

Saltzman lives on through "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle"

I wonder if I have touched someone's life and at this moment, they are thinking about me. Somewhere at the other end of the world I have touched a life not my own...I wonder who is thinking of me at this moment.

-From the journal of
David Saltzman

We are. We are thinking of David Saltzman at this moment because he dreamed up something extraordinary the summer before his senior year of college, the summer before he became ill, the summer before the winter of his life.

We are thinking of David Saltzman because, as he lay dying of cancer at 22, his parents and his brother made a vow that his spirit, his memory and his name would live on.

And we are thinking of David Saltzman at this moment because their promise and his dream - a magical children's book called "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle" - have finally been realized.

The book, which comes five years after his death from Hodgkin's disease, is a remarkable legacy for one who died so young and a remarkable testament to the power of love.

To read between the lines of the book, to understand the passion that pushed it to publication, here is what you have to imagine:

A young man, majoring in English and Art (and excelling at both), conceives a story in verse about a jester who is banished from his kingdom because he no longer makes the king laugh.

In the story, the Jester sets out with his talking scepter, Pharley, looking for laughter, and happens on a city of downcast people, including a very sick little girl in a hospital. (This may be the first successful literary pairing of the words humor with tumor.) The

Jester helps the little girl discover that sadness can be vanquished with laughter, the laughter conquers even the grimmest opponent.

Months after the plot is cast, the young author is found to have cancer. An inoperable tumor the size of a grapefruit has invaded his lungs.

Over the course of his senior year at Yale, the year he will later describe as the best of his life, he undergoes chemotherapy and radiation, yet manages to earn straight A's, cartoon for two newspapers, give tours to prospective Yalies and counsel seriously ill students because he is so contagiously buoyant. When he graduates, as is only fair, the cancer is in remission.

But it soon returns.

And his only hope is a bone marrow transplant.

It is a terrible and painful procedure. And it fails.

At home with his parents in Palos Verdes, he devotes himself to finishing his book.

A journal entry from that time: "If the worst does happen, I want that book finished and in the hands of those who love me."

You simply cannot imagine more capable, loving hands than those.

"David had this gift since he was an infant to bring joy to everyone who crossed his path," his mother says.

And he will continue to bring joy even in death. One of David Saltzman's wishes was that his book be given to children fighting cancer and other serious illnesses.

The Saltzmans, in collaboration with Parents Against Cancer, a non-profit organization affiliated with Long Beach Memorial Hospital, have created a special fund that will provide a copy of the book for the estimated 10,000 American children who will be found to have cancer in the next year. Anyone else can order the \$20 book by calling (800) 9-JESTER.

Two weeks after his illness was diagnosed and long before it seemed destined to extinguish his life, David Saltzman wrote this in his journal: "Dance, Dance, Dance, Dance when music is playing. But the key is to dance when the music is not playing."

That, certainly, is the message of the book.

And just as certainly the message of David Saltzman's brief life.

Which is why, at this moment, we are thinking of him.

