

Book Notes | Mary B. W. Tabor

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An Expensive Success

In 1990, shortly after her 22-year-old son, David, died of Hodgkin's disease, Barbara Saltzman began the daunting task of trying to publish "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle," a children's book he had begun as an art student at Yale.

Having promised to turn the project into a book, Ms. Saltzman found a literary agent who submitted the 64-page tale of a court jester's search for laughter to several publishers, all of whom said either that it was too long (children's books are usually 32 to 48 pages) or that rhyming tales were out.

Insistent that her son's work remain intact, Mrs. Saltzman, an editor at The Los Angeles Times, decided to publish the book herself. She and her husband, a journalism professor, took out a second mortgage on their house. They sent the book to the writer and illustrator Maurice Sendak, who wrote an enthusiastic afterword describing the book as "brimming with promise and strength." They found a printer in Hong Kong. And they began looking for ways to sell and distribute "The Jester."

The \$20 hardcover was published in October. Already the Saltzmans have shipped 24,000 books and ordered a second printing, spurred by thousands of mail orders as well as orders from the Ingram Book Company, Barnes & Noble, Borders and Crown Books, Mrs. Saltzman said.

In keeping with David Saltzman's wishes, about 10,000 books have been donated to children with cancer.

So far, the project has cost the family \$380,000. Breaking even is still thousands of books away. But Mrs. Saltzman said "The Jester" had profited the family in priceless ways and she intended to remain the book's publisher.

"I am enjoying doing it myself so much," she said. "I like being a publisher. I like having control of the book and watching over the quality. If it wouldn't bankrupt us, I'd probably give the book away to every child I met."



Illustration from the children's book begun by David Saltzman, a Yale student who has died.