



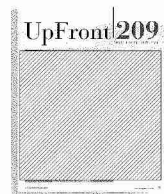
Matthew James Photo

## Local Senior Advocate:

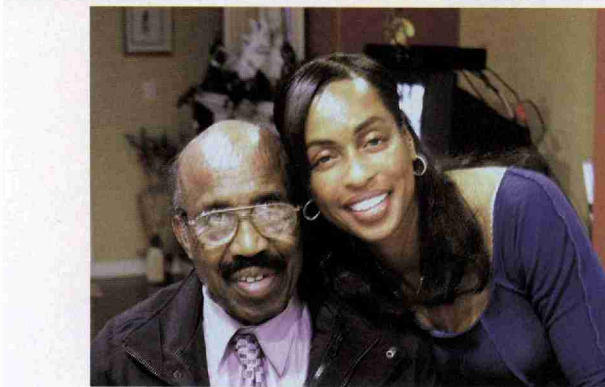
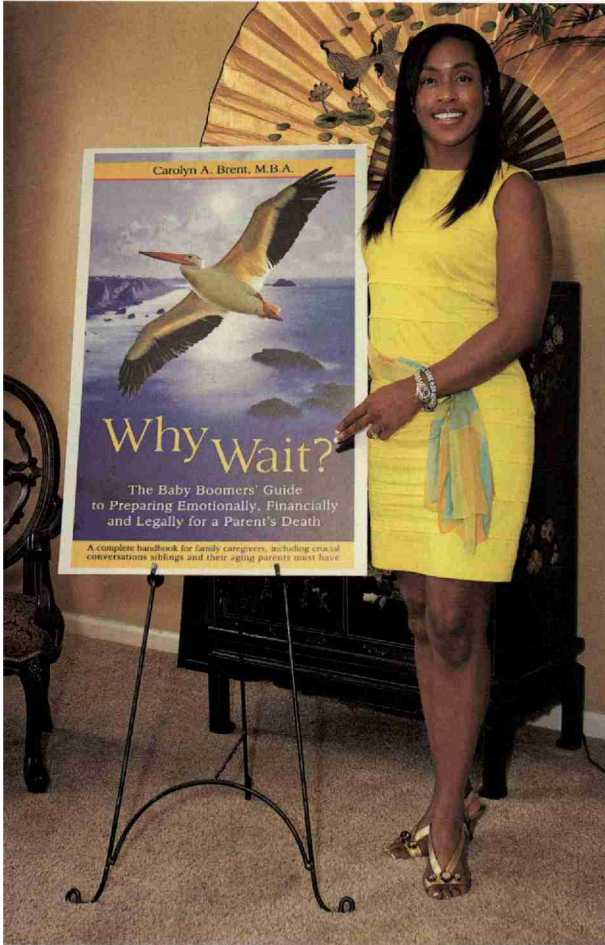
Carolyn Brent

BY KATY BERRY

Caring for a parent who is ill or dying is difficult. Legal, financial, and emotional stresses run high, and too often families are torn apart by expensive, painful legal battles, usually over money. Senior advocate Carolyn Brent experienced such a situation while caring for her ailing father, and now devotes her life to providing the elderly and their caretakers with valuable information to avoid these painful family feuds. >>



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Brent cared for her father for twelve years with no assistance from her seven siblings. It was only when her father had a near death experience that Brent began hearing from family members, who filed false reports of abuse and dragged her to court on multiple occasions for unfounded accusations. Brent, unable to defend herself from the onslaught, was simply along for the ride.

Though her father had signed legal documents naming her as his caretaker and granting her power of attorney, he had only gotten approval from the county courts. This left loopholes for Brent's siblings to contest the documents through state and federal courts – the ultimate goal being to gain access to his estate. Had Brent been aware of these legalities, she could have protected herself and her father's wishes. Instead, she was dragged into a slow, unorganized legal process, harming her reputation and draining her of time and money. Eventually, the FBI and APS threw out Brent's siblings' claims against her, but the damage had already been done.

Since then, Brent has formed Caretaker's Story, a non-profit organization which shares her experience and offers resources to those caring for a parent. In addition, Brent began her company Grandpa's Dream, and has recently published: *Why Wait? The Baby Boomers Guide to Preparing Emotionally, Financially, and Legally for a Parent's Death*. The book covers topics like when a parent can no longer live alone, how to find an attorney that is prepared to deal with estate planning and other complex end-of-life legal issues, how to find a quality assisted living facility or nursing home, how to create a sibling contract, and crucial legal and financial conversations with your family.

According to Brent, the key to discussing matters related to a

parent's death is to embrace the subject as a family. "We sit at the big family table and talk about who's getting married, who's graduating, who had a baby, who's getting a promotion... We're always planning. But when's the last time we planned for death? Have we ever?" says Brent.

"If we can plan for our death as a family, then families are not going to fight, because they will look at it as a way to embrace the life and the legacy of someone they loved."

One reason she says many parents avoid the topic is because they fear showing favoritism among their children. "I tell parents: Identify, here's a child who's good with medical issues. Have that child be responsible for that. If someone is good with money, let them be the responsible party. If there's a child who hates your guts and doesn't speak to you, let it be stated that you do not have a relationship with that child, and they cannot contest what you have in writing, because that happens a lot too."

Brent is currently working to become a member of Gov. Jerry Brown's California Commission on Aging, and is also scheduled to be the AARP keynote speaker in May. She has created a checklist of goals for reforming senior rights legislation, which includes items like requiring extensive background checks for potential power of attorneys, requiring attorneys to have evidence of a senior's mental capacity from an independent medical professional before executing a power of attorney, and requiring adult protective services to report false claims to authorities for prosecution. Ultimately, Brent hopes to one day make this issue an openly discussed matter that will close the door to painful family separations, and allow loved ones to pass on in with dignity.

**For more information:**  
[caregiverstory.com](http://caregiverstory.com)

Matthew James Photo; Courtesy Carolyn Brent