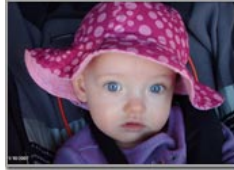


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Lubbock Infant Can Read at 17 Months Old

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A month ago, when I got an e-mail from a Lubbock mom who told me her 16-month-old baby could read, I didn't really take it seriously - especially when she told me it was her first baby. But after a few weeks and a few more e-mails, I decided to meet her and see for myself.



Elizabeth Barrett is now 17 months old. She looks and acts like most babies her age, but her mom Katy says, "She can read sentences. She can read more words than we can count."

So we watched as Elizabeth pulled out her favorite book, climbed in her favorite reading chair, and looked at pictures.



Katy, a speech pathologist who is married to Michael, another speech pathologist, told me that most people don't believe their infant is a reader.

"The joke is that since we see kids with language problems, we think anybody with normal language skills is a genius. But as time goes on, it's harder to deny that she's exceptional," said Katy.



Aside from reading books every day, play-time means mom writes down a word on paper and Elizabeth figures it out.

When we asked to see what Elizabeth could do, Katy wrote excited on a piece of paper and said, "Elizabeth, what does this say?" Elizabeth said "excited" and waved her hand over her chest. Katy explained that Elizabeth not only read the word, but signed it as well.



Katy is convinced that sign language helped launch her daughter's reading skills, partly by watching shows like "Signing Times" on public television.

"What's this word?" she asked. "Bear", answered Elizabeth." Yes, it said bear.

But we still weren't convinced. So I asked if I could try it. I wrote down the word ball.

"Ok, Elizabeth. What's this word?" I asked. "Ball", she said. That's when I nearly fell over.

Next my cameraman, Brandon wanted to try, so he wrote down the word banana.

"What's this word, Elizabeth," he asked her. "Banana", she said. Indeed, it was banana. That's when Brandon fell back and said, "I am very impressed!"

So we played "stump the baby". I picked up a magazine, opened it somewhere in the middle and randomly pointed to a picture of a plate and the three words underneath it. "What does this say?" I asked her. Elizabeth said, "How to eat." And she was right.

So we kept at it. "What's this word?" "Family", she said. "Can you read this one?" "Good", she answered. "Ok, what's this?" "Night", she said. Every time, she was right.

It was obvious, Elizabeth talks like she's 1, but she reads like she's 7. So what does her doctor think? Dr. Steve Stripling, Elizabeth's pediatrician, says at 14 months he saw her sight read the word avocado.

"I was floored", he told me.

The Barretts say they weren't trying to impress the doctor when they showed him what Elizabeth could do. It was more important for them to know that she didn't have some condition, like autism.

Dr. Stripling told me, "Elizabeth does not appear to be autistic at all. It looks like this child is going to be completely normal and, likely, will be a great resource for humanity, being as smart as she is."

What a relief to the Barretts that they can quiz Elizabeth on dozens of words but still enjoy playing, laughing, watching TV, and many other activities. I listened to Elizabeth read words like happy, puppy, penguin, vegetable, and kangaroo. That was impressive enough, but apparently, she's inherited her parent's love of music as well. When her mom wrote down Led Zeppelin, Buddy Holly, and the Beatles, she said those words too.

Again, Katy reminded me that it's not bragging rights, but a call for help, that brings this family to NewsChannel 11 for this story. Dr. Stripling also told me he is very glad they are showing

people what Elizabeth can do. The reason? When the parents contact major medical centers for advice on how to challenge their little girl, nobody calls or writes back. Because they don't believe what she can do. Dr. Stripling says since seeing is believing, maybe the right people will contact them after seeing this story.

Katy told me, "We just want to know what to do with her next. We want her to be challenged. We don't want to hold her back," Katy said.

Just for fun, I scribbled one more thing on a piece of paper and held it up for Elizabeth to read. "Tonight Show", she said. That's what it said, and I have a feeling that's exactly where you might see Elizabeth the next time she's on TV.

"Signing Time" is distributed by American Public Television. It airs on KTXT, Channel 5, at 8:30 on Sunday mornings. For more information on the program, ([click here](#)).

Since this story originally aired on NewsChannel 11, many stations from around the country have called us wanting to broadcast this story in their markets. We have learned that the Today Show has made arrangements to fly Elizabeth and her family to New York to be interviewed on Friday, March 7th. They have set Elizabeth up with a specialist from New York University.

[Click here](#) to watch video of Elizabeth's Today Show appearance.



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