

# THE Giving Kit

*A companion to 52 Reasons I Love You*

*Nora Ellison*

---

The book's already written. Fifty-two reasons on the left-hand pages, and beside each one a page only you can fill. This kit is for everything that happens around that: getting it into his hands, and getting yourself past the blank half on the night the words won't come.

Print it, or keep it open on a screen next to you. Nothing in here has to be done in order and nothing in here is homework. Use the sheet you need on the day you need it.

## WHAT IS IN HERE

---

### One **Three ways to give it**

All at once, one page a week, or hidden and found. With the wording for each.

---

### Two **Thirty memory prompts**

For the nights the page stays blank. Answer them on scrap paper first.

---

### Three **Four habits that flatten a line**

One sentence, rewritten four times, so you can watch it happen.

---

### Four **The fifty-two week calendar**

Date it once, in January or in July, and the weeks stop sliding.

---

### Five **The tag and the note**

Cut it out, copy it word for word, and you're done.

## Three ways to give it

*The note at the front of the book covers three ways to fill it. This is the other question, the one people get stuck on at eleven o'clock the night before: how it actually leaves your hands. Pick one of the three. They aren't equally good for every couple, so the first line of each one is who it's for.*

### 1. All at once

*For an anniversary, a birthday, a Christmas morning — any day with a moment in it where he opens something in front of you.*

- Block out an afternoon. Not an evening: you want daylight and no clock. It takes about four hours if you don't stop, and most people stop.
- Do the easy ones first. Weeks 1 through 13 are the ordinary days and they come out fastest. Leave the hard section for when your hand is warm.
- If a page won't come, leave it and move on. Come back at the end. A blank page in a finished book reads as honest; a strained page reads as strained.
- Write the dedication page — *This one is for you* — last. The book says so at the front, and it's right: it comes easier once the other fifty-two are done.

***What to say when you hand it over. Short beats a speech. Any of these, out loud:***

*"I wrote in it. You should read it on your own, not with me watching."*

*"There are fifty-two of them. One for each week. Take your time."*

*"Some of them were already in there and some of them are mine. You'll know which is which."*

Then leave the room. Genuinely. He won't read it properly with your face in front of him.

### 2. One page a week

*For a couple who'll still be in the same house in a year, and for anyone who can't face doing fifty-two of anything in one sitting.*

- Give him the book empty, with the calendar from Sheet Four dated and tucked inside the front cover. He can see the whole year coming.
- Fill one right-hand page a week, on the same day every week, and hand the book back. The same day every time is the whole trick, and it's why the calendar exists.
- He gets fifty-two openings instead of one. It's the version people say they'd do again.
- You'll miss a week. Everybody misses a week. Write the date you actually wrote it, not the date you meant to, and carry on down the page.

***What to say when you give him the empty book, which is the awkward part:***

*"It isn't finished. That's on purpose. I'm going to write one of these a week for a year, and you get to read them as they come."*

*And then, each week, nothing more than: "This week's is done." Leave it where he'll find it — his side of the bed, the seat of the car, on top of his keys.*

Set a repeating reminder on your phone for the same evening every week and put his name in it. In February you'll be glad you did.

### 3. Hidden and found

*For a man who hates being watched while he opens things, and for a giver who can't keep a straight face across a table.*

- Fill in as much as you're going to fill in. Twelve true pages is a gift; fifty-two strained ones is an assignment.
- Put it somewhere that belongs to him and that he opens alone: his side of the closet, his work bag, the drawer with the chargers in it, the passenger seat before an early drive.
- Timing matters more than the hiding place. Leave it where he'll find it at the start of something quiet, not eight minutes before he leaves for work.
- Don't hint. The whole value of this one is that nobody is performing.

***Something has to be with it, or he'll think it ended up there by accident. Write this on a card and lay it on top:***

*"You found it. Don't read them all at once — there are fifty-two. I'm downstairs."*

*Or, if you won't be in the house: "This has been in your bag since Tuesday. I've been waiting all week for you to find it. Read it somewhere you can sit down."*

Then let him come to you. He will, and it'll be a better conversation than the one you'd have had across a restaurant table.

---

**And if you only fill in twelve.** The front of the book says it and it's worth saying twice: a half-finished book that's completely true beats a finished one you had to strain for. The blank pages are an invitation, not a debt. All three routes above work exactly as well with forty pages still empty.

## Thirty memory prompts

*Every right-hand page in the book asks for something specific — a morning, a room, an argument, a drive. When one of them won't come, the problem is almost never that you've got nothing to say. It's that you're reaching for a summary of eleven years instead of one afternoon.*

So don't answer these in the book. Answer them on scrap paper, badly, in fragments, spelled wrong. Then look at what you wrote and lift the one concrete thing — the object, the day, the sentence he actually said — across onto the page. Thirty prompts: none of them repeats another, and none of them repeats one of the fifty-two.

### *The first times*

- 1 The first time you saw him before he saw you. Where the room was, what he was doing with his hands, and how long you looked.
- 2 The first thing he ever did for you that he had no reason to do — and how long it took him.
- 3 The first time you were sick in front of him. What he came back from the store with, and what he got wrong.
- 4 The first time you told somebody else about him. Who it was, and the exact sentence you used.
- 5 Your first real argument. Not what it was about — how it ended, and which of you moved first.
- 6 The first time you saw him with his own family, and what you understood about him inside ten minutes.

### *The ordinary Tuesdays*

- 7 The chore nobody ever assigned him that he's done every week for years. Name it, and name the day he does it.
- 8 What he calls you when there's nobody else in the house. All of them, including the ridiculous one.
- 9 The two of you in a grocery store: who pushes, who holds the list, and the one aisle he always doubles back to.
- 10 The last photo he took of you without asking. Where you were, and what your face was doing.
- 11 The sound of him in another room that tells you what kind of day he's had.
- 12 Sunday morning, before either of you has said anything. Who gets up first, and what he does with the first ten minutes.

### *The bad weeks*

- 13 The last time you cried in front of him. What he did with his hands, and the first thing he said.
- 14 Something he did for someone in your family that they still bring up.
- 15 A habit of yours he has never once complained about, though he had grounds.
- 16 A night he didn't sleep, and what he was doing instead.
- 17 Someone in his life he keeps showing up for even though it costs him. Name the person, and name the cost.
- 18 The sentence he says to you when you're spiraling. In his words, not yours.

### ***When nobody is watching***

- 19 Something he does when he thinks he's alone in the house.
- 
- 20 The ninety seconds after something goes wrong that's nobody's fault — a flat tire, a canceled flight, a broken plate. What does he do first?
- 
- 21 A rule he keeps for himself that nobody asked him to keep.
- 
- 22 Something in your house he fixed instead of replacing, and how long it's held.
- 
- 23 What he was like at twenty-two, from the stories he tells — and which part of that is still in there.
- 
- 24 Him at work, described the way somebody who works with him would describe him.
- 

### ***The life you're building***

- 25 The word or the phrase only the two of you use, and the day it started.
- 
- 26 Something he's kept — a ticket, a note, a receipt, a screenshot — that you didn't know he had kept.
- 
- 27 The version of your life he describes when he's describing it to a stranger.
- 
- 28 What he's like on the third day of a vacation, once he has finally stopped.
- 
- 29 A fear you used to have that's quietly gone, and what he was doing while it went.
- 
- 30 The one thing of his you'd take out of a burning house — and why it isn't the valuable one.
-

## The four habits that flatten a line

---

*None of this is about writing well. It's about four ordinary habits that make a true sentence land flat, and every one of them is easy to see once somebody points at it. So the same sentence gets carried the whole way down this sheet and fixed one habit at a time. Watch what's left at the bottom.*

### THE SENTENCE WE ARE STARTING WITH

*"You've always been so supportive, and words can't express how much that means to me."*

Every word of that is true, and he'll read it once. Here's why.

### Habit One • Adjectives standing in for evidence

**What it sounds like.** *Supportive. Kind. Amazing. My best friend.* Words that describe the conclusion you reached instead of the thing that made you reach it.

He's been called supportive by his mother, by his last boss, and by a card that went around an office. The word can't carry anything, because everybody uses it about everybody. Take the adjective out and put in whatever it was you actually watched him do.

### REWRITTEN

*"You've always sat with me when things were bad, and words can't express how much that means to me."*

*Better — it's an action now instead of a category. But it's still describing a hundred nights at once.*

### Habit Two • Always and never

**What it sounds like.** *You always. You never. Every single time.* The average of a decade, which is a shape nobody can picture.

A summary is something you could say about a person. One night is something you can only say about him. Pick a single occasion — the most recent one you remember clearly, not the most impressive one — and let it stand for the rest. It will.

### REWRITTEN

*"The night I got the call about the job, you sat with me, and words can't express how much that means to me."*

*Now there's a date in it. The second half is still borrowed.*

### Habit Three • Card voice

**What it sounds like.** *Words can't express. You complete me. My rock. Forever and always.* Phrases you'd never say out loud to his face without laughing.

He knows your voice. He has been hearing it every day for years and it doesn't sound like a greeting card, so a greeting-card sentence reads as somebody else's. Read the line out loud. If you'd be embarrassed saying it to him standing in the kitchen, cut it and write what you'd actually have said.

## REWRITTEN

*“The night I got the call about the job, you sat down on the kitchen floor next to me and didn’t say anything for an hour, and I don’t think I’ll ever forget it.”*

*That’s your voice now. One habit left, and it’s the one nobody spots.*

## Habit Four • Explaining what it meant

**What it sounds like.** ...and that meant so much to me. ...and that’s when I knew. ...I hope you know how much I appreciate it. The moral, glued on at the end.

The detail already did the work. Explaining it afterward tells him you didn’t trust him to feel it, and it’s the exact place where a true page starts sounding like a card again. Delete the last clause. Nearly every time, the sentence finished one line earlier than you thought it did, and the ending you cut was doing nothing.

## REWRITTEN

*“The night I got the call about the job, you sat down on the kitchen floor next to me and didn’t say anything for an hour. You got up twice — once for the blanket, once for the tissues — and sat back down both times.”*

*Same night, same feeling, not one adjective in it. That’s the page he’ll still have in twenty years.*

---

One test for the whole sheet: could this sentence be true of somebody else’s husband? If it could, it isn’t finished. *You’re so supportive* fits four million men. *You got up twice, once for the blanket and once for the tissues* fits exactly one.

## The fifty-two week calendar

---

*This is the sheet that decides whether a reason a week stays a reason a week. Print it, put one date on it, and keep it inside the front cover of the book.*

- Pick the day. Sunday evening works for most people: nothing is scheduled and the week is already over. Whatever you pick, it doesn't change again.
- Write the date of the first one next to Week 1, then fill in the rest seven days at a time. Doing all fifty-two dates now takes about six minutes, and it is the whole safeguard — an undated plan slides, a dated one argues back.
- Check the box when the page is written, not when you meant to write it.
- You will miss two in a row at some point. That isn't a failure, it's a Tuesday. Pick up at the next date on the sheet instead of trying to catch up; catching up is where people quietly stop.

**The reasons listed here are the book's, in the book's order.** You don't have to go in order — plenty of people jump to whichever one is true that week and date that line instead. But if you do go straight down the sheet, it is worth knowing what is coming: Weeks 1 to 13 are the ordinary days and they write themselves, and Weeks 14 to 26 are the hard ones. Nobody should meet Week 14 by surprise at ten at night.

THE FIFTY-TWO WEEK CALENDAR

| Wk | Date | The reason                                                 | Done |
|----|------|------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 1  |      | Because you make the coffee without being asked            |      |
| 2  |      | Because you notice when I've gone quiet                    |      |
| 3  |      | Because you take the side of the bed closest to the door   |      |
| 4  |      | Because you text me when you get there                     |      |
| 5  |      | Because you let me finish the long version                 |      |
| 6  |      | Because you know how I take everything                     |      |
| 7  |      | Because you laugh at the same thing twice                  |      |
| 8  |      | Because you carry the heavy one without making it a moment |      |
| 9  |      | Because you warm the car up                                |      |
| 10 |      | Because you remember what I said in passing                |      |
| 11 |      | Because I never have to ask twice                          |      |
| 12 |      | Because you save me the last one                           |      |
| 13 |      | Because you find me in the crowd                           |      |
| 14 |      | Because you stayed in the room                             |      |
| 15 |      | Because you didn't try to fix it                           |      |
| 16 |      | Because you made the calls I couldn't make                 |      |
| 17 |      | Because you told me the truth when a lie was right there   |      |
| 18 |      | Because you let me be unreasonable, and waited             |      |
| 19 |      | Because you drove through the night                        |      |
| 20 |      | Because you sat in the waiting room                        |      |
| 21 |      | Because you never brought it up again                      |      |
| 22 |      | Because you apologized first, more times than I did        |      |
| 23 |      | Because you learned what I needed instead of guessing      |      |
| 24 |      | Because you kept going when the money didn't               |      |
| 25 |      | Because you were steady when I couldn't be                 |      |
| 26 |      | Because you came back                                      |      |

THE FIFTY-TWO WEEK CALENDAR, CONTINUED

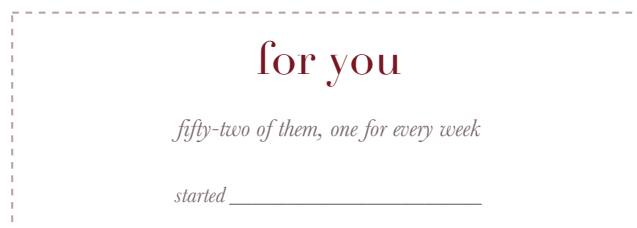
| Wk | Date | The reason                                                    | Done |
|----|------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 27 |      | Because of how you are with your mother                       |      |
| 28 |      | Because you're kind to people who can do nothing for you      |      |
| 29 |      | Because you finish what you start                             |      |
| 30 |      | Because you say when you don't know                           |      |
| 31 |      | Because you keep your word on small things                    |      |
| 32 |      | Because you're patient with the kid version of everyone       |      |
| 33 |      | Because you do the job right when no one will check           |      |
| 34 |      | Because you're not cruel, even when you're right              |      |
| 35 |      | Because you tip well and never mention it                     |      |
| 36 |      | Because you're braver than you think you are                  |      |
| 37 |      | Because you take responsibility before anyone hands it to you |      |
| 38 |      | Because you still get excited about things                    |      |
| 39 |      | Because you're the same person in every room                  |      |
| 40 |      | Because every plan you make has me in it                      |      |
| 41 |      | Because of what you do to a room                              |      |
| 42 |      | Because you're on my team in front of other people            |      |
| 43 |      | Because you make space for what matters to me                 |      |
| 44 |      | Because you talk about me when I'm not there                  |      |
| 45 |      | Because you keep choosing this                                |      |
| 46 |      | Because you make an ordinary Tuesday feel like something      |      |
| 47 |      | Because you let me change                                     |      |
| 48 |      | Because you protect the quiet parts of our life               |      |
| 49 |      | Because I can picture us old                                  |      |
| 50 |      | Because you made me better without ever trying to             |      |
| 51 |      | Because home stopped being a place                            |      |
| 52 |      | Because you're still the one I want to tell first             |      |

The fifty-third week is the closing page of the book. Don't date that one — you'll know when you get there.

## The tag and the note

*If the front of the book is as far as you get, this sheet is enough on its own. Cut the tag out along the dotted line, put the date on it, and tie it to the book — then copy the note underneath onto the first page, word for word if you want to. It's already true; that's why it works.*

CUT ALONG THE DOTTED LINE



Punch a hole in the top left corner and tie it on with whatever you have. The line is for the date you're starting — whether that's the day you hand it over finished or the day he opens it empty. A year from now he'll want to know when this began.

### The note, if you copy nothing else

Write it inside the front cover, or on the blank page that follows the dedication. Change the details that aren't yours; keep the length.

*"There are fifty-two reasons in here, one for every week of the year. Most of them were already written when I bought it, and I left them exactly as they were, because they said the thing I've been meaning to say to you for a long time and never found the shape for.*

*"The pages on the right are mine. I'm going to fill them in slowly. Read them whenever you want, and then read them again in ten years, which is really what a book like this is for.*

*"Fifty-two isn't a random number. It's one for every week I get to keep doing this with you."*

### And if even that is too much

One line, on the first page, in your handwriting. It does the job:

*"I couldn't fit it on a card, so I got a book with fifty-two of them in it instead. Start anywhere."*

---

*That's the whole kit. None of it matters as much as the fact that the handwriting is yours. He isn't going to grade it, and he's going to keep it on a shelf for the rest of his life.*

— Nora