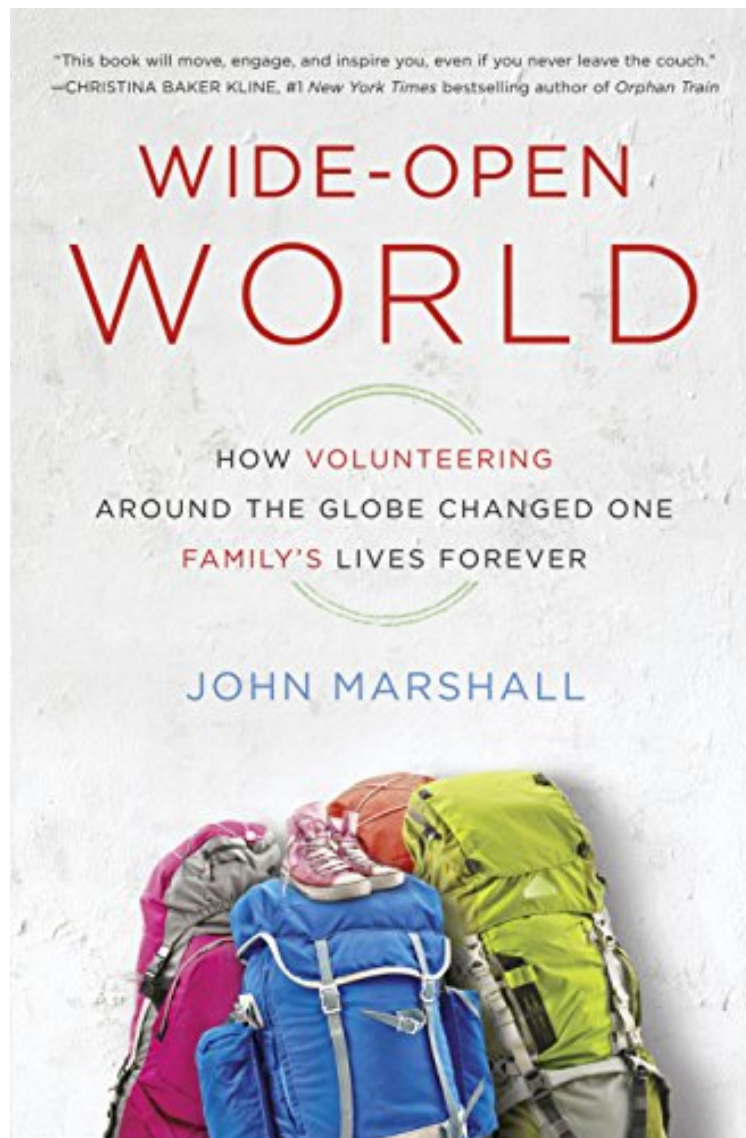


(Download pdf) Wide-Open World: How Volunteering Around the Globe Changed One Family's Lives Forever

Wide-Open World: How Volunteering Around the Globe Changed One Family's Lives Forever

John Marshall

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John Marshall : Wide-Open World: How Volunteering Around the Globe Changed One Family's Lives Forever before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Wide-Open World: How Volunteering Around the Globe Changed One Family's Lives Forever:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Spend a day reading to enter the Wide-Open World of possibility By richard pickering If you are American parents to teenagers (or soon to be teenagers), this book provides an honest

depiction of some of the challenges you will most likely encounter. It is a credit to John and Traca that they met these challenges in such a creative, positive, and inspiring way. Perhaps they gained more than they gave, but that is almost always the case when intentions are true. As I read, I was constantly reminded of the feelings of satisfaction you get when you give a gift that the receiver truly loves. John and his family shared their gifts and were returned with the deep satisfaction that comes from new experiences and new perspective. Wide-open World is part love story between a man and his wife and children, and part guide-book for those who seek travel for a purpose. It opens doors to what is possible, and for us at least, as the Marshalls go their separate ways, we can all be confident that there are 4 Americans out there who will continue to contribute to our world in positive and enlightened ways. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Worth the read, give to your high schooler! By T. Allen Good read and interesting look at options for world travel in a different way. Would love to see more high school kids read this and take up the mantle of service! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Inspirational By Alise Mat Beautiful book about a family who spends six months volunteering. An inspiration to families who want to reconnect with their kids and with the world, to find some meaning outside the routine of daily life. My husband and I have spent the last few years skirting around a similar idea, so I enjoyed reading one family's story. John Marshall is a gifted writer, and I couldn't put Wide-Open World down. He takes the reader into the experience and deftly weaves real life experience, memories, philosophy, hopes and dreams, and observations all together to create a beautiful look into his family's experience. As a Christian, there are some aspects that are disturbing, most surrounding choices and attitudes of the author's wife, who seemed to go deeper and deeper into a way of life that focuses very much on self - self focus, self awareness, etc. In reading the author's website after the book, it's easy to see how deeply a six month volunteer trip changed the entire focus of his life and life work...I'm trying not to give too much away.

For readers of *Three Cups of Tea*; *Eat, Pray, Love*; and *Wild* comes the inspiring story of an ordinary American family that embarks on an extraordinary journey. *Wide-Open World* follows the Marshall family as they volunteer their way around the globe, living in a monkey sanctuary in Costa Rica, teaching English in rural Thailand, and caring for orphans in India. There's a name for this kind of endeavor—voluntourism—and it might just be the future of travel. Oppressive heat, grueling bus rides, backbreaking work, and one vicious spider monkey . . . Best family vacation ever! John Marshall needed a change. His twenty-year marriage was falling apart, his seventeen-year-old son was about to leave home, and his fourteen-year-old daughter was lost in cyberspace. Desperate to get out of a rut and reconnect with his family, John dreamed of a trip around the world, a chance to leave behind, if only just for a while, routines and responsibilities. He didn't have the money for resorts or luxury tours, but he did have an idea that would make traveling the globe more affordable and more meaningful than he'd ever imagined: The family would volunteer their time and energy to others in far-flung locales. *Wide-Open World* is the inspiring true story of the six months that changed the Marshall family forever. Once they'd made the pivotal decision to go, John and his wife, Traca, quit their jobs, pulled their kids out of school, and embarked on a journey that would take them far off the beaten path, and far out of their comfort zones. Here is the totally engaging, bluntly honest chronicle of the Marshalls' life-altering adventure from Central America to East Asia. It was no fairy tale. The trip offered little rest, even less relaxation, and virtually no certainty of what was to come. But it did give the Marshalls something far more valuable: a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to conquer personal fears, strengthen family bonds, and find their true selves by helping those in need. In the end, as John discovered, he and his family did not change the world. It was the world that changed them. Praise for *Wide-Open World*: "Marshall's use of rich details locates readers firmly in each time and place, enabling them to sense the adventure, wonder and joy he experienced in his surroundings and in watching his children grow into hardworking, more responsible teens, as well as the frustrations and disappointments he and his family inevitably encountered along the way. A great armchair adventure that should inspire others to consider voluntourism as a way to help others and see the world." —Kirkus Reviews "Each new location combines beautiful scenery with a dose of sentiment, a good deal of humor, and some heartfelt consideration of the human condition. . . . His philosophy may not fit everyone and the ending is bittersweet, but this is an enticing call to service." —Publishers Weekly "Wide-Open World is an adventure made up of countless small moments of human connection. It's an armchair travelogue that may well inspire you to do good off the beaten path." —BookPage "For anyone who has ever imagined what it would be like to pack up, unplug, pull the kids out of school, and travel around the world, this volunteer adventure is your ticket. *Wide-Open World* will move, engage, and inspire you, even if you never leave the couch." —Christina Baker Kline, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Orphan Train* From the Hardcover edition.

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Wide-Open World will move, engage, and inspire you, even if you never leave the couch."—Christina Baker Kline, #1 New York Times bestselling author of Orphan Train"John Marshall has done it, written a big, honest, charming memoir about the dream—and reality—of escaping it all, on a round-the-globe boondoggle with your family. In Wide-Open World, the pleasures are deep, the sentiments revelatory, and the voice true and funny. And best of all, you won't have to leave your armchair, or upend your life, to know what it feels like to make your way, with kids, out there in the beautiful, churning world."—Michael Paterniti, author of Love and Other Ways of Dyingnbsp; "Volunteering may not change the world—but as we learn in Wide-Open World, it will change you and your family. Let this heartwarming, hilarious, poignant book be your inspiration: Dare to follow in the Marshall family's footsteps, and give more of your time, effort, and heart than you ever thought possible—and watch the blessings flow!"—Sy Montgomery, author of The Good Good Pignbsp; "Compelling, richly detailed, and often laugh-out-loud funny, Wide-Open World is the poignant story of four ordinary people trying to salvage a family while saving the world (or at least making it a little bit better). Sometimes the truest path to self-knowledge is focusing on the needs of others, and this book provides ample—and compulsively readable—evidence of just that."—Gwen Cooper, author of Homer's Odysseynbsp; "This invaluable book proves again why travel is the greatest education we can offer both ourselves and our children. If creating compassionate, well-rounded, conscious global citizens of our kids is the true measure of a parent, then John Marshall gets an A+. I read every page with joyous envy. Altruism truly is the best defense."—Andrew McCarthy, author of The Longest Way Homenbsp; "Told with great wisdom and humor, this exhilarating story made me want to pack up my family tonight and go travel around the world on a 'voluntourism' stint. Marshall finds wonderful moments of grace when he isn't expecting them, and his rich, cinematic writing allows the reader to hop on the bus with him and go along for the ride."—Susan Conley, author of Paris Was the PlaceAbout the AuthorJohn Marshall is a nine-time Emmy Award-winning writer, producer, and director. In addition to his work behind the camera, Marshall has been a familiar face on Maine television for more than ten years, writing and hosting numerous weekly TV shows. Wide-Open World is his first book.Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.1Out of the BlueTaking a trip around the world was at the very top of Traca's bucket list long before I met her and it became a recurring topic of conversation in our marriage over the years. We dreamed about it from time to time, mapped out routes, imagined the adventure. For my part, I was mostly playing along with this fantasy, not really thinking I'd ever go, but Traca never let it die. Even when there was no practical way a big trip made any sense at all, when we were busy with young children or in debt up to our eyeballs, she loved to toss the idea of world travel onto the floor like a magic carpet and see if it took us anywhere. It's just part of her makeup. Foreign cultures and unknown languages and passport stamps and airport terminals fire her imagination like nothing else. It's not so much wanderlust. It's more like fernweh, another German word, which means "an ache for the distance." That's Traca. She aches to go and explore ... she yearns to experience the world ... as if she is pulled by a gravity I simply do not feel. It's not that I'm against travel. I love it. I guess I'm just more practical than she is. While Traca would happily spend the last of our meager savings on a spectacular two-shy-week trek in Peru, I tend to analyze a specific trip and calculate whether the cost of plane tickets, hotels, and restaurants and the sheer hassles involved would make a good investment for a family on a budget. We did manage to spend a wonderful, impractical year in a Portuguese fishing village back in 2000 when our kids were seven and five—but a complete circle of our enormous planet? That was different. The timing just wasn't right, or it was too expensive, or I wanted to focus on my career, or it would be better when the kids were older, or I'd do it later. In fact, I probably could have stalled like that forever (because it's never really the right time to take a trip around the world), until one day, as if the universe were advocating on Traca's behalf, three words popped into my head, and even I couldn't resist the idea any longer. I wasn't thinking of anything particular at the time the three words occurred to me. I wasn't really thinking at all. I was just sitting on an airplane, looking out the window, marveling at the Windex-blue water of the Caribbean. I had a ginger ale in front of me and a tan on my face, and I was feeling better, more centered, than I'd felt in a very long time. Maybe ever. This bliss—shy;for lack of a better word—shy;was the result of a weeklong yoga retreat Traca and I had just completed, and it came as a complete surprise to me. When she proposed the idea, I had zero interest in a yoga vacation, even a tropical one. Traca was the yoga instructor and daily practitioner in the family. Time spent in a rigid ashram environment might seem like heaven on earth to her, but to me it sounded like a descent into backbend hell, and an expensive one at that. Still, I had been pretty stressed out. Professionally, my work as creative director at a few

local TV stations in Maine felt uninspired, and my eyes were almost constantly red from too much computer time. I felt listless, unmotivated, going through the motions of life; which was a fairly accurate description of my marriage at the time, too. After sixteen years of raising children, Traca and I were more like chaperones than lovers, treading water in the deep end of the parenting pool, just passing the time. We got along well enough. We were committed to our kids. There was no cheating or plate throwing, but there wasn't a lot of passion, either. While I buried myself in work and focused on my career, Traca got deep into yoga and meditation and shamanism and Reiki therapy. We were drifting and we both knew it, but there were so many other things preoccupying us. I always assumed we'd reconnect when the kids went off on their own; it would just mean three more years of treading water, which I knew would pass quickly. As for the yoga vacation, I didn't expect it to fix any or all of these problems, but since it was the only thing Traca wanted for her birthday that year, I signed us both up. I packed my swimsuit and my stretchy pants, resolved to leave my cynicism and my judgment at home, and flew to Paradise Island in the Bahamas for a little downward-facing dog and, hopefully, some time on the beach. My first impression of the ashram, other than the palm trees and the warm sun, was "These people do not look very friendly." I said this out loud to Traca, which I could tell instantly annoyed her, but it was true. Everywhere I went on the ashram property, residents and instructors followed me with their eyes as if I were a shoplifter. When I passed people on the lush, overgrown paths, said "hello," and tried to be friendly, many of them looked right through me or looked away. It didn't make any sense. Where were the enlightened smiling faces and the "Thanks-for-spendingso-much-money-with-us"; hospitality? Feeling judged and defensive, I decided to forget about everyone else and just focus on myself. For better or worse, I committed wholeheartedly to the regimented ashram routine. So I woke up while it was still dark, walked silently down the beach with the other guests, sat in meditation as the sun came up, then did my best to chant the hour-long Sanskrit song that began and ended every ashram day. For most of this epic chant, I had no idea what I was saying; but I did recognize the famous Hare Krishna lines that devotees used to sing in airports back in the seventies. I remember spotting a group of these chanters while on a family vacation as a kid. It was as if my two brothers and I had found a nest of rare, hilarious birds, and we couldn't help laughing at them as they banged on their tambourines, twirled in their robes, and whipped their thin, solitary braids around on their otherwise bald heads. Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare ... The first time I said these words at the ashram, I was sitting in a group of chanters, all of them swaying and vibing on the rhythmic chant energy. Sandwiched between Father Granola and Sister Moonstar Rainbow Bright, I looked up to try to catch Traca's eye. She was sitting across from me, head down, with her own sway and vibe going on. Then, as if she knew I needed her, she lifted her head and looked right at me. For a beat, we just looked. Then she smiled and shrugged, which for some reason sent me into a fit of laughter. If my brothers could have seen me at that moment, I knew they'd be laughing, too. After morning chant, two hours of yoga awaited. I did my best but, sadly, I was like the Tin Man, with welded hips and steel bars for legs. (And not much heart, either, now that I think of it.) Most classes, I was a million miles from the perfect pose the rubber-limbed yogis would demonstrate, but I was there. I was trying. "Now hold your foot to your breast like a baby," a rail-thin instructor said one afternoon, sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of me. To demonstrate, he lifted one foot effortlessly to his chest, rocking back and forth. "And feed your baby gently," he said, now breast-feeding his own foot. "And kiss your baby," he said, drawing his foot to his puckering mouth. As I sat on my mat, having trouble just keeping my back straight without support, I managed to lift my foot a full eight inches off the ground. But it was not going any higher, not without tearing a few ligaments. Naturally, the instructor was just getting started. "And finally, rest your baby behind your head like this and lift your other baby to your chest." I watched him sitting there with one ankle tucked behind his neck, the other suckling at his bosom, and I thought: I would need to fall off a building to end up in a pose like that. "What's your opinion?" Traca asked me at the end of the class. She was smiling, firing on all cylinders, clearly in her element. "I think my babies are going to go hungry," I said. But I didn't give up. Day by day, I ate the mega-healthy meals (just brunch and dinner), attended every yoga class (four hours per day), received a small ovation when I did my first unassisted headstand, chanted with all the sincerity I could muster, even tapped a tambourine during one evening program. Then a funny thing happened. In just seven days, all the people at the ashram went from unfriendly to friendly. "The people here are so nice," I said to Traca with a laugh, knowing that the change had happened within me. For the first time in years, I felt light and joyful, my mind was still and clear, and I saw Traca; really saw her; not simply as a mother and a homemaker but as the beautiful woman I had fallen in love with so many years ago. The coldness that had permeated our marriage for too long was breaking up. We held hands. We kissed. It was an epiphany, really. As though I'd been sitting in the dark for years and suddenly someone had pulled open the shades. "You are feeling better?" a swami asked me as I was leaving. I said that I was. Much better. "I can tell," she said with a big smile. "Your eyes are shining." With this peaceful easy feeling, I boarded a plane headed back to Portland, Maine, with a stop in Atlanta. Traca took the aisle, I took the window. Below, the bright blue water matched the clarity I was feeling when the three words appeared in my mind like a non sequitur from God. Though I wasn't looking for them at the time or fishing for them in any way, they felt urgent; if not a sign, then

at least an inspired nudge. Three simple words: Year of Service. It's a strange feeling, getting an answer to a question you did not know you were asking, but I knew exactly what the words meant, and—shy; in spite of my newfound calm—shy; they both thrilled me and freaked me out. I also had the superstitious notion, right away, that if I spoke these words out loud, they would take on a life of their own, that Traca would chomp down on them like a pit bull and never let them go. Even I couldn't resist the idea they suggested, and I began planning in my head almost immediately. Up until that point, my biggest resistance to the idea of a trip around the world had always been the cost. I read a book once called *One Year Off* by David Elliot Cohen in which the author packed up his wife and three small children (and an au pair!) and hit sixteen countries over the course of thirteen months. While I loved the author's "leave it all behind" attitude and his close encounters with hippos and holy men, my biggest impression was: This must have cost a bloody fortune! In one eleven-day period, the Cohens went on a five-day safari at Chobe National Park in Botswana, a three-day safari at the Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe, and a white-water rafting trip below Victoria Falls. As if that wasn't enough, they then flew to South Africa for another three-day safari at a place called Makalali in Kruger National Park! I won't even begin to speculate on how much this week and a half must have set the family back; even with the best possible bargain hunting, I'm sure it was a lot. And while I have no problem with the Cohens spending whatever they wanted to spend on their adventure, I just knew that this kind of lavish traveling was not going to be our story. But a Year of Service ... I'd read about the idea in a magazine. "Voluntourism," it's called; vacations with a purpose. All over the world, people are combining travel with service and creating much more meaningful experiences. In exchange for some work and usually a placement fee, volunteers get food and a bed to sleep in. If we planned it carefully, I reasoned, it probably wouldn't cost very much at all. We'd need airfare, but after that we'd just need to find organizations that needed volunteers. We wouldn't just be sightseeing. We'd be helping. Instead of impersonal hotels and budget restaurants, we'd be in communities where we were needed, making connections to local people, eating with them, living with them. Some people report having their lives forever altered by a single week of overseas service. So what could a whole year do? The more I thought about it, the more excited I got. What an amazing gift to give our kids! Like most every other teenager in America, our daughter, Jackson, was totally addicted to Facebook and her cell phone. What if we could unplug her for a full year? Wouldn't that be worth almost any price? And our sixteen-year-old son, Logan, would be gone from home soon. What if we could show him the world together before he headed off into it alone? How would the trajectory of his young life be changed after such a trip? How would all our lives be changed? I looked at Traca and she smiled. I looked back out the window. In my mouth the three words rolled around like marbles. Year of Service ... Year of Service ... In Atlanta, I was literally biting my tongue, not speaking, afraid the words would tumble out if I so much as yawned. I carried them down the moving sidewalks, past the magazine racks, up to our gate. Did I even want this? A whole year of service? I was excited but I was scared. What was I scared of? Nothing had actually happened yet. The words weren't a burning bush or anything. I had a career. I had kids in high school to think about, college coming up. I wasn't some flaky Hare Krishna. Year of Service ... Year of Service ... And then ... we were talking about it. We were eating some lunch, waiting for our connecting flight, and I just started saying it all. I opened my mouth and the marbles rolled all over the table.