



ALUMNI NEWS

## The Jester's Jingle: A Promise Kept



The Saltzmans at David's graduation from Yale in 1989, with Barbara and Joe flanking David and his brother Michael.

"This isn't just my son's book any more. It's everyone's book." As USC journalism professor Joe Saltzman '61 discusses *The Jester Has Lost His Jingle*, a children's book written and illustrated by his late son, David, he smiles broadly.

Saltzman and his wife Barbara '62, an editor at the *Los Angeles Times*, fulfilled a promise to their son by publishing the brilliantly colored book about the healing power of laughter. The story follows a young jester and his talking staff, Pharley, after they are banished from the

kingdom for failing to make the king laugh. Fearing that humor is lost forever, Jester and Pharley search the planet for laughter, eventually finding it inside a sick little girl lying in a hospital bed.

When it was first proposed, *The Jester* was another concept in the precocious career of David Saltzman. At 21, the Yale senior had already printed and sold his own campus calendar, produced cartoons for several publications and managed to earn straight A's while double-majoring in English and art. Then, in 1989, he was diagnosed with an incurable cancer.

"Upon hearing the news, I went to a patch of lawn, sat by a tree and cried," David wrote at the time, a passage memorialized in the "Author's Note" section of the book.

"And that was when my jester came to me. He literally walked over to me, put his hand on my shoulder and, with a concerned look, said: 'David, how come you're not laughing? Your cries sound just like laughs, so why not laugh instead of cry?' He came to help me in my time of need, and my hope is that, if you let him, he will come alive within these pages and help you too."

David died on March 2, 1990, 11 days before his 23rd birthday — but after finishing his lively children's book.

The family's five-year struggle to publish the book would have been worth it just to honor David's memory, says Joe Saltzman. But no one, including Saltzman, could have imagined the impact of his son's book. "A speech pathologist in Bethesda, Md., told us that an eight-year-old boy who experienced trauma and couldn't speak is now reading the book out loud," he says. "People who are sick call me and say they read the book before they go to sleep, and it tells them life is worth living. That makes me feel fantastic."

The words that have moved young children to smile, to speak, and to laugh, also captured the imagination of Maurice Sendak, author and artist of the classic children's story *Where the Wild Things Are*.

"That he died before his 23rd birthday is a tragedy beyond words," Sendak writes in an Afterword to David's book. "That he managed through his harrowing ordeal to produce a picture book so brimming with promise and strength, so full of high spirits, sheer courage

The  
Jester  
Has Lost  
His  
Jingle

by David  
Saltzman

Illustrated by  
Maurice Sendak

