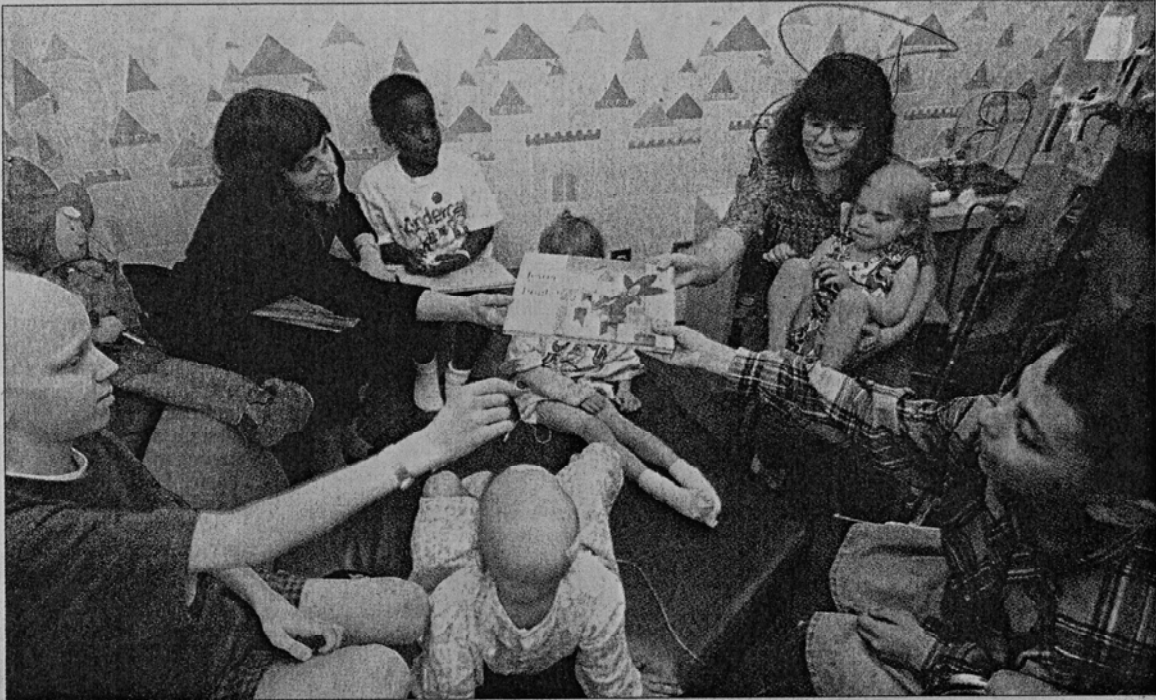


THE KANSAS CITY STAR

SDAY, May 16, 1996

METROPOLITAN EDITION ★



KEVIN ANDERSON/The Star

After reading the story *The Jester Has Lost His Jingle*, Barbara Saltzman (second from left) handed copies of the book to children cancer patients Wednesday at Chil-

dren's Mercy Hospital. The book was written by her son David Saltzman before he died of Hodgkin's disease.

A moral for ailing children

Laughter is the best medicine

By JULIUS A. KARASH
Staff Writer

A group of young cancer patients, some sporting head bandages and hooked up to IVs, entered the world of an imaginary jester Wednesday afternoon at Children's Mercy Hospital.

The jester is the star of *The Jester Has Lost His Jingle*, a book about laughter helping people through tough times. Hoechst Marion Roussel, which has its North American headquarters in Kansas City, is paying to have

10,000 copies of the book produced and distributed to children who are diagnosed with cancer this year.

The group of eight children at Children's Mercy were treated to a spirited reading of the colorful book by Barbara Saltzman, mother of David Saltzman, who wrote and illustrated the *Jester* before he died of Hodgkin's disease in 1990 at 22.

The children listened intently as Saltzman read the part of the story in which the jester asks a girl in a hospital why she's not laughing.

"Here I lie, I have a tumor... And you ask me where's my sense of humor?" the girl replies.

Jester tells the tale of a court jester who awakens one day and finds the king and his court with a bad case of the

grumps. He tries in vain to make them laugh. The angry king declares that "the jester has lost his jingle," and banishes the hapless clown from the castle.

The jester searches high and low for laughter, encountering no one but other grumps. The girl in the hospital tells him she feels like crying instead of laughing.

The jester tells the girl he too feels like crying sometimes. But when he does, "I smile hard instead! I turn my sadness upside down and stand it on its head!"

The jester sings, dances, clowns around. He finally gets the girl to laugh. The laughter spreads through the town and back to the castle, where

See **JESTER'S, B-5, Col. 1**

Jester's advice rings true

Continued from B-1

the jester is welcomed once again.

"So when you're feeling lonely, or sad or bad or blue, remember where laughter's hiding...it's hiding inside of *you!*" the book concludes.

After the reading, the children joined music therapist Allison Ebberts in a song she wrote about the jester. The children shook jingle bells to accompany Ebberts' guitar.

Ten-year-old Mario Urbina, one of the children who attended Wednesday's reading and singing fest, said his favorite part of the book was when the girl in the hospital discovers a reason to laugh.

"Because I'm in the hospital, and it made me feel good," said Mario, a fourth grader at Crestview Elementary School. "I'd like to read it again...It might even make you laugh!"

Five-year-old Rachel Gibson, another member of Wednesday's circle, was diagnosed with a brain tumor last December. Rachel's mother, Doreen Gibson, said Rachel related to the girl in the hospital "because the little girl had a bandage on her head, and a tumor, like her."

"It's a good way to expose kids to what other kids go through, and the fact that you can find happiness in any situation," Doreen Gibson said.

Others said the book isn't just for children. Irene Bettinger, a Kansas City neurologist, said her daughter Lori Bettinger read the book last December. Lori Bettinger, 18, is due to start her freshman year next fall at Yale, where David Saltzman graduated magna cum laude. Lori Bettinger also is a cancer patient.

Irene Bettinger said Lori Bettinger uses "Pharley," the name of the jester's head-on-a-stick companion, as her e-mail alias.

"She loved the book and related to it," Irene Bettinger said. "The upbeat spirit of these characters and the important role of humor and laughter, and the need and ability to find your strength inside you. Those features have been an integral part of her philosophy through all her medical treatment."

Besides being a gifted student and artist, David Saltzman was an accomplished pianist and thespian. Home movies on videotape show him clowning through the years with his brother, Michael Saltzman, an executive producer of the "Murphy Brown" TV show.

"I think the jester represents David's outlook on life," said Barbara Saltzman, a former *Los Angeles Times* features editor. "Joy, laughter, hope."

Barbara and her husband, Joe Saltzman, a journalism professor at the University of Southern California, promised David that they would get the book published and distributed to children with cancer.

They initially spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on the book project. Then a Los Angeles-area physician showed the book to a Hoechst Marion sales representative. At the end of last year, just before the *Jester's* third printing, Hoechst Mari-

on made its commitment to buy and distribute 10,000 copies, enough for all the U.S. children expected to become cancer patients this year.

"Hoechst Marion Roussel's generosity in giving the book to 10,000 young cancer patients helps us fulfill David's dream," Barbara Saltzman said.

"Whenever David was receiving treatment for Hodgkin's disease, he never failed to go up to any child receiving chemotherapy or radiation treatment to tell them his story of the jester, to make them smile and give them a hug."

Hoechst Marion brought Barbara and Joe Saltzman to Kansas City this week, and later this year will pay for the couple to spread the jester's tale in Chicago, Houston and New York.

Hoechst Marion spokeswoman Julie O'Dell said the company is providing \$100,000 to pay for the printing of the 10,000 books, plus additional funds for promotion and distribution.

"We really became enchanted with the message behind the *Jester*, and thought we could join forces with the Saltzmans to bring the *Jester* to kids who are diagnosed with cancer this year," O'Dell said.

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■ For more information on cancer in children, visit *The Star's* site at <http://www.kansascity.com> and click **Business**.

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