



## Best books ... chosen by Gail Sheehy

Gail Sheehy put a fresh frame around life's challenges with her international best-seller *Passages*. Below, she recommends titles for families grappling with the 'predictable crisis' that is the subject of her new book: *Passages in Caregiving*.

**They're Your Parents, Too!** by Francine Russo (Bantam, \$26). Russo, a journalist who covered the baby boomer beat for *Time*, guides adult children of aging parents in how to win crucial help from your siblings instead of letting them drive you toward considering fratricide.

**Elder Rage** by Jacqueline Marcell (Impressive Press, \$25). "Jacqueline, you ignorant slut!" is not the sort of greeting one would expect when a daughter visits her father in the hospital—unless one has been a caregiver for a proud parent who has gone cognitively haywire. Marcell offers hilarious relief to anyone coping with parental rebellion, along with solid guidelines for those who are caring for a loved one with dementia.

**Always on Call** by Carol Levine (Vanderbilt Univ. Press, \$25). A tell-it-like-it-is book from a woman who was caregiver to her husband for 17 years. Levine's gift to caregivers is a brilliant website: [Nextstepincare.org](http://Nextstepincare.org). It will guide you through the toughest part of this passage—transitions in care between home, emergency room, hospital, rehab, and back around again.

**Share the Care** by Cappy Capossela and Sheila Warnock (Fireside, \$15). *Share the Care* is more than a book. It's a philosophy from two caregivers who looked after a friend with cancer for five years and developed a step-by-step model for empowering friends, neighbors, and co-workers to create and maintain a "caregiving family."

**A Family Caregiver Speaks Up: 'It Doesn't Have to Be This Hard'** by Suzanne Mintz (Capital Books, \$15). The tireless president of the National Family Caregivers Association offers expert advice on how caregivers need to believe in themselves, protect their health, and reach out for help.

**Walking a Sacred Path** by the Rev. Lauren Artress (Riverhead, \$14). The outdoor labyrinth at the Rev. Artress' Grace Cathedral in San Francisco was the inspiration for my book's thesis—that the caregiver's journey is like walking a labyrinth. Here, Artress identifies the labyrinth as "the inner map of knowing in women," and reminds us that its use in healing and rebalancing predates Christianity.

## Author of the week

### Manny Howard

For a man who created a farm in his Brooklyn, N.Y., backyard, Manny Howard isn't much of an idealist, said Michael Astor in the Associated Press. In *My Empire of Dirt*, his appealingly ragtag memoir



about trying to feed his family of four from just a patch of earth, Howard readily acknowl-

edges that the entire project began as a stunt for *New York* magazine, meant to poke gentle fun at the local-foods movement. But the resulting pileup of chicken manure and rabbit carcasses gravely tested the patience of his publishing-executive wife, and his story eventually became a drama about a marriage redeemed by the intervention of a freak tornado that swept through city streets. Because Howard stuck with his project after the 2007 twister destroyed his crops, he says, "I started to win her back."

A stronger marriage wasn't the project's only benefit, said Julie Vadnal in *Elle*. Howard dropped 29 pounds during his first eight months in agriculture. "I didn't grow any booze, which is usually a central part of my diet," he says. He's since sold the rights to his story to Hollywood. But his happy ending didn't come without risk. While building his first chicken coop, he partly lopped off his pinky finger with a power saw. These days, when Howard wanders outside to collect eggs from his chickens, the repaired digit won't cooperate with attempts to stuff his hands into his pockets. "On some very fun level," he says, "it looks like a toe."

## Also of interest ... in new titles on Mark Twain

### Mark Twain: Man in White

by Michael Shelden (Random House, \$30)



A century after Twain's death, his final years have received a fresh look, said Janet Maslin in *The New York Times*. Most previous biographers have painted the septuagenarian author as a bitter man, but Michael Shelden sees a widower who shook off grief to don an attention-grabbing white suit and "enjoy the perks of his celebrity." Shelden can seem "dangerously oversympathetic" to his subject, but Twain packed in enough travel and quipping at the end that he makes pleasant company here.

### Mark Twain's Other Woman

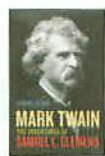
by Laura Skandera Trombley (Knopf, \$28)



Laura Trombley's Twain is a much uglier old man than Shelden's, said Peter Rowe in *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. Relying on the journals of a personal secretary whom Twain eventually dismissed, Trombley presents her subject as a self-absorbed grouch who angrily turned against his adoring aide (the "other woman" of this book's title). Ultimately, the portrait seems unfair: While "other biographers have noted Twain's fondness for alcohol, Trombley's Twain may be the most intoxicated on record."

### Mark Twain

by Jerome Loving (Univ of Calif., \$35)



"If you're looking for a strong, readable, authoritative, perceptive biography in which Mark Twain and his world come alive, you couldn't do much better than this one," said Martin Levin in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*. Recent biographers have gone overboard trying to stuff the legend's peripatetic life between two covers, but Loving does it in just 431 pages. He's an astute reader of Twain's work, and his "brisk, episodic chapters" read surprisingly like the work of Twain himself.

### Lighting Out for the Territory

by Roy Morris Jr. (Simon & Schuster, \$26)



Twain "wrote memorably" about his Western adventures, and so does Roy Morris, said Colette Bancroft in the *St. Petersburg, Fla., Times*. Still a teenager when he left Missouri, Twain "found his authorial voice and much of his subject matter" as he traveled with pen in hand through the Nevada Territory, on to San Francisco, and over to Hawaii. "Morris provides a more linear and comprehensive account" than Twain did, but loses little of his subject's sense of fun.