

Kids' book fulfills dying wish

By ALISA VALDES
of the Boston Globe

The death of one's child has been called the most unnatural of all human experiences. And of all losses, it is said to be the most difficult to surmount.

In the case of Barbara and Joe Saltzman of Los Angeles, grieving has meant five years of hard work to realize their son David's final wish — to publish the children's book he wrote and illustrated in the year and a half before his death.

It has been a crusade for the Saltzmans, one that has turned their lives upside down and added an extra full-time job to both of their schedules. Recently they spoke about their mission to keep David's dream — and memory — alive.

David Saltzman was 22 years old when he died of Hodgkin's disease in March 1990. He had graduated magna cum laude from Yale the year before, despite having been diagnosed with cancer and having gone through chemotherapy and radiation all during his senior year. He earned a double major in art and English, and a standing ovation from his classmates at the graduation ceremony, a moment captured on videotape by his father, a documentary film professor in the journalism department at UCLA.

David was a talented writer, artist, actor and pianist. He was a cartoonist for the Yale newspaper, and illustrated an academic calendar for the university using "Pops," a character based on his own father, right down to the beard-but-no-moustache look.

The turning point in David's life, however, was in 1985, when he met Maurice Sendak, the author-artist of the classic children's book, "Where the Wild Things Are." Sendak had come to Yale to do a workshop.

David's mother remembers that her son called after that, completely inspired and convinced that what he wanted to be an author-illustrator of children's books.

"He said, 'Mom, I want a life like I have, surrounded by these wonderful characters, with a house surrounded by nature in the woods.'"

In a sad twist, Sendak saw David's work only after his death, when Barbara sent him a copy of the book, asking for an endorse-

Parents spend \$350,000 to bestow Yale student's legacy of laughter

Colorful, inspiring

"The Jester Has Lost His Jingle" is a colorful, inspiring book about a kingdom where laughter is lost, and an enterprising jester who sets out to recover it with the help of his friend Pharley. The jester finds laughter in an unlikely place: The smile of a little girl bedridden with cancer. The idea for the book came to David three months before he was diagnosed with cancer himself.

As he got sicker, David's devotion to his book grew fierce. His parents said that they only saw him cry once, when his cancer came out of remission and his tumor started to grow again. The rest of the time, his parents said, David tried to laugh when he felt like crying, one of the themes of his book. He forbid his mother to cry in his presence when they found out that his illness had taken a turn for the worse.

"During the fall of my senior year at Yale, I was diagnosed as having Hodgkin's disease, a cancer of the lymphatic system," David wrote in his author's note. "Upon hearing the news, I went out to a patch of lawn, sat by a tree, and cried.

"As I sat there crying, I listened to my sobs, thinking how much they sounded like my laughs. And suddenly, one of the lines I had written during the previous summer popped into my head: 'Here I lie, I have a tumor ... And you ask me where's my sense of humor?' And that was when my Jester came to me. He literally walked over to me, put his hand on my shoulder and with a concerned look said, 'David, how come you're not laughing? Your cries sound just like laughs, so why not laugh instead of cry?' I thought about it for a second and then repeated the question to myself: 'How come I'm not laughing?'"

When David died before he could publish the book, his parents took it upon themselves to do it. But when they took the manuscript to major publishing houses they were dismayed to discover that the companies wanted to cut the 61-

Children mesmerized

When the Saltzmans visited St. Peter's School in Cambridge, Mass., last week to read during story hour, the students stuck through the length of the book without fidgeting. In fact, they seemed mesmerized. And they enjoyed the rhymes. They laughed in all the spots where children are supposed to laugh, such as when the jester, discovering where happiness has been hidden, says to an ill child:

*"Whenever I feel like crying,
I smile hard instead!
I turn my sadness upside down
and stand it on its head!
When I get sad or lonesome,
or when I get depressed,
that's when I sing my loudest
and dance my very best!
So won't you try it, little girl?
Won't you laugh with me?
We'll start off very slowly
with a tiny Tee-Hee-Hee."*

When Barbara finished reading, the children bombarded her with questions and advice.

"When I'm sad I hug my guinea pig," one child offered.

"How do you handle the sadness?" another asked her, point blank. The children had been told by their teacher what happened to David before the Saltzmans got to the school.

Barbara seemed taken aback by the question and answered by quoting the jester. Then she read the children the author's note, in which David recounts learning of his cancer and how he decided to battle the illness with laughter instead of tears. During the reading of this portion of the book, Barbara choked back her own tears.

"It's a pain that never goes away," she said later, seated in the library of the building in Boston where Joe's sister owns a condominium.

The Saltzmans own a home in the exclusive L.A. suburb of Palos Verdes, and put both of their sons through Yale. (Michael Saltzman is now a producer for the show "Murphy Brown.") But paying for

sion to use the money for the book.

"I swear she spends it like it's real money," said Joe. "But it's not. I'm the sensible one. If she had her way, she'd just give the book away. She's going to bankrupt us."

"I wanted this book to be perfect," said Barbara. "I mean, (at the L.A. Times) I'm an editor who will completely replate for one comma. So to get the book right, the only way to do that was to do it ourselves."

The book was produced in Hong Kong, where production prices were half of what they are here, for better quality. Of the 23,000 books, 10,000 have been purchased by Parents Against Cancer for its donor program, which gives the books to sick children.

"That's exactly what David wanted," Barbara said. "He said he wanted the jester to be with every sick child."

The other books have been purchased in limited numbers by bookstores, most of them small, or by mail order directly from their home. The Saltzmans said that it has been next to impossible to get the large book chains to touch the book without major corporate backing.

Many orders flooded the Saltzman's toll free number (800-9-JESTER) after Good Housekeeping ran an article in October about their efforts. Same thing happened when they appeared on "Good Morning America."

When do the Saltzmans think they will be able to relax?

"Never," Joe said without missing a beat. "This was David's dream, and I'm sure Barbara won't be able to let it go for as long as she lives."