

Good morning,

The attached article ought to hit home for all of us. It is a poignant description of family relationships that may be strained in ways none of us ever imagined. There's an opportunity here if we look for it.

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Good morning, and welcome to the Essential California [newsletter](#). It's **Thursday, March 19**, and I'm writing from Los Angeles.

It's been four days since Gov. Gavin Newsom [called for Californians ages 65 and over](#), along with others at risk from underlying health issues, to stay home in an effort to slow the spread of coronavirus.

At least [16 California counties](#), along with the cities of [Palm Springs](#) and [Fresno](#), have now extended the guidelines to the general population and asked residents to shelter in place and stay home as much as possible in the coming weeks.

[See also: [“What are the coronavirus restrictions in my community? A guide for Southern California”](#) in the Los Angeles Times]

On Wednesday, President Trump [invoked wartime powers](#) that could boost the manufacturing of medical equipment used to fight the coronavirus pandemic, as hospitals braced for a nationwide explosion of infections and Congress rushed to pass emergency legislation to keep the country's economy on life support. As of Wednesday night, Los Angeles County [had confirmed](#) 46 new cases of the novel coronavirus, including eight in Long Beach and two in Pasadena. The new cases bring the county's known total to 192 and the statewide total of confirmed cases to 869. The U.S. death toll has hit 150, with 17 deaths in California.

[See also: [“Tracking coronavirus in California”](#) in the Los Angeles Times]

As official guidance from state and local authorities has grown more stringent, **many Californians have found themselves at odds with at-risk loved ones about their refusal to stay home**. After putting out a call on social media, I heard from dozens of people about their frustrations — primarily millennials who were arguing with their baby boomer parents in an uncomfortable reversal of familiar parent-child roles. Of course, the street runs both ways, as

federal health officials have called out younger people for not taking social distancing seriously either.

One L.A. resident in her mid-30s — who asked to remain anonymous because her 70-something-year-old mother doesn't know that the Find My Friends app on her iPhone enables her daughter to track her location — described calling her parents' landline a few days ago, just to check in.

They didn't pick up, which seemed weird, but she figured they might be in the back gardening.

"When they weren't home the second time, I thought of doing the tracker thing," she said. It was mainly for reassurance, as she expected her parents' home address to pop up on the screen. But instead the map revealed that not only had the couple, who both have underlying health issues, left the house — they were out with the masses at a Costco.

"I was like, oh my God, how are they in a Costco right now?" she said.

She knew her parents had already been grocery shopping a few days ago and were fully stocked up. There was absolutely no reason for them to be in a Costco in the middle of a pandemic when people 65 and older have been advised to stay home for their own health. And yet. (For what it's worth, this woman was far from alone in her Costco concerns. Two other people shared stories about their older parents defying guidelines specifically to head to that bulk discount wonderland.)

Like many other boomers, this woman's parents don't see themselves as "old." They're highly independent and used to being able to live how they want. The [more than 5 million](#) Californians who fall into that 65-plus age bracket are, of course, a varied group. But for some, this pandemic is probably the first time they've had to contend head-on with the fact they fall into the demographic category of ["the older population,"](#) let alone wrestle with the vulnerability it implies.

[See also: ["Can Tom Hanks and the NBA stop coronavirus skepticism in boomers and others?"](#) in the Los Angeles Times]

Parents treating precautions lightly or as a bit of a joke was another running thread in my conversations. One 39-year-old man showed me a selfie his 69-year-old father had sent him on Wednesday morning. The dad mugged for the camera in front of a local L.A. cafe, holding a to-go cappuccino in his bare, gloveless hands.

"What the hell are you doing out of the house. I bought you an espresso machine," the son texted back. His father replied with a zinger about taking his son out of his will, along with a refrain familiar to many dealing with a boomer parent in the face of a pandemic: "You can't keep me locked up forever."

If you fall into the 65-or-over category and have been warring with your children or grandchildren, please know that no one wants to keep you locked up forever. They just want you to make it through all this intact.

That's the long and short of it, and also what makes many of these conversations feel so jarring.

In theory, talking about a coffee run or a trip to Costco should be as low stakes as it gets. But in the age of the coronavirus, these otherwise ordinary-sounding decisions can feel like matters of life or death. And perhaps they actually could be, if you play each choice down the line of potential dominoes.

It doesn't help that everyone is already on edge, with nerves run ragged from days of upheaval. At any given moment, there is but the flimsiest of internal barriers separating the gargantuan entirety of our fears from the situation at hand.

Sure, you're mad about a trip to the store. But who can separate any of it once the floodgates open? Suddenly, you're also crying about every doctor in Italy forced to [make triage decisions](#) about who lives and who dies, the mass graves for coronavirus victims in Iran visible [from space](#), whether you still have your job, what will happen if your local hospital system is overwhelmed and — the list goes on. It's no wonder that these please-follow-the-guidelines conversations often become emotional and raw.

A week or two ago, you ran errands, went to restaurants and had the illusion of control over your life. Now, the people you love most are mortally vulnerable amid a vast backdrop of the unknown. The fight is about the store, but it's also about feeling as if you have any small element of control over the safety of the people you love, particularly those who are at increased risk.

Millennials, please be patient and kind with your boomer parents as you berate them into not leaving the house. Unlike us, they came of age in the [land of postwar opportunity](#). All those decades of relative stability have undoubtedly colored their worldview, and maybe even made them feel a little invincible.

And boomers, please, please just stay home. We love you and want to spend many more years driving you batty. Maybe we'll even give you grandchildren someday. But only if you stop going to Costco until after all of this is over.

And now, **here's what's happening across California:**