

FINALIST. WOMAN OF THE YEAR

Barbara Saltzman

By Stephanie Cary Staff Writer

Barbara Saltzman made her 22-year-old son David a promise.

She promised him she would publish the book he wrote and illustrated exactly as he envisioned, and that she would help get that book into the hands of every child who is diagnosed with cancer.

"The Jester Has Lost His Jingle" was published in 1995, five years after David died of Hodgkin's disease. What started out as David's senior project at Yale University became a best-seller on the New York Times adult-fiction list.

The book is about The Jester, who wakes up one day to find that laughter is missing from his kingdom. So he and his friend Pharley — a talking piece of wood — set off to find it.

The message of the story is that laughter is always in us, no matter the obstacles one might face. And though it may seem simple, Saltzman says the message is deep.

A line in the story says, "It's up to us to make a difference. It's up to us to care."

This is the motto of The Jester & Pharley Phund, a nonprofit Saltzman created 10 years ago after seeing the impact David's story had on children and adults alike.

"It has gotten to be so well-loved among not only children who are ill but children of all ages," Saltzman said. "It has tremendous resonance for any child who might be sick — especially with cancer — but it really is for every age and everybody responds to it with such love and they embrace it and keep it."

Saltzman, 70, of Palos Verdes Estates, is a former journalist, having worked at the Los Angeles Times for 22 years.

She has remained working long past her retirement with The Jester & Pharley Phund, to get the book and Jester dolls into the hands of sick children. The group raises the money needed to donate the items to hospitals across the nation.

So far, 150,000 books and dolls have been donated.

Saltzman also has created two literacy programs for schools nationwide.

Reading Makes A Difference is a \$5,000 program that includes an assembly to introduce the book and the book's background, which then leads to talks about writing, research and coping with illness.

Every class receives a copy of the book and three education manuals the organization has produced. Often, participating students also send get-well cards to sick children at local hospitals.

"It's a wonderfully exciting way to get children involved in reading, especially children who need to have a little push in the direction of getting involved in reading," Saltzman said. "And they become readers for their whole lives and the schools keep requesting that we bring our program back because it's been so successful."



Steve McCrank Staff Photographer

Another program Saltzman has developed is Reading To Give, through which schools participate in a read-a-thon to raise funds to have a book or Jester doll donated to a local hospital. So far, participating students have read more than 26 million pages.

Saltzman says the response from teachers has been overwhelmingly positive.

"They all said these programs should be in every school in the nation, and that would be my wish," Saltzman said. "And my wish would be to have the book given to every child in the country diagnosed with cancer upon diagnosis, as well as then to other children going through challenging life experiences."

"The Jester Has Lost His Jingle" is no longer readily available in stores, but can still be purchased on Amazon.com or directly through Saltzman's organization.

All proceeds received through her programs go back into The Jester & Pharley Phund.

And though the book has already made a difference in so many lives, and Saltzman has far surpassed her promise to her son, she says she is not finished.

"My dream has been to have our school program be taking place in every school in Southern California every day of the year," Saltzman said. "I want The Jester & Pharley Phund to continue forever, continue to be helpful and make a difference in children who need a smile."

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— Barbara Saltzman, nominee for Woman of the Year