

Part Anthony Bourdain, part Deepak Chopra, it's the book Elizabeth Gilbert or Cheryl Strayed might have written had they been born with a penis.



A novel based on a true story.

FROM THE AUTHOR

vi·var·i·um [vahy-vair-ee-uhm, vi-]

A place, such as a laboratory, where live animals or plants are kept under conditions simulating their natural environment, as for research.



Set to the backdrop of India and Southeast Asia, at the heart of *A Curious Year in the Great Vivarium Experiment* is Thomas Furey's search for meaning. On one level it's about an artist searching for his voice and a writer searching for his story. On another, it's a journey towards becoming a man in the shadow of his parent's death, surrendering his past and trusting the future that is pulling him forward, and the power of gratitude and intention to shape our reality.

As a young, aspiring artist who was as confused as he was impressionable, *A Curious Year in the Great Vivarium Experiment* is the book I wish someone had given me 25 years ago. In it the reader will discover that for the narrator, the way to happiness, love, and acceptance is not an outward journey, but an inward one. Part rock 'n' roll and part spirituality, it offers joy, hope, and healing, as well as insights into the transformative power of travel.

A Curious Year in the Great Vivarium Experiment is about the hero's journey towards overcoming the self and the fact that each of us is the hero we've been waiting for. No matter where the reader is in their life's journey, it's a transformative story about the awareness that occurs in awakening to life's simple yet most profound truth.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born with a curious mind and a restless spirit, Tim Shields has heeded the call of the creative muse wherever it has summoned him. Whether playing in a band, taking improv and acting classes, volunteering at an orphanage in Tanzania, buying one-way tickets to India and Mexico, or attempting to create his own travel show throughout Europe, his interests can be found at the intersection of creativity, self-expression, travel, and expansion.



Tim's love of travel was born as a rising star in New Jersey's competitive soccer scene where his talent took him all over the United States, Canada, Europe, and Jamaica, eventually earning him a full athletic scholarship to Loyola University in Baltimore, Maryland. There he received a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing and Philosophy.

In 2006, after a relationship and a job ended in the same week, he began his life as an adult traveler by leaving everything behind to volunteer for two months at an orphanage in Tanzania (a decade later the orphanage was featured on *60 Minutes*). The following two summers he traveled with a friend throughout Holland, France, and Spain to create *Jack Will Travel*, a loosely defined adventure turned creative writing and video project about two knuckleheads

from New Jersey trying to make a travel show. He has also performed with Jet City Improv and was the front man in a Seattle band, among other things. In April 2011, always eager to find the narrative, with enough money to travel for 3 - 4 months he bought a one-way ticket to India. 15 months later he returned with more money than he left with and countless experiences with the magical, the mystical, and the transcendent.

In the professional arena, he has spent more than fifteen years writing, marketing, and developing campaigns for some of the world's largest brands. In November 2016, he left the corporate world behind to earn his living as a ghostwriter. Two of his visionary clients are *NY Times* bestselling authors who are leaders in the fields of healing and transformation. He's also helped a Fortune 500 executive develop a book proposal. The first book he worked on debuted at #15 on Amazon and was translated into 28 languages within the first 9 months of publication.

He currently lives in Seattle, WA.



A Curious Year in the Great Vivarium Experiment

Tim Shields

S U M M A R Y *

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ASK, SURRENDER, LISTEN, AND TRUST?

A Curious Year in the Great Vivarium Experiment is a story about a man in his mid-30's coming to terms with the death of his parents. Beneath the facade, however, it's a multi-layered literary novel in three parts (Spirit, Body, Mind) about an artist searching for his voice, a writer searching for his story, and the power of gratitude and intention to create our reality.

Drawing on the themes of childhood, the search for self, and the quest for self-realization, *A Curious Year in the Great Vivarium Experiment* takes the reader on a journey into Thomas Furey's inner life as he travels throughout India and Southeast Asia for exactly one year.

Using a gratitude/intention journal as a structural element, the catalyst for the story is the morning of Thomas' 36th birthday, which finds him jobless, without a relationship, or any of the other successes his friends seemed to have. Having just returned from his mother's funeral, he decides to buy a one-way ticket to India. Possessed by fear, armed with hope, protected by naivety, and guided by intention, from the moment Thomas begins to act in alignment with his true self, serendipity intervenes.

Throughout the course of exactly one year, Thomas finds himself volunteering for a Nobel Prize winner in India, working as the assistant to a delinquent school photographer in Vietnam and China, drinking his way through Laos and Cambodia, wallowing in the depths of loneliness in Thailand, experiencing a moral hangover in the Philippines, and after having just rekindled a love affair in Sri Lanka, believes he may meet his end in a tsunami.

The course above charts a roadmap for Thomas's spiritual, mental, and emotional growth as he wrestles with the death of his parents, heals the wounds of his past to create a new future, and attempts to surrender his fears for a greater vision of himself.

But threatening his security, safety, and success was the veil, behind which he sensed was the source of what he had always known as his "soul ache". Something he could feel more than name, the veil was a shadowy force that haunted his life and dreams for as long as he could remember. Terrified by whatever was behind it, the veil threatens to lead him down a trail of self-destruction, all the while obfuscating a truth central to his life.

Throughout his year of travel, like the breath of life that animates his body, Thomas moves through a series of joyful expansions and painful contractions as he drifts through women and excess, paralyzing fear and self-doubt, fathomless loneliness and unbounded gratitude, and the terrifying and ultimate realization that he is infinitely more powerful than he ever could have imagined.

At the archetypal level, *A Curious Year in the Great Vivarium Experiment* is the hero's journey towards self-realization/actualization. Ultimately, it's about the fact that each of us is the hero we've been waiting for.

No matter where the reader is in their life's journey, it's a story about transformation and the awareness that occurs in awakening.

• For a short and mid-length summary, please refer to the end of this document.

BOOK DETAILS



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Author: Tim Shields

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AUTHOR Q & A

What was the inspiration behind writing this book?

I've been writing around these same themes since I was 17 years old. When I was younger, people used to ask me what I wanted to write about and I'd say, "You know—life." Of course that would require life experience, which I didn't yet have. At the time, I didn't realize what it meant to be an artist or a writer. I'm still figuring it out, but I think artists, writers, musicians, painters—they are all trying to express this inner source that needs to be first contemplated, and then brought out of us and into the world in order for us to understand ourselves. Hopefully in that internal and personal journey, you stumble upon a kernel of truth that is universal. The journey of life is a journey of understanding ourselves, our place in the world, and how all of these people, places, and things fit together.

There is an important meaning behind the title you chose. Can you tell us what it is and why it's important?

First off, the book takes place in exactly one year, so that's obvious. I live in Seattle, WA very close to the Olympic Sculpture Garden, which is a part of the Seattle Art Museum. There is this beautiful permanent installation there by a world-renowned artist named Mark Dion. It's this beautiful mixture of art and science. Well, one day as I walked through it, the idea came to me that inside the vivarium is our life. It's a journey through this physical plane where we're supposed to learn and experiment, but outside the vivarium is the central truth and unifying principle of our existence—that we're all connected by something greater. You can call it God, the quantum field, source energy, consciousness. It doesn't matter. That's just a label for the mystery.

How is your travel book different from other travel books or journeys?

The inciting incident of the book, which is based on my personal experience, was the death of my mother in 2010. She suffered a slow, brutal decay from Parkinson's and dementia that bookended a decade of sick and dying parents. Since I had spent so many of my "vacations" going to New Jersey to visit them, when she passed I decided it was my time, so without a plan, a clue, or even a Lonely Planet guidebook, I purchased a one-way ticket to India. So began my research in the great vivarium—an experiment in what's possible when consciousness is directed by gratitude, intention, surrender, and trust.

The result was that with only enough money to travel for 3-4 months, 15 months later I returned home with more money than I left with, had traveled all over Southeast Asia, volunteered for India's most important environmental lawyer (who's won the equivalent of two Nobel prizes), worked as a photographer's assistant in Vietnam and China, lived in Berlin for three months, and had countless experiences with the magical and the mystical.

Every day I wrote in my gratitude/intention journal, and some days when I was really in the flow, what I wrote in the morning regarding what I wanted to create in my life would show up in my external world by the afternoon. So there's really a deeper philosophy about the mind being the builder of our reality—that our external reality is actually a reflection or projection of our consciousness and our state of being.

I think the external journey of travel pales in comparison to the expansion engendered by the internal journey. I always knew or sensed this but had to experientially discover it for myself—but this type of expansion is not possible without a level of surrender and trust not found in everyday life. So it's about a lot more than travel. It's about taking the leap, trusting in yourself, and surrendering to the winds and tides. It's also about trusting in the creative powers of your mind, because I think the mind is the builder of our external experiences. So in that respect, it's really a spiritual coming-of-age story.

Why did you choose to self-publish?

For a few reasons. I agonized over the process of whether to go the traditional route or self-publishing. While I was living in Mexico, I met this woman who I shared a deep connection with and she said, "Someone out there is trying to put all of this together to express what you are trying to express. Why wait? Just put it out into the world and see what happens."

I am very much a believer in asking for and trusting in signs. I do my gratitude/intention journal almost every day, yet I never put time limits on it. Well one day in September 2017 I wrote, "I want someone to show up this week to guide me toward which publishing path to pursue." This was on a Monday. A few days prior, the second large earthquake happened in Mexico City so I went down there to help this woman I spoke of. On Monday, I never could have guessed I'd be in Mexico City on Friday. So anyway, Friday I'm in a coffee shop and I receive an email from a woman who I was put on an email string with about three weeks prior. She apologizes for getting back to me so late saying, "I was on vacation and there was this little earthquake." I said you must have been in Mexico or Mexico City, and she said, no—I'm based here. So we had an in-person meeting the next week and that's how I decided to go with Halo Publishing International.

For a long, long time I had been meditating and asking that the right people show up to help me bring this book into the world. I couldn't see it then, but now I see this thread of incredible, amazing people that kept showing up one by one. I had shared a former iteration of my website with friends and advisors. I built it with messaging towards literary agents, complete with how I would market it and who my audience was. Then a friend who saw it said, "Why are you handing this over to agents? This is a business plan. Why don't you just execute on it yourself?" I had never thought of it that way.

So I decided to put my 15 years of marketing and advertising to the test. Again, the right people showed up at the right time, which included my friend being in India to shoot the trailer. Then I challenged my brilliant 20-year-old nephew to create the musical score for the trailer. He knocked it out of the park and has since created a soundtrack to the book. Finally, I felt like I had a wide enough net of eclectic friends spread all over the world who would help me spread the word, especially with regard to sending my trailer out to their friends. So I took the plunge, but not without a great deal of what at times was hopelessness and paralyzing fear.

Can you tell us how fear played a role in your journey?

My mother, while incredibly loving, was a very fearful person. One of my sisters always says that maybe all the trips I've done, risks I've taken, and adventures I've thrown myself into was to combat the fear she instilled in me. I'm not really sure how I made all these things happen. Something I have tried to live by, even though it terrifies me, is that when you jump, the net appears. This has been my experience every time I've traveled.

It's always interesting the dichotomy between how you appear to yourself internally and how people perceive you. Someone recently said to me—and this was actually in regard to relationships, but it also had a broader context of everything I've done—but she said I don't think you're a fearful person. I was surprised to hear this and then thought about it a bit. I think there are only two sources of fears; one is the very real threat when your life is in danger, and the other only exists in your mind. But that second one can seem so real. Fear that exists in the mind is a state of being, but courage is pushing through the fear, despite the fear. So I'm trying to change my internal story and get used to the idea that I'm courageous, rather than fearful.

What was your greatest discovery on your journey and why is this important to your readers?

Our thoughts have energy and they create our reality. I have no doubts about that. The other thing is that we don't have to know everything about the mystery. We only need to participate in it, after all, it's for us. It's for our enjoyment, expansion, and the evolution of our souls.

What books influenced you most?

I think maybe the first truly influential book in my life was *The Tao of Pooh*, by Benjamin Hoff. I was probably about 17 when I read it, which was also when I started writing. It was my first introduction to an eastern way of thinking and I really connected with it. It's probably why I majored in philosophy in college. For a long time, I said my favorite book was *Narcissus and Goldman* by Herman Hesse, because I really identified with the artist's search. Goldman wanted to stay inside the walls of the monastery with his mentor who was also a scholar. But Narcissus recognized in the young man the soul of an artist, and that he had to go out into the world—to love, to suffer, to experience—in order to discover who he was. I had the same experience reading other writers like Joyce, Hemingway, and Steinbeck in high school. I knew if I wanted to be a writer, I had to do big things so I would have something to write about, and for me, that meant going out into the world and volunteering at an orphanage in Tanzania, buying a one-way ticket to India, backpacking through Europe with a friend while trying to do my own travel show, working on my book in Cape Town, South Africa, or living in Mexico for three months to finish this book. Every time I took off on an adventure though, especially solo, it was not without a lot of fear and uncertainty.

You obviously have a passion for travel. Where did that passion come from?

I was a talented athlete from an early age and got really lucky to play soccer in Europe at 13 and 15. I was in Holland, Belgium, Denmark, and we got to stop over in Iceland for two days as well. I can still remember some of those days—the color of the sky, the air, the sense of awe and wonder being in the squares of cities that were hundreds of years old. I just loved it.

For years I was laden with debt, and although it wasn't too much in the scheme of things, it seemed insurmountable. I finally got a little ahead in the game when a job and a relationship ended in the same week. I thought, hmmm, maybe life is telling me something. I knew to write you needed something to write about and I also had this idea that I wanted to be of service, so that's when I took off for two months to volunteer at an amazing organization called the *Rift Valley Children's Village* in Tanzania. I knew it was a special place when I was there, and a decade later *60 Minutes* did a story on it. And that's when I got the travel bug and took my first solo trip as an adult.

Do you have any plans for future projects?

When I was living in Mexico, the idea for this book became a trilogy. I know the titles, how the books and ideas connect, how they tie together, and how each one ends. Of course, now I have to write them, which is very daunting when you are starting from scratch, although I have started the second book. The process for the next two will be much different, though. For the first book, it was gonzo writing—go out and live, have experiences, and write about them all the while. The next one is much more deliberate in creating the structure, plot points, and so on. There's some white boarding involved, which is new. I always use post it notes to get the ideas out of me and to chart the course of my progress. But I also really like to ghostwrite as well. I love interviewing people to pull their story out of them.



WOULD YOU LIKE TIM TO
SPEAK TO YOUR GROUP?

Possible speaking topics:

- The transformative power of travel
- Overcoming fear
- Creating a dream and living into it
- The power of consciousness to create our reality



A Curious Year in the Great Vivarium Experiment

Tim Shields

SHORT SUMMARY

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ASK, SURRENDER, LISTEN, AND TRUST?

On the morning of his thirty-sixth birthday, Thomas Furey finds himself alone and jobless. Devastated by the recent loss of his mother, he feels untethered, like he is falling into the depths of something he can't describe. On a whim, he buys a one-way ticket to India. Possessed by fear, armed with hope, protected by naïveté, and guided by intention, when Thomas learns to operate in alignment with his true self, serendipity intervenes.

MID-LENGTH SUMMARY

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ASK, SURRENDER, LISTEN, AND TRUST?

On the morning of 36th birthday, Thomas Furey finds himself jobless, without a relationship, or any of the other successes his friends seemed to have. Having just returned from his mother's funeral, he decides to buy a one-way ticket to India. Possessed by fear, armed with hope, protected by naivety, and guided by intention, from the moment Thomas begins to act in alignment with his true self, serendipity intervenes.

But threatening his security, safety, and success was the veil. Something he could feel more than name, the veil was a shadowy force that haunted his life and dreams for as long as he could remember. Terrified by whatever was behind it, he sensed it was responsible for his "soul ache", a seemingly sourceless pain that threatens to lead him down a trail of self-destruction, all the while obfuscating a truth central to his life.

Throughout his year of travel, like the breath of life that animates his body, Thomas moves through a series of joyful expansions and painful contractions as he drifts through women and excess, paralyzing fear and self-doubt, fathomless loneliness and unbounded gratitude, and the terrifying and ultimate realization that he is infinitely more powerful than he ever could have imagined.

At the archetypal level, *A Curious Year in the Great Vivarium Experiment* is the hero's journey towards self-realization/actualization. Ultimately, it's about the fact that each of us is the hero we've been waiting for.

No matter where the reader is in their life's journey, it's a story about transformation and the awareness that occurs in awakening.