

LIANE HANSEN, host:

At the end of the year, many of us reflect on what we want to do differently in the new one. After a particularly bad 2007, lawyer John Kralik decided to start 2008 with a new resolution - to be thankful for the good things and people in his life. So, he spent the next year writing 365 thank you notes to many of the people who added something to his life. Those notes provide the backbone of his new book, "365 Thank Yous: The Year a Simple Act of Daily Gratitude Changed My Life."

John Kralik is at member station KPCC in Pasadena, California. Welcome to the program. Happy New Year.

Mr. JOHN KRALIK (Lawyer, Author, "365 Thank Yous: The Year a Simple Act of Daily Gratitude Changed My Life"): Thank you.

HANSEN: Why thank you notes? Why not just say thank you?

Mr. KRALIK: I thought of how my grandfather, whenever you sent him a thank you, he would always send you a silver dollar. And then if you wrote him a thank you for the silver dollar, he'd send you another one. And at the time, I really needed money, maybe that's why I was thinking of that. I thought, I don't have anything to lose, let me try sending some thank you notes.

HANSEN: What was the first thank you note you wrote?

Mr. KRALIK: The first one was to my son, who is - you know, at first I thought, of course, since I was not in a great frame of mind I didn't have anything to be thankful for. But I got some Christmas presents and the best one was from my son. And so I sat down to write him that note and I realized I didn't have his address. But I wrote him a note to thank him for that present.

And what happened was that when I called him to get his address, he said, gee, I need to stop by and take you to lunch. And he repaid me a loan of thousands of dollars in cash that I had totally forgotten about. And I thought, wow, this thank you note thing really works. You know, maybe I'm onto something here. So, I wrote him another thank you note for repaying the loan and also for taking me out to lunch, both of which, at the time, in the financial condition I was in, were very much appreciated.

HANSEN: And then you began to write notes to other people in your life. You wrote a note later on to the Starbucks guy.

Mr. KRALIK: Well, I went through all my Christmas presents and wrote notes to my coworkers and things got better, to some extent. But then one day I just couldn't think of anybody to thank. I was very down about the fact that there was a lawsuit against me at the time and wrestling with that. And I spent a sleepless night and then on my way to work, all of the sudden, the Starbucks guy says, John, your usual venti. And I thought - and with a great smile, as he always did - and I thought, you know, this is really kind of a great gift in this day and age of impersonal relationships that someone had cared enough to learn my name and what I drank in the morning.

And I found, to my embarrassment, that I hadn't taken the time to learn his name. So, I waited by the side there drinking my coffee until somebody else who did know his name said, hi, Scott. And so then I sent him a thank you note. At first he thought it was a complaint letter but he was very happy to get it.

HANSEN: Yeah. Now, a lot of people are confronted with all the gifts they've received and are contemplating thank you notes. And sometimes people look at it as kind of a chore. But can you give us some tips for writing some sincere holiday thank you notes?

Mr. KRALIK: Well, I found that sincerity was the best approach. So, you know, I try to write one sincere sentence. I think it was Gertrude Stein said to Hemingway, you know, just write one true sentence about what this person means to you or what their gift meant to you, if it was a very moving gift, and how it changed your viewpoint.

HANSEN: You have a list of things to do when writing a thank you note, a good way to write a thank you note. And I'm impressed by the fact that you say they must be written, they should be handwritten. And the reason is because a piece of you will be in the same room with the person to whom you write.

Mr. KRALIK: I think, yes, that your handwriting reflects your personality and you're there. I'm often moved by how people have saved my notes. It was very meaningful to them. It's up on their wall. It's like part of you that's there. Things we write in cyberspace are so easily deleted and forgotten and buried by the next 30 emails we receive. But in this day and age, a handwritten note is something that people really feel is special.

HANSEN: Your daughter saved the note that you sent.

Mr. KRALIK: She did and, you know, she reluctantly gave it up for some publicity that had to be done in New York but I brought it back and she placed it in her special place with her special rocks. And, you know, every child has a collection of special things - special pictures, of trips of ours. And she's got a little cupboard in our house and that's where it stays. And she was very happy to have it back, and that has always moved me.

HANSEN: Yeah. It's such a short note that you wrote to her. I mean - (Reading) Thank you for being cheerful and happy when I pick you up in the evening. Sometimes I don't have a very fun day but when I see you and we talk about things and have fun, I feel better. Thank you for being the best daughter ever.

She was even too young to read cursive so you had to read it to her.

Mr. KRALIK: But it came from my heart. And thank you for reading it because I don't know if I could have. You know, I had the privilege of doing the audiobook a couple of weeks ago and I didn't know which parts of the book would be hard to get through but that was the one.

HANSEN: John Kralik is a Los Angeles superior court judge and the author of the new book, "365 Thank Yous." It comes out this Tuesday from Hyperion Books. He joined us from member station KPCC in Pasadena, California. Thank you, John Kralik.

Mr. KRALIK: Thank you.

(Soundbite of music)

HANSEN: You can find John Kralik's 10 tips for writing perfect thank you notes and an excerpt from his book at our website, NPR.org.

*Copyright © 2010 NPR. All rights reserved.*