

# Turning sadness upside down

## Late author spreads message about keeping laughter alive

BY KATHRYN MCKENZIE NICHOLS  
Herald Staff Writer

Keeping laughter in the world was so important to one young man that he wrote a book about it, and lived by its words even after being diagnosed with cancer.

Now that same book spreads the message to thousands of children — some homeless, some without hope or dreams.

Barbara Saltzman said her son David would have been pleased.

"It's all in rhyme, and it's wonderful to read," said Saltzman, who now appears across the country to read the book and give it away to children in need. "It's a happy, uplifting story about discovering the place where laughter is hiding."

David Saltzman died of Hodgkin's disease in 1990. But the book he wrote and illustrated, "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle," lives on — and on, making bestseller lists usually reserved for adult tomes.

Children's book publishing is risky business, but "The Jester" must have been touched by an angel.

Barbara Saltzman will come to the Monterey Peninsula this weekend, where she will read her son's book at the Teddy Bear Tea at the Monterey Museum of Art, as well as at three area bookstores.

She will be accompanied on her rounds by a live jester.

"This will be my first reading at a museum," said Saltzman, who seems to be the official ambassador for the book, although her husband, son Michael and daughter-in-law Jennifer are all involved in the Jester Company.

The company, formed by the family to publish David's book, now has a life of its own, too.

Since its first printing in 1995, the book has sold more than 200,000 copies. There is a spin-off toy — the Jester and Pharley doll — and the company has a Jestermobile that travels to events.

### The Jester Has Lost His Jingle

Story and Pictures by David Saltzman

With an Afterword by Maurice Sendak



**THE CHILDREN'S BOOK,** "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle," is written in rhyme and shares a simple story about a jester who finds that laughter is in short supply in the kingdom. The jester and his puppet friend travel far and wide to bring laughter back.

In 1996, Barbara Saltzman, then an entertainment editor at the Los Angeles Times, quit her job in order to give her all to the Jester Co., which is run out of her home.

*The book has touched thousands of lives in many ways, and by any measure, it's a success.*

"We've turned our home into Jesterland," she said with a laugh. "My dining room table is my office."

The story is a simple one: The Jester finds that laughter is in short supply in the kingdom, and travels far and wide to bring it back, accompanied by his faithful stick puppet, Pharley.

The book doesn't pull punches. It shows people who are angry, unhappy, on the street and in the hospital. But it is there, at the bedside of a sick girl, that the Jester finds the secret of rediscovering laughter.

In fact, the little girl in the hospital asks him point-blank: "Here I lie, I have a tumor . . . And you ask me where's my sense of humor?"

The jester tells her that when he's sad, he turns sadness "upside down," and suddenly laughter is heard in the world again.

"People of every age respond to it," said Saltzman. "It's being regarded as a new children's classic."

David Saltzman, who died just days before his 23rd birthday, was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease while attending Yale University. The art and English major had been working on "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle" as his senior project.

Ironically, he had penned the lines about the sick little girl before learning that he, himself had cancer of the lymphatic system.

But his father, mother and brother made him two solemn promises: that "The Jester" would be published as he envisioned it, and that his message would be shared with others and books given to children diagnosed with cancer.

To date, more than 25,000 copies have been given away, Barbara Saltzman said, to youngsters with cancer and other special needs.

There are probably a lot of book publishers out there who are sorry they passed it up. The Saltzmans visited publishers in the beginning, only to be told "rhyme wasn't selling this year," said Barbara Saltzman. "And it was too long, and too expensive to produce."

Because they wanted to be true to David's last wish, they instead formed their own company to publish it.

Now, there is talk of a feature film or television special based on the book, as well as a play. Saltzman also said Hollywood is interested in the story behind the book, about her son's life and his vision.

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But, as Saltzman said, "It's bittersweet, because it should be David doing all this."

The compensation is seeing the Jester come alive for the children she meets.

### READINGS

**WHAT:** "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle," written by David Saltzman, read by Barbara Saltzman

**WHEN:** Saturday (see below for times)

**WHERE:** 10 a.m.: Bookworks, 667 Lighthouse Ave., Pacific Grove (372-2242); Noon: Monterey Museum of Art's Teddy Bear Tea, 559 Pacific St., Monterey (372-5477); 3 p.m.: Thunderbird Bookshop, The Barnyard, Carmel (624-1803); 7 p.m.: Borders Books, 2080 California St., Sand City (899-6643)

**ADMISSION:** Bookstore readings are free; at Monterey Museum of Art's event, children are free with teddy bear, adults \$4; museum members \$3