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## Best-seller was labor of love

Children's book published by mother after son's death

By Renee Berg  
Gazette news intern

When publishers call Barbara Saltzman, asking to take over a children's book written by her son David before his death, she tells them they're late for the party.

After numerous rejections from publishing houses, Saltzman, her husband, Joe, and another son Michael formed their own company to publish the book.

Today, "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle" is on the New York Times best-seller list and might be turned into an animated feature film.

Saltzman, who was in Cedar Rapids for a wedding Saturday, took time out to read the book at Barnes and Noble Booksellers.

Saltzman said she began her mission to have the book published after David's death from Hodgkin's disease just before his 23rd birthday in 1990.

She didn't realize it would mean multiple rejections and two mortgages on her house.

Saltzman, who has a background in journalism, was convinced "The Jester" would be a hit.

"I really knew this should be a children's classic. I really knew, both as an editor and as a mother."

Publishers told her the 64-page story was

too long, too colorful and rhymed too well. She disagreed and took the book home.

The Saltzmans decided to publish the book themselves, without altering the rhymes, length or illustrations. So began their own publishing company, The Jester Co. Inc. "I felt we owed it to ourselves to check out all the possibilities of having it published by a conventional publisher. Deep in my heart, I really did think we'd do it ourselves," she said.

AFTER QUITTING from the Los Angeles Times, Saltzman began fulfilling her promise to David full time. Researching printing costs, marketing techniques and book wholesalers became her job.

The first hopeful sign came when Maurice Sendak, author of "Where the Wild Things Are," offered to write an afterword for "The Jester."

"When he gave his blessing to it, it was like a blessing from the pope," Saltzman said.

Sendak's name appears on the cover, below David's, and his afterword glows with praise for the young author.

"David was a natural craftsman and storyteller," Sendak wrote. "His passionate picture book is issued out of a passionate heart. David's Jester soars with life."

The basic message of "The Jester" is to live life with a smile on your face and laughter in your heart. The Jester and his sidekick, Pharley, travel the world looking for laughter, and find it tucked inside a young girl battling a tumor.

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**Barbara Saltzman**

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"So won't you try it, little girl?" the Jester asks. "Won't you laugh with me? We'll start off very slowly with a tiny Tee-Hee-Hee."

Before the presses rolled, Saltzman tested the book on children between the ages of 2 and 5 years. She got an immediate response.

"They absolutely adore the characters," Saltzman said. "The kids really process the basic message of the book."

With "The Jester" still in its first year on the market, The Jester Co. plans to release The Jester & Pharley Doll. Saltzman is considering publishing David's other works, "The Rainmaker" and his journal, and is fielding offers to turn "The Jester" into an animated feature film.

Also, David's personal story may be put into movie form.

Saltzman sees no end to her work with David's material.

"I always thought it would outlive me," she said of "The Jester."