

## Leaving it all behind

By Paul Saitowitz, Daily Pilot

*Corona del Mar resident's new book encourages people to discuss estate matters before they become issues.*

Death - the last hurrah, the great mystery, the final adieu - may be the ultimate earthly presence an individual will have, but the legacy of a lifetime of accumulation and the destination of that booty can live on long after the final breath or heartbeat.

Oftentimes grief is compounded by family members bickering over just who inherits what is left behind. This can lead to feelings of guilt, greed and anger - enter Dr. Steven Hendlin.

Hendlin, who lives in Corona del Mar and has been in private practice focusing on psychotherapy with adults since 1976, has just released a book on the subject - his fourth - called "Overcoming the Inheritance Taboo."

"My book deals with all aspects surrounding the death of a parent . grief, the need to have an estate plan or will, trust, emotional problems within the family, all of it," Hendlin said.

Hendlin's contention is that many squabbles over estates start because people are conditioned to not breach the topic before the person dies.

When a loved one has reached a dire stage, it is often taboo or morbid to begin talking with them about how their possessions will be split up, who they want to have what and how they want things wound up.

"The best thing is to deal with these family issues of inheritance when you can and not when you have to," Hendlin said. "Emotions run high during times of crisis, and that's when a lot of deep-seated feelings come out."

Those emotions can often trigger sibling rivalries that have been there all along.

"People are really superstitious about dealing with inheritance," he said. "They think people will look at them as vultures if they bring it up too soon. No kind of family argument that happens is happening for the first time; the death just helps bring it to the surface."

One way he pushes to help ease the tension is for parents to give possessions to children before they die. That way they can take pride in seeing their children enjoy them.

Just as Hendlin was set to begin writing the book, he was faced with these issues firsthand with the death of his mother.

"That was a hard time for me, and I was faced with the dilemma of whether or not to fulfill my commitment and go on writing the book or just step away from it," he said. "I think going through that experience ultimately helped me write the book."

Although the book is largely targeted to more affluent families with large estates, Hendlin says the basic principles apply to everyone.

"Just because a family may not have as much to divide up does not mean the same emotional attachment is not there," he said. "The same problems can creep up with every family."

The book, released by Penguin/Plume Books, is available at bookstores everywhere.