

Palos Verdes Estates family flooded with responses to ‘CBS Sunday Morning’ segment



Barbara Saltzman reading her late son David's children's book, "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle" at Barton Elementary School in Anaheim. The Jester & Pharley Phund courtesy photos

By [Megan Barnes](#), The Daily Breeze

May 17, 2015

Mother's Day admittedly isn't easy for Barbara Saltzman, or for any mother who knows the pain of losing a child.

But this year, 25 years since the passing of her son, David, to Hodgkin's lymphoma and 20 since the publication of his award-winning children's book, "The Jester Has Lost his Jingle," was different.

Hours into the morning May 10, Saltzman was flooded with heartfelt emails from strangers across the country bound by her son's enduring message of finding hope and laughter in the darkest of times — a message she shared on [a Mother's Day-themed "CBS Sunday Morning" segment titled, "A mother's promise."](#)

"The notes we have received, they have been really, really touching. I haven't gotten caught up with them and I'm having to learn to Tweet," she said, a few days after 5.75 million viewers tuned in to the program. "It has been so gratifying on so many levels this Mother's Day. It's been really a fantastic gift."

Saltzman, a former Los Angeles Times editor, her husband Joe, a journalism professor at USC, and their TV writer-producer son Michael were interviewed last month by CBS correspondent Tracy Smith in the backyard of their family's home in Palos Verdes Estates. Cameras followed Saltzman to a book reading at Barton Elementary School in Anaheim, something she does at schools 15 to 20 times a year.

The Saltzmans knew the CBS segment would instantly broaden the Jester's reach, but something else happened that they weren't quite expecting: They realized that their son's book, now older than its author's lifetime, had gained a following wider than they ever knew.

"We've not only heard from a lot of new people who were unaware of the book until now, but after 20 years, we've also gotten a wonderful response from a lot of people who have been fans of the book and used it for years, many I didn't know," Saltzman said.



Barbara, David, Michael and Joe Saltzman at David's Graduation from Yale University in 1989. He died nine months later at age 22 due to Hodgkin's lymphoma. His children's book, *The Jester Has Lost His Jingle* was published in 1995.

David wrote and illustrated the 64-page story — about a court jester and his sidekick, Pharley, who embark on a search to return missing laughter to their kingdom — for his senior project at Yale University. The 22-year-old read the book to children in the hospital while he underwent treatment himself. He died in March 1990, nine months after his graduation.

David's family made a promise to publish his book and give it free to every child diagnosed with cancer in the United States.

After running into reluctance from publishers concerned about the book's length, they published it themselves in 1995. Saltzman quit her full-time job and later formed the [Jester & Pharley Phund](#), a nonprofit dedicated to promoting literacy and sharing the book with children fighting not only cancer, but obstacles of all kinds.

To date, she says there are at least 325,000 copies in circulation, many donated to hospitals and schools through the nonprofit's "Reading to Give" and "Reading Makes a Difference" programs. She estimates children have read 38 million pages through both programs, which are made possible by support from companies, foundations and individuals.

The Jester & Pharley Doll came out in 1996 and a bilingual English and Spanish version of the book followed in recent years. Now the nonprofit is working on an e-book as well as a translation for children in Japanese hospitals. Saltzman is finalizing details for a third annual tennis doubles fundraiser July 11 at Alta Vista Park in Redondo Beach.

In the meantime, she continues bringing the Jester to children in schools, hospitals, and shelters. At a recent visit to Metro Charter Elementary School in downtown Los Angeles, a kindergartner undergoing cancer treatment, Nahla Hamilton, said having books and dolls donated in her honor to California Hospital Medical Center was "the best day of my life."

In addition to hearing from adults who read the book as children, teachers who have treasured it in their classrooms and families who used it to lift their spirits through difficult times, the Saltzmans have received calls from old classmates of David's at Yale and Chadwick School, where he was an honor student, a popular cartoonist and editor of the school's yearbook.

His first-grade teacher also saw the program, recalling a young David drawing on his assignments and even in his books.

Book orders from Amazon.com and the Jester & Pharley Phund website have been pouring in, as have inquiries from charitable organizations.

"It's so wonderful, whether I'm reading the book to a child in a hospital or a shelter, or a school, to see how it personally makes them feel good," Saltzman said. "To see it happening year after year after year after I saw it happening when David shared it with children, that's really how this program began."

For more information about the book or The Jester & Pharley Phund, visit www.thejester.org or call 310-544-4733.