parents for weeks following their births. Wires and tubes still connect the infant to nutrition, medication delivery systems and monitors. The big difference is recognition of the importance of early bonding between parents and infant.

Parents are encouraged to interact with their new infant from the start and family

and friends are allowed to visit. Parents can make a huge difference in the infant's drive to thrive. I told Brian and Jennifer that their son was lucky to have the parents he got since they would devote their energy to giving him the best possible chances.

Some unexpected positives came out of this difficult experience. The bond forged between parents and child during this intense time is strong. As one of Jennifer's friends said to her, 'You will probably hold him just a little bit tighter.'

Brian wears a new tenderness on his face when he touches his tiny son gently and smiles at his antics. I love seeing my boy holding his boy.

Extended family rallied in support of the new baby and his parents. Brian and Jennifer posted a blog on the Internet for us, so we were able to stay engaged long-distance. The family circle broadened and deepened.

Some of our grandson's issues have resolved or have positive prognoses, though we may not know the consequences of some of them for years. He may have difficulties with language or motor skills. His development may be slower than normal.

Or maybe not.

Many signs point to not, but we've gotten better at accepting 'wait and see' answers.

Out of all the uncertainty, one thing is certain: though there could be challenges ahead for Brooks, he will have every chance to be all that he is capable of being. Whatever lies ahead, we are all hopelessly in love with this new little person in our lives. Before settling on Brooks' name, Brian and Jennifer called him 'nugget.' I think of him as our little gold nugget and he most certainly is more precious than gold.”