

# Daily Journal

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## Advocate of Gratitude

*A routine of daily thank you notes dramatically altered the course of Judge John Kralik's life.*

By Blaise Scemama  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

**B**URBANK — Judge John J. Kralik is somewhat of a guru of gratitude and has published a bestselling book about his journey back to grace through writing thank you notes.

In “A Simple Act of Gratitude,” the Los Angeles County Superior Court judge told his autobiographical account of a man whose life was headed in the wrong direction but was able to turn it all around through learning to say “thank you” every day.

### Judge Profile

The story begins with Kralik twice divorced, overweight, estranged from his two oldest children and the head of a failing law firm. However, after being inspired by an ex-girlfriend's thank you note for a Christmas gift, Kralik became determined to focus his attention on what he could be grateful for.

At 53, he began his journey to redemption by writing 365 thank you notes in a year. Through that process, Kralik was able to get his firm back on track, mend his relationships and eventually realize his dream of becoming a judge.

As he described it in his book, becoming a judge appeared to be an unobtainable career dream in 2006 when he started the application process.

“I had been waiting for the right moment to fill out the application ever since I had become a lawyer 27 years earlier,” Kralik wrote. “Almost from the moment I understood the adversarial legal system, I wanted to make myself qualified to be a judge.”

#### John J. Kralik

Superior Court Judge  
Los Angeles County  
(Burbank)

#### Career Highlights:

Appointed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to the Los Angeles County Superior Court, 2009; partner, Kralik & Jacobs 2008-09; partner, Kralik & Associates 2004-08; partner, Miller Tokuyuma Kralik & Sur, 2001-04; partner, Kralik & Associates, 2000-01; counsel, Atlantic Richfield Company, 1993-2000; partner, associate, Hughes Hubbard & Reed 1979-93

**Law School:** University of Michigan, 1979

After waiting three years, Kralik finally got a call from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's appointments secretary in 2009, during an intense settlement conference in the chambers of a federal judge. A few months later, he was appointed.

“I wrote another thank you note to the appointments secretary. I wrote one to the governor, too,” he said in the book.

Kralik was born in Cleveland to a family of nine children. His father, also named John Kralik, was a heart surgeon who invented multiple life-saving heart and lung machines while serving as a doctor in the military and at Cleveland's Marymount Hospital. His mother, Rita, was a nurse.

After receiving his bachelor's and law degrees from Michigan University, Kralik began his 30-year career as a civil litigator at the law firm of Hughes, Hubbard & Reed LLP in 1979 where he was quickly elevated to partner.

In 1993, he left Hughes Hubbard



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to become a senior attorney at the large in-house legal department of the Atlantic Richfield Company. In 2000, Kralik left ARCO to start his own firm, which would have multiple iterations but eventually be known as Kralik & Jacobs LLP.

In 2009, after just signing a five-year office lease along with his partner, Lois Jacobs, he was appointed to the bench.

Kralik was first assigned to a criminal misdemeanor calendar in an East Los Angeles courthouse. Since then, he has presided over mostly civil trials in courts from Chatsworth to Central Civil West. He currently oversees a civil unlimited calendar at the Burbank Courthouse.

In a personal injury asbestos suit set to begin trial later this month involving a former Iranian citizen alleging he suffered asbestos exposure while working at oil refineries in Iran during the 1960s, Kralik granted two pre-trial motions to apply Iranian law.

Kralik noted in his filing that while his ruling differed from other judges, who seemed concerned with religious influence inherent

in Iranian law, the provisions in question in this particular case appeared well-established, civil, and secular in nature.

Asbestos defense attorney James Parker of Parker Hugo LLP, who filed the motion, said Kralik was the first trial judge he knew of to allow Iranian law to be applied in a personal injury case. Houshang Sabetian v. Air & Liquid systems Corp., BC699945 (L.A. Ct., filed March 28, 2018).

Kralik's ruling gained the attention of Eugene Volokh, UCLA School of Law professor of religious freedom law and church-state relations law. Volokh said other judges in similar situations had not allowed the application of any Iranian laws, due to their Islamic influence.

However, Volokh said Kralik correctly reasoned that, while some Iranian laws do offend U.S. legal tradition, the ones to be used in this trial did not and should not be dismissed merely because they were rooted in religious tradition.

Business and real estate litigator Oren Bitan of Buchalter, who recently went before Kralik in a

business dispute at the Van Nuys Courthouse where Kralik was last posted, said the judge puts extra effort into solving pretrial issues, such as discovery disputes.

"In this particular case, he really went above and beyond what a typical judge normally does with respect to discovery disputes and took a lot of time to sit with us in formal discovery conferences," Bitan said.

Bitan mentioned Kralik's demeanor in the courtroom matched very much the character depicted in Kralik's book: A person earnestly trying to solve problems presented to him.

Business and real estate attorney Phillip Ashman, a partner at Myers Andras Ashman Kumamoto LLP who was involved in a civil business litigation suit that came before Kralik, called the judge's goal of writing 365 thank you notes a year, "an incredibly powerful concept."

"This had a profound impact on me, and I started doing the same thing, and it has been a huge blessing in my life," Ashman wrote in an email.

Like Ashman, many readers of Kralik's work seem to have taken up the practice of writing thank you notes, evidenced by the many such notes Kralik has received from fans over the years.

Kralik said while he feels honored by the scores of readers who followed in his footsteps, he was most honored to learn his father, who died this year, also had adopted the practice.

While going through some of his father's belongings after his death, Kralik found a pamphlet dating back to 1953 with an underlined passage about gratitude.

"It's kind of like the student teaching the teacher, not realizing the teacher has already taught the student," Kralik said.

Kralik intends to answer every thank you note he has received but keeps a separate spreadsheet tracking all the formal notes of gratitude he has written since beginning the project.

The total now stands at 1,238.

*Here are some of Judge Kralik's recent cases and attorneys involved:*

•*Houshanf Sabetian et al. v. Air & Liquid Systems Corp.*, BC699945 — personal injury

For the plaintiff: Benno Behnam Ashrafi, Weitz & Luxenberg PC, Los Angeles

For the defense: Shaghig Agopian, Hugo Parker LLP, San Francisco; Luis Barba, CMBG3 Law LLC, Irvine; Robert Berkes, Berkes Crane Robinson & Seal LLP, Los Angeles; Aaron Brian, Nixon Peabody LLP, Los Angeles; Tynnete Campbell, Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP, Los Angeles; Catherine Cranford and Steven Park, King & Spalding LLP, Los Angeles; Kevin Jamison, Kevin Jamison Law, Chino; John Lister, Palmieri Tyler Wiener Wilhelm & Waldron LLP, Irvine

•*Antonio A.F. De Salles, et al. v. Neurosigma*, LC105572 — petition to compel/ confirm/vacate arbitration

For the defense: Lee Hill Boyd, McKool Smith, Dallas

For the plaintiff: Glenn Everett Turner III, Gibbs Giden Locher Turner Senet & Wittbrodt LLP, Los Angeles

•*WindairWest v. Castle and Cooke* — LC104747, property damage tort

For the plaintiff: Louis R. Miller and Amnon Siegel, Miller Barondess LLP, Los Angeles; Phillip Ashman, Myers Andras Ashman Kumamoto LLP, Irvine

For the defense: Peter P. Brotzen and Gregory Anderson, Dwyer, Daly, Brotzen & Bruno LLP, Los Angeles

•*Louis Tyler et al. v. American Optical Corp. et al.* — BC588866, personal injury/wrongful death

For the plaintiff: Kazan, McClain, Satterley & Greenwood, A Professional Law Corporation, Oakland

For the defense: Mark E. Haddad, Sidley Austin LLP, Los Angeles

•*Kirk Von Salzen v. American International Industries* — BC680576, personal injury/wrongful death

For the plaintiff: Stuart Purdy, Simon Greenstone Panatier PC, Long Beach

For the defense: Alexander G. Calfo, King & Spalding LLP, Los Angeles