

TOWN NEWS

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West Hartford girl's letter brings a 'kiss from heaven'

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WEST HARTFORD — The lesson of a new children's book, "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle," has sprung right off the pages and into the life of a young West Hartford girl.

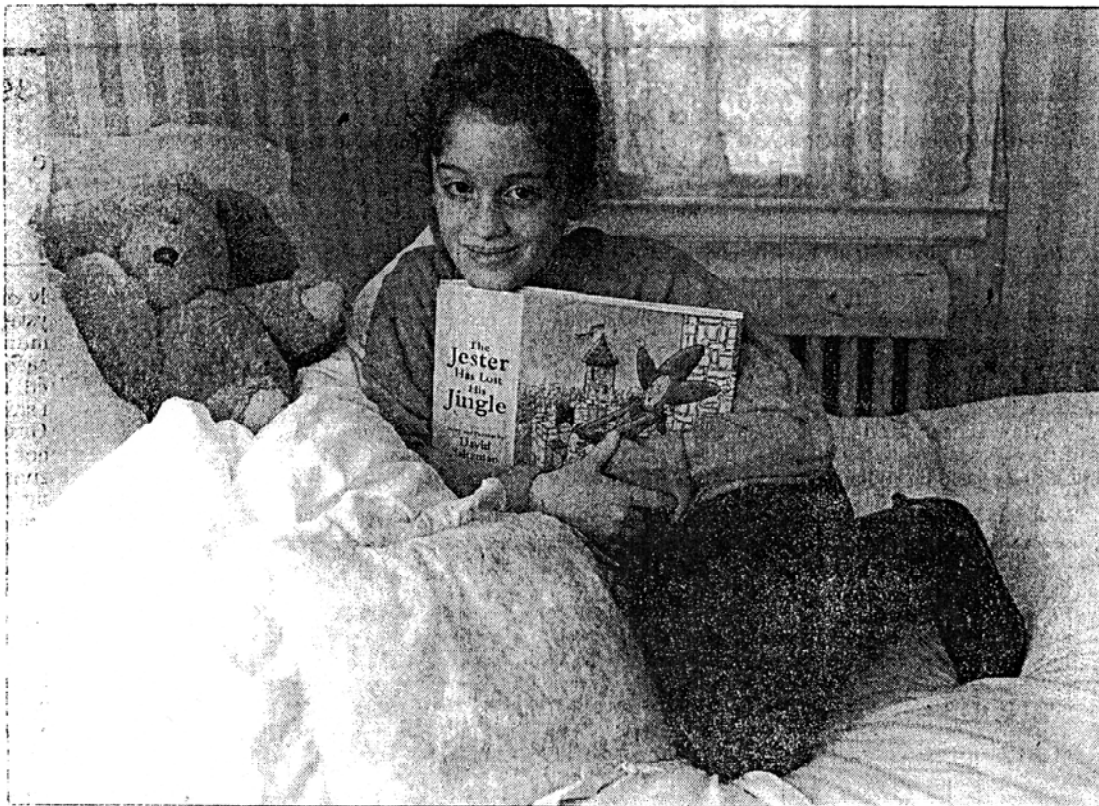
So impressed was she with the book, Duffy fourth-grader Maureen Daly penned a moving letter to the late author's mother — a letter now being used in publicity for the book, which is now finding its way into area bookstores.

In the book, a court jester is saddened

when his king banishes him from court and laughter seemingly disappears from the land. With his companion, Pharley — "a piece of talking wood" — the Jester searches the world for the missing sense of humor.

He finds the humor again in a bedside chat with a sick little girl and he spreads it around, making others happy. "Soon laughter leaped right out the window, growing louder as it flew," author David Saltzman wrote. "It spread to every corner. It filled up every space."

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Sherry Peters / The Hartford Courant

Maureen Daly of West Hartford holds a book, "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle," that inspired her to write a letter to the author's mother, which in turn led to an interview on "Good Morning America." Maureen is a fourth-grader at Duffy School in West Hartford.

Girl's letter brings 'kiss from heaven'

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Saltzman died in March 1990 after an 18-month battle with cancer. He was 22.

Maureen, 9, was so inspired by the book and by the story about how the author's family published it after he died that she wrote to Barbara Saltzman, David Saltzman's mother, who is an editor with the Los Angeles Times.

Her letter landed Maureen an interview on ABC television's "Good Morning America," that will be televised next week. In her letter to Barbara Saltzman, Maureen wrote, "You must have taken good care of David for him to know how important laughter is. Thanks for making sure a lot of people heard David's message. David would probably be proud of you."

"I was blown away by that letter," Barbara Saltzman said Wednesday.

Last week, as Maureen was being interviewed for "Good Morning America" at Atticus bookstore in New Haven, a giant copy of her letter filled the bookstore window.

Barbara Saltzman stood nearby, signing books.

Maureen had gotten so excited about meeting Barbara Saltzman that she went to Lux, Bond & Green to buy a gold charm of a jester. The store donated it, though, and another one for Maureen to keep, after the store's owners learned the story behind the charm.

It's just like in the book — "One nice little thing happens after another. You just keep passing it on," said Maureen's mother, Kathleen Daly. The chain of events arising from Maureen's letter has been a good lesson for Daly's other two children, who were initially unimpressed. "They thought 'Big deal, you're sending a letter,'" Daly said.

Maureen admits she has been surprised by the fame and good cheer her letter has brought. "I thought it was just going to bring a smile on someone's face — not bring 'Good Morning America,'" she said.

In an author's note at the end of the book, David Saltzman explains that he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease as a senior at Yale.

"Upon hearing the news, I went out to a patch of lawn, sat by a tree, and cried."

Saltzman remembered the Jester and the sick little girl in his storybook just then. "I have a tumor . . . And you ask me where's my sense of humor?" the girl had said to the Jester. The Jester prodded the girl to laugh. Just a little. And she did. So Saltzman tried it himself and turned his tears to laughter.

The "Good Morning America" segment will be shown Tuesday morning.