

Daily Pilot

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Finding the jester's jingle

"They looked in vain for flowers. They heard no songs of birds. But saw lots of angry faces and heard lots of bitter words."

If there ever was a time for David Saltzman's "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle," it's now. My best friend gave me a copy of this children's picture book for my 22nd birthday. It's traveled with me ever since.

The book tells the story of Jester's quest to regain his ability to make people laugh, a journey that takes him through the countryside, into the city and finally to a hospital.

"Maybe someone can tell me. Maybe someone might know. How come people aren't laughing? How come spirits are so low?"

Barbara Saltzman, the author's mother, will be reading the book at 11 a.m. today at Bloomingdales, Fashion Island. For every Jester book or doll purchased at the event, one will be sent to Children's Hospital of Orange County.

It's a beautiful book with a poignant story. Not just the story inside — although that's wonderful — but the story of the author and how the book got published.



**Jennifer Mahal
IN THE WINGS**

In 1988, David Saltzman was a junior at Yale University attending summer classes in Greece. One day, he came to class and made a bunch of jokes. No one laughed. So he began doodling in his notebook, drawing an oval with three triangles on top. Above it he wrote "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle."

"That afternoon, he returned to his room — he always wanted to write children's books — and he outlined the entire story," Barbara Saltzman said.

The book became the English and art major's senior project. But that October, David Saltzman was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease, a type of cancer. He kept working on the book, even while receiving chemotherapy.

Nine months after he graduated from Yale, David Saltzman died. He was 23. But he finished the book.

"Oh Pharley, I fear, it's much worse than I thought. Is laughter something these people forgot?"

Barbara Saltzman and her husband promised that they would see the book published as David had envisioned it — in full color, on quality paper with the rhyme scheme intact.

"It took us five years," Barbara Saltzman said from her Palos Verdes home.

After going around and around with publishing companies, the Saltzmans took a mortgage on their house and published 30,000 copies. Ten thousand of those were donated to every child in the country who was diagnosed with cancer in 1995.

"Before it was on the bookshelves, it was in every hospital in the country," Barbara Saltzman said.

"There must be someone somewhere with a smile upon their face. There must

be someone cheerful in this cold and lonely place."

The Saltzmans formed the Jester and Pharley Fund — Pharley is Jester's talking wooden stick — to help take the book to children everywhere.

"The Jester Has Lost His Jingle" speaks to children in such a way that they're able to rediscover their own sense of laughter and joy," Saltzman said.

Among the programs that Saltzman and her husband have started is a literacy program. Children are encouraged to read books and every page read translates into one penny donated in the form of Jester books and toys to local hospitals.

"There's a line in the book when the Jester and Pharley are standing outside a hospital and the Jester says 'It's up to us to make a difference. It's up to us to care.' That's really one of the things we're trying to instill in children," Saltzman said.

"We've found where it's been hiding. We've discovered where it's been. It's hiding inside everyone. It's buried deep within!"

Saltzman has story after story to tell of people who have written to her about what the book means to them. And though I never was one of the people who wrote in, I can say here that on some of my darkest days, "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle" has reminded me that there are reasons to smile.

"So when you're feeling lonely or sad or bad or blue, remember where the laughter's hiding . . . It's hiding inside of you!"

More information about the Jester and Pharley Fund can be found at <http://www.thejester.org>.