

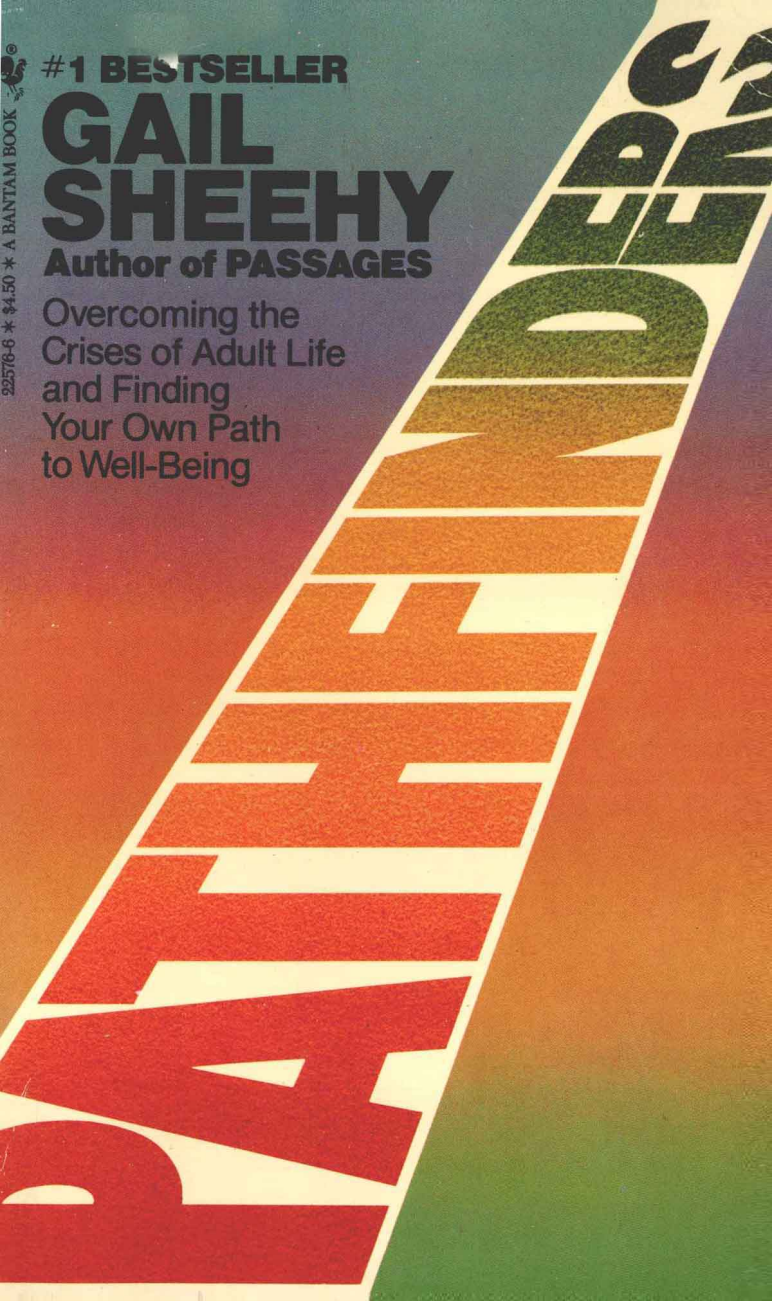
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GAIL SHEEHY is the author of six books: *Lovesounds*, a novel; *Panthermania*, a study of the clash between the middle class and radical blacks in New Haven; *Speed Is of the Essence*, a collection of articles; *Hustling*, a psychological and journalistic study of prostitution that also became a major ABC-TV documentary-drama; *Passages*, published in 1976, which firmly established that adult life proceeds by developmental stages; and now *Pathfinders*.

Ms. Sheehy graduated from the University of Vermont in 1958 and in 1970 received a fellowship to study at Columbia University under her mentor, Margaret Mead. In 1974 she was awarded a grant from the Alicia Patterson Foundation to continue her studies of adult development. Ms. Sheehy's honors include the National Magazine Award and the Penney-Missouri Journalism Award; she was twice the winner of the Newswomen's Club of New York Front Page Award. She lives in New York City.



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Part I

WHICH WAY AT THE CROSSROADS?

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
—ROBERT FROST, "The Road Not Taken"

1.

HUNTING THE SECRETS OF WELL-BEING

All of us have stood at a point where two roads diverged and doubted our wisdom to choose. Many of us have chosen by refusing to risk moving at all; others have made a choice by default or been unaware even that they stood at a crossroads. But some among us have recognized that crossroads and seen in it the path to another beginning, an opportunity to make themselves more. What can such people teach us about the process of finding and choosing paths to expansion in our lives, about avoiding the ruts into which most lives eventually fall, the meagerness of lives spent on a safe and narrow track, the blind alleys, the bitterness and breakdown of nerve that overcome people who hit the bumps completely unaware?

Our personalities do not stop developing at the end of adolescence. Each time we move from one stage of our lives to the next we face a transition, what some have called a "psychosocial crisis" and I have termed a "passage." To know that such passages occur throughout our lives, however, does not give us any clues about how to navigate them, how to move forward rather than backward in growth. As I traveled around the country after I finished *Passages*,¹ I heard the same question in one variation after another:

"Help! I'm stuck between the twenties and the thirties—how do I avoid the old traps?"