

The Columbian

SERVING CLARK COUNTY, WASHINGTON THURSDAY, JULY 16, 1998

'Humor is a healing thing'

Late author's mother joins Cancer Society fund-raiser

By BRIAN WILLOUGHBY
Columbian staff writer

Cancer steals lives, including that of her 22-year-old son, but Barbara Saltzman said the disease doesn't win.

"David may not have survived the cancer, but I do believe David and others like him really do win the battle," Saltzman said. "The disease didn't make him morose. He didn't feel sorry for himself. It didn't diminish his spirit. He maintained a sense of spirit and joy and love of life, and so he won."

Saltzman, who lives near Los Angeles, will be the guest speaker Saturday at the 10th-anniversary Relay for Life, a 24-hour community event expected to raise \$200,000 for the American Cancer Society.

She is the mother of David Saltzman, who died in 1990 at age 22 from Hodgkin's disease.

David was at Yale University, majoring in English and art, when his cancer was diagnosed. "The Jester" was his senior project. After David's death, his family vowed to publish and distribute his book, a message of hope and laughter in the face of death and disease.

They accomplished that in 1995, and the book has since become a best-seller, topping 200,000 copies. In addition, more than 25,000 copies have been given free to children with cancer or other illnesses.

The book is a rhyming tribute to the power of happiness, featuring a colorful jester

who "turns sadness upsidedown."

"It's a ray of sunshine that pops into people's lives," Saltzman said in a telephone interview from her home. "The book lets me share a part of David, his essence of optimism, his joy and love of life. A sense of humor is a healing thing, a very healing thing."

Saltzman keeps busy with speaking engagements and readings, promoting the book in an effort to spread her son's message.

at message — one of happiness amid difficulty — ties in nicely with the Relay for Life. While the cause is serious, the mood is high-spirited.

Participants camp out around the track, in decorated tents, bringing a strong sense of community and camaraderie.



Photo courtesy of BARBARA SALTZMAN

Lost son: Barbara Saltzman, pictured here with son David, published and distributed David's book, "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle," after David's death from cancer. Saltzman is guest speaker at this weekend's Relay for Life, a fund-raising event for the American Cancer Society held at Columbia River High School.

"I remember that first year we did it, just a few teams clustered at one end of the track," said Joanne Lacey, a member of the Vancouver Ford team that has participated each year and typically raises more money than any other team. "Now we have the whole field surrounded, with tents all the way up behind the tennis courts."

Friends walk and run together. People hold picnics. Balloons fly freely and squirt-gun battles aren't uncommon.

But amid the festivities, there are somber reminders. Lighted candles will ring the track at midnight, honoring those who have died of cancer.

"You walk around the field and you

see all those names and you know why you're there," Lacey said. "It brings us all together, pulling together to do something for the community."

"That's part of my commitment in joining these events, to help bring forth a tool so nobody ever has to endure this ugly disease again," guest speaker Saltzman said. "This is a tribute to all those people who never gave up, who hung in there and battled this disease. They had something to teach all of us."

AT A GLANCE

■ **WHAT:** A 24-hour event in which about 700 members of 47 teams walk and run around a track to raise funds for the American Cancer Society.

■ **WHEN, WHERE:** 10 a.m. Saturday to 10 a.m. Sunday at Columbia River High School, 800 W. 99th St., in Hazel Dell.

■ **HISTORY:** Last year, 45 teams raised more than \$180,000. This year, the goal is \$200,000. Funds go toward patient services, research and risk-reduction programs.

■ **OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:** Several events during the relay; see page B9

■ **INFORMATION:** Call 576-5045 or 992-3482.