

Acknowledgements

To my parents, Donald and Carol Trewartha,
and my husband, Rick, and sons Sam, Joe and Jake
thank you for the gift of you in my life

— *Julie*

What People Are Saying About *BlessBack*[®]

What a beautiful book filled with wonderful ideas on gratitude. *BlessBack* is an incredible gift. It teaches, inspires and offers practical, real-world advice on how to extend and expand your appreciation through offering BlessBacks. Once you get reading *BlessBack*, it is hard to put it down!

— Leigh Anne Saxe
Happiness Coach and Inspirational Speaker,
Toronto, Canada

BlessBack provides perfect measures of inspiring stories and practical advice. Savor each page and you'll find yourself remembering, noticing, and blessing back those who have already blessed your journey through life.

— Jane Kise, Ed.D., author of *LifeKeys* and *SoulTypes*

BlessBack is like this giant injection of positive inspiration that makes me eager to thank those whom I have appreciated in the past, but also opens my grateful eyes to those who help me in countless ways today."

— Margaret Wakeley
Community Development Coordinator for Gratefulness.org,
a network for grateful living (ang*L)

BlessBack is a fresh and beneficial read! Julie Saffrin asks readers to intentionally honor those who have helped them become who they are today. Not only does she explore the power of gratitude as it pertains to each of us, but she explores gratitude's power to change the world exponentially. When we thank those who shaped us, we change ourselves, our communities and our world. As I read her book, I felt as if I got a sneak-peek at everyone's Christmas gift.

BlessBack is definitely a home-run!

— Dr. Dwight "Ike" Reighard
Inspirational Speaker,
Atlanta, Georgia

Author's Note:

The personal stories in this book appear with the consent of the people involved. Names have been changed when requested.

*Stories are for those late hours in the night
when you wonder how you got
from where you were to where you are now.
— Tim O'Brien*

*Summing it all up, friends,
I'd say you'll do best
by filling your minds
and meditating on things
true,
noble,
reputable,
authentic,
compelling,
gracious
— the best, not the worst;
— the beautiful, not the ugly;
— things to praise, not things to curse ...
... I do want you to experience
the blessing that issues
from generosity.
— Paul of Tarsus,
to the Philippians*

Part One

What is a BlessBack?

*Courteous conductors and porters
are at the service of all Pullman passengers
and they are glad to render assistance
and furnish information to travelers.
— From the Pullman Company, Chicago*

Chapter One

I collected my luggage from Heathrow's customs and rolled it toward London's underground subway system. As I crossed to the train, a recorded man's voice over a loud speaker told me to "mind the gap" — that space between land and rail.

Funny what happens when you lift your foot from land. You put yourself at risk. You trust the train, signals, system, and brakes all to work. If they do, you are transported to a different place.

I promise you an exhilarating, life-changing journey, on the condition that you time-travel with your memories and board the train. I will sweeten the offer. You can also expect to be:

happier
healthier
less stressed
more in control of your life
empowered
less lonely
and feel like you matter ...

... Will you mind the gap, take a deep breath and risk it?

I'm glad you chose to board. No longer are you content that you made it another day above the topsoil. You're up for an adventure. You want to take a trip. What lies between these pages sends you on a voyage, one that will give you meaning, make a difference in your life, and as you discover yourself and your past, will give meaning to others and make a difference in their lives, too.

You are on a BlessBack journey that really is the story of you and your importance to the world.

BlessBack: What Is It?

Before we depart, we need to learn a few basic definitions.

BlessBacks are different from random acts of kindness. Most often, a random act of kindness is being kind to someone in a spontaneous way.

A BlessBack gives thanks back to someone who has had a positive influence in one's life. It is an exchange of blessing between two parties: the giver and the receiver. As you live the BlessBack life, you will discover that at various times you may be a giver and at other times a receiver; sometimes you may experience both giving and receiving at the same time.

A BlessBack, on the other hand, specifically directs and gives a blessing to someone in your past who was or is significant to you. It has two parts. The first part asks you to examine your life - from as long ago as when you were a child to as recently as yesterday - and look for the people who are or were a positive influence. The second part involves connecting with these influential people to give your thanks, and telling them specifically how they made your life better. Instead of paying the kindness forward, a BlessBack pays your thanks backwards to the person who made a difference in your life. These people are points-of-light people because an element of their attitude, personality, or character affected you in such a way as to stay in your memory. Points-of-light people may be someone who changed your day, your year, or even your life.

Life is a banquet, and most poor suckers are starving to death.
— Rosalind Russell

Points of Light People

Points-of-light people illuminate the way for us, whether they do so by helping, teaching, respecting, guiding or offering a course correction. Perhaps someone gave you sound advice on your next career move. Maybe a friend gave you a place to live when you were between homes. Perhaps an uncle, by taking you to a foreign country, helped broaden your worldview and opened your eyes to other cultures. Perhaps someone stepped in and offered advice before you made a huge mistake. Maybe you received comfort from a friend after a loved one died or you are in the profession you are in because of a great teacher's guidance.

Points-of-lights people light the way at life's crossroads. They make a difference in our lives. They help us see in a new way. They are our illuminators, lighting up an ideal and causing us to pause, pivot, retreat or advance. Illuminators can give short bright bursts of light or provide a beacon for a lifetime.

One of my tenderest BlessBacks was two sentences. The friend wrote, "I cannot compare the way you care for me to anything else I have ever experienced. You will never know how secure you make me feel."

Her words have kept me focused on the way I want to live.

All of us have dreams, hopes and goals. There are so many marvelous ways we can give someone a good day if we will only "*kindle enthusiasm*," as Oswald Chambers said. Kindle is a verb; used with an object it means "*to set fire to*." When points-of-light people give us a BlessBack, they stoke the fire of our hearts. Their encouragement in seeing something good in us spurs us on to be better people.

BlessBack in the Small Moments

A BlessBack can make its greatest impact when given to those who had a life-changing effect on us, but a BlessBack also is for the moments when someone's good work in the world moves you.

When my son Jake was ten, he had a homework assignment to write a thank-you letter to a military veteran. He wrote a relative who, in 1968, enlisted into the Marines.

Dear George,

*Thank you very much for your service to our country as a Marine during the Vietnam War.
Happy Veteran's Day!*

*Sincerely,
Jake*

A reply came two weeks later.

Dear Jake,

Thank you very much for your nice note. No one has ever thanked me for my service to our country. Thanks for writing. Hope to see you and your family soon.

*Semper Fi,
George*

A BlessBack honors others. BlessBacks can be great or small. Best of all, they are for everyone and cost little, except time.

A *Los Angeles Times* reporter received an email thanking her for her tribute to the dancer and actress Cyd Charisse. The reporter responded back to the reader the next day. "Thank you for taking the time to write. You wouldn't believe the mean mail I get."

BlessBacks affect not only individuals but also marriages, families, neighborhoods, communities, schools and work places. They can build a better world of goodness and gratefulness, one person at a time. All it takes is to begin with "Thank you for ..."

Life's uncertainty is certain, yet we can lighten another's load. Words heal. Words break down the walls and fences we build between each other. When we BlessBack, we give others a momentary respite from their daily lives; their own journey through life becomes relevant to their lives today. Whether spoken or written, BlessBacks empower and encourage. They create exponential and ever-expanding connections of gratitude.

"Life is short," wrote Henri-Frederic Amiel, "and we have never too much time for gladdening the hearts of those who are travelling the dark journey with us. Oh be swift to love, make haste to be kind."

You cannot change the laws of gravity. You may not be able to change your financial situation or stop from facing a life crisis, but you can reframe the realities in which you, and others around you, live.

*You have it easily within your power
to increase the sum total of the world's happiness now.
— Dale Carnegie*

When we think about how grateful we are for what someone has done for us, but keep it inside, it only benefits us. While this may self-satisfy, this kind of satisfaction does not stay for long and it does nothing to change the world. *Gratify*, according to Webster, is from the Old French *gratus* (pleasing) and the Latin *facere* (make) and means “to satisfy” and “to do”. *Gratify* is a call to action and that is what a BlessBack is all about.

Andre Agassi knew this. After the last match of his professional tennis career he said to the crowd,

"The scoreboard said I lost today, but what the scoreboard doesn't say is what it is I have found. Over the last 21 years, I have found loyalty. You have pulled for me on the court and also in life. I have found inspiration. You have willed me to succeed. Sometimes even in my lowest moments, I've found generosity. You have given me your shoulders to stand on to reach for my dreams, dreams I could never have reached without you ... I will take you and the memory of you with me for the rest of my life."¹

People are a part of life's tapestry and when someone specifically gives thanks to another, both lives are the richer for it.

Take time to look back and explore where you received goodness from others and you will find positive memories - what Wordsworth called *spots of time*. If you offer a BlessBack to people who have made a difference in your life, you will not only deliver joy into their common days, but your action will bring joy into your life, too. If you believe and act upon BlessBack's transforming powers, you will rattle the globe in a good way.

In the beautiful, thought-provoking movie *Get Low*, Robert Duvall plays Felix Bush, an old, self-described hermit who knows townsfolk spin rumors about him. When a friend dies without Felix expressing how he felt about him, Felix decides to put on his own funeral party while he is still

alive. He knows people want to discuss past events, and he wants to hear their stories, good or bad. Felix's reasoning, he tells the perplexed owner of Quinn Funeral Home, is that he has heard people eulogized at funerals. "I remember wishing," he tells Quinn, "they could hear all the beautiful things people said about them."

We wait until people are gone to honor and thank them for being a part of our lives when we could tell them before they die how we feel.

This book challenges you to give living eulogies. It will guide you by sharing examples of others' BlessBack stories, and give you insights and ideas of how to offer thanks in a meaningful way to those who have illuminated your life.

Note to Self

For each leg of their journey, navigators use the tides, weather and maps to chart their course. This book is about taking a life-changing journey. To have a successful voyage, one must not only have a desire to change one's direction but also have the equipment necessary to arrive at the destination. Included in this book are *Note to Self* sections to give you the tools needed on your quest for change. These self-study places are for you to write your feelings as you read. They are designed to cause you to think about your life and those people in it whom you want to BlessBack.

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Each *Note to Self* has five elements. They are an *ideal*, a *look back*, an *invitation*, a *BlessBack course of action*, and a *benediction*. An *Ideal* is something of value to pursue, maybe a feeling, a virtue or a goal. The *Look Back* asks you to find the visible ideal in your life and write about the person who demonstrated it to you. The *Invitation* poses questions for reflection on the ideal and challenges you to apply the ideal to your life. The *BlessBack Course of Action* provides writing space for you to get started implementing the ideal. Use the *Benediction* as a prayer or an affirmation to empower and encourage you to act.

Take the time to write your responses for each of the *Note to Self* elements in the space provided as you will use what you write later. You can do the *Note to Self* section all in one day, or you may find you want to give more time — perhaps one section daily — to your writing. The idea is for you to reflect on the questions as you think about your life.

Where you decide to time-travel with your BlessBacks is up to you. You might give your first BlessBack to someone you just met. Others of you may take a window seat and mentally

meander back through your lifetime, and let your memories tell you to whom you want to BlessBack first.

Let the stories and your notes within this book's pages carry you to a changed life, a joy-filled life. Use these pages as a road map to find your redemptive roots. Let them transport you to a more thankful, purpose-filled, and affirmed you.

Open your passport. Let's begin.

*For my part,
I travel not to go,
I travel for travel's sake.
The great affair is to move;
to feel the needs and hitches
of our life more nearly.*

— *Robert Louis Stevenson*

Notes from a Traveler Afar