

## LOCAL NEWS

By Martin Snapp | Columnist

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### [Snapp Shots: Beloved pooch back at Berkeley center for deaf children](#)

*The kids love Labrador/golden retriever mix Nan, who in turn loves, teaches them lots of concepts*

Please don't be insulted, but you're not as smart as you used to be. If it's any consolation, neither am I.

But there was a time you were a positive genius. It was when you were a baby/toddler. There you were, fresh out of the womb, and the first thing you were handed was a seemingly impossible task: installing the operating system in the most powerful



*Nan, a 9-year-old Labrador/golden retriever mix that lives with the executive director of Berkeley's Center for Early Intervention on Deafness (CEID), returns recently to the center, much to joy of children there. CEID had to shut down in-person instruction last spring when the pandemic struck, but now in-person learning is back. (photo courtesy of Cindy Dickeson)*

computer the world has ever known — your own brain.

And there was no operating manual to tell you how, either. You didn't even know what monster was making that awful noise that was scaring you so badly, until you finally figured out that the monster was you, and the noise was the sound of your own crying. Then you had to figure out that those nice people who were taking such good care of you — your mom and dad, as you finally learned — were making sounds too; and it was their way of communicating with each other. And if you wanted to communicate with them, you had to make those sounds, called words, too. It was the hardest job you'll ever have, but you did it. So take a bow, genius.

And you kept programming yourself all the way up to age 5, when you finally had learned enough to move on to easier stuff like spelling, arithmetic, reading, writing and, eventually, philosophy, history, astronomy and nuclear physics. But there's a catch. During those all-important years from 0 to 5, you're taking in most of this crucial information through your ears, not your eyes, because you haven't learned to read yet. But what do you do if you can't hear?



*Nan, the resident canine at Berkeley's Center for Early Intervention on Deafness, appears recently with a teddy bear, which is also a teaching tool, seen signing "I love you" in American Sign Language. (photo courtesy of Cindy Dickeson)*

That's where Berkeley's Center for Early Intervention on Deafness (CEID) comes in. They'll jump on the problem right away with a two-track strategy.

The first track is finding out what's causing your hearing problem and helping you minimize the impact, using sign language, hearing aids, cochlear implants or a combination of the above — whatever works. At the same time, you still need to get all that vital self-programming into your little brain right away because if you don't learn it now, you'll be stuck playing catch-up forever.

CEID has experts to help you, though, including audiologists, speech therapists, teachers and perhaps the most important helper of all, a dog named Nan. She's a 9-year-old Labrador/golden retriever mix — how's that for friendly? — that lives with CEID's executive director, Cindy Dickeson. She loves the kids, they love her, and a lot of basic concepts are taught through her ("put the blanket under Nan," "put the blanket over Nan," etc.).

Unfortunately, CEID had to shut down in-person instruction last spring when the pandemic struck, and the learning went online. Nan and the kids did their best to adapt, but it wasn't the same as the real thing. But now in-person learning is back! Some parents are still keeping their kids home a little while longer, however, just to be sure. Still, it's hard to tell who's happier — Nan or the kids.

"When they arrived, I went out to greet them in the parking lot, and the first thing they said was 'Where's Nan? Where's Nan?' " says Dickeson. "Then they gathered around the front door waiting for her so they could greet her and crowd around her. Nan was wagging her tail like crazy and rolling over for belly rubs, and one little girl started imitating her. She lay down on the ground next to Nan when Nan was lying down, sat next to Nan when Nan was sitting, and told Nan stories of things that had been happening since they last saw each other. It was very sweet."

I can't say this strongly enough: If you, or someone you know, suspect your little one might be hard of hearing, contact CEID immediately at [ceid.org](http://ceid.org). Time is of the essence because every day you wait is a day lost forever. Don't waste any time wondering if you're imagining things because you have nothing to lose. If turns out to be a false alarm nobody will be happier than them. But if it turns out to be real, you'll be happy forever that you acted so quickly.

And if you'd like to support CEID's life-changing mission, you can donate on the same website ([www.ceid.org](http://www.ceid.org)). Tell them Nan sent you.

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