

‘Not a baby person’ finds new reason to become one

By Sherri Gardner Howell

He is barely 8 pounds and has changed our world. That’s the way it is with babies – so small, dependent and fragile and yet so powerful.

Gardner Worth Howell cruised into our world on Aug. 30, his late maternal grandfather’s birthday, and readjusted life in homes in Seattle, in Nashville and in Knoxville. He is the third grandson for his proud Gigi and Granddaddy and is the namesake of his father, Brett Gardner Howell, and Gigi, Sherri Gardner Howell. The middle name ties him to his Neal family and his birthday partner, grandfather Richard Worth Neal, who passed away in 2014.

In Seattle, mom Olivia, dad Brett and big brother Cohen are adjusting to whatever time schedule this tiny baby happens to adopt each week. In Nashville, Uncle Trey and Aunt Kinsey watch for text messages with videos and pictures and wonder if it has really been almost two years since they held Gardner’s cousin, King, in their arms for the first time. Uncles in Knoxville and New York and Grandmother Sandra in Kentucky all join in asking questions that seem ridiculous in most other settings: How often is he eating? Are his nights and days mixed up? Has he smiled, reached for your finger, gurgled, cooed, slept longer than three hours?



Truthfully, I’m not really a “baby” person. In choosing my favorite ages for enjoying my children, grandchildren and nephews, those infant months barely make the top five. Babies are scary, with only one way to communicate and so many needs to figure out from that cry. But you aren’t paying attention if you look at a baby and think, “Wow. Boring. They just lie there.”

Sitting and holding Gardner kept me more than occupied. I was fascinated by his every activity, his every expression. He captivated Neville and me with every little thing he did. The problems of life, of the world can melt away when someone hands you a new baby. You don’t have to be a philosopher or a poet to start to wonder about the mysteries of the universe, of human nature or God and goodness and life. You see such wonder in those barely focusing eyes, those tiny fingers and toes, quivering lips and big, stretchy yawns.

So many things change our lives and our perspectives as we walk through this world. Spouses do. Children do. Grandchildren do. Careers, beloved pets, friends – it’s all a Carole King tapestry

that gets woven into a picture that reflects who we are. But spending 10 days with Gardner in these first weeks of his life brings home the truth of how it all starts. Everything else melted away when I could sit and hold him.

Gardner will be a month old next week, and he is already so changed from when I saw him in person. Most likely, it will be December when I see him again, and I am sure I will marvel again at his every waking – and sleeping – moment.

They are powerful gifts, these little ones. Welcome, my sweet grandson, to our crazy, totally devoted to you, family.