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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Hi, Liza — Thanks so much for sending this our way again. I removed a couple of the long quotes that I thought might exceed fair use in print; I think their removal only makes your own words shine more brightly. I’m happy to arm wrestle if you disagree and especially if you think they were more essential to the narrative than I perceived them to be. I’ve also added an editorial postscript (ironically, with a quote from an NPR report), which I hope extends its timeliness. I drafted a bio, and I’m happy to adapt it if you’d like. Please let me know any concerns. I’d like to use it as soon as possible, maybe even in Wednesday’s paper.

All the best, Jeff



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Touching down in Minneapolis

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 In a 40-hour witness to a besieged city’s resistance, a
3 writer reflects on grief, fear, music, privilege, and neighborly
4 courage

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 A WEEK AFTER Alex Pretti was killed, I joined a dear friend
7 in Minneapolis. She grew up in the Twin Cities and we went to
8 visit her family and offer what felt like a meager token of support
9 as they continued living day-to-day in a besieged city.

10 We also went as witnesses. To document for posterity
11 what we saw, and to carry back home what could be scenes from
12 our near future.

13 If ICE is a virus spreading city to city, then the people of
14 Minneapolis — who were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize
15 — are the first responders, administering to the suffering with the
16 grace and grit we all must be ready to muster soon.

17 In the neighborhoods we visited in south Minneapolis —
18 Powderhorn and Whittier, Corcoran and Central — the care of
19 the community was evident everywhere. And so was the
20 occupation.

21 Nearly every house had a message staked in the yard or
22 taped to the window: ICE OUT OF MPLS, GO HOME, NO SECRET
23 POLICE, SAY THEIR NAMES. Homemade signs marked the locations
24 of kidnappings.

25 There was a pervasive sense of urgency cloaking the
26 community, undamped by the fresh snow that fell the day we
27 arrived and blanketed the memorials.

28 In the face of Trump's undocumented paramilitary force
29 — which roves lawlessly, running red lights in their oversized
30 SUVs, their identities always obscured behind tinted windows
31 and face masks — there was a grave call to protect the city block
32 by block, neighbor by neighbor, to counter the goons not with
33 weapons but with sheer good will.

34 At the site of Renée Good's killing, someone carefully
35 moved through the island of flowers and signs, wiping the fresh
36 snow off of each tribute with his mitten. Someone else shoveled
37 slush away from the curb to open up passage for
38 circumambulating visitors. Someone else tended a fire.

39 And still someone else — a young man of Hispanic
40 descent, not insignificantly — handed out fresh cups of coffee,
41 brewed on a portable gas burner next to the memorial.

42 “The resistance to ICE is driven by neighbors looking out
43 for neighbors more than by affinity groups or any specific left-
44 wing ideological project,” Robin Kaiser-Schatzlein [wrote](#) in *The*
45 *New York Review of Books*. Up against such clear opposition,
46 pulling together reflected the shared conclusion that no one else
47 was coming to protect them. All over, we saw the sign: “WE KEEP
48 US SAFE.”

49 * * *

50 WE GOT THE SENSE from my friend’s brother and sister-in-
51 law — who live not far from George Floyd Square, which is not
52 far from Renée Good’s memorial, which is not far from Alex
53 Pretti’s — that it was all-hands-on deck, all the time. Everyone is
54 doing something in addition to their day jobs to resist the
55 occupation.

56 Meeting up with a couple of my friends in the city
57 required planning around not only their work schedules, but also
58 their food delivery shifts to families sheltering in place, and
59 school watch shifts, in which trained observers survey nearby
60 blocks during drop-off and pick-up, ready to alert school officials
61 if they see a suspected ICE vehicle.

62 Meanwhile, my friend’s partner drives kids from two
63 families to and from school every day so the parents can avoid
64 exposure. Meanwhile, other neighbors are repurposing their local
65 bus stop into a mini clothing donation center — winter coats and
66 snow pants neatly arranged on hangers across the length of the
67 shelter, bins of clothes below, available to any passersby in need.

68 * * *

69 THIRTY THOUSAND Minnesotans have now been trained as
70 constitutional observers. With a 15-to-1 ratio over ICE, these
71 everyday heroes are “actively responding to a case every six
72 minutes across the state of Minnesota,” [Edwin Torres Desantiago](#),

73 who leads trainings for the Immigrant Defense Network, told
74 Minnesota Public Radio.

75 “They are the ones keeping watch,” he [said](#) to *Sahan*
76 *Journal*. “They’re the ones that are making sure our constitution is
77 upheld, and when those rights get violated, we work with legal
78 partners to bring a remedy through the court system.”

79 Some of these observers are on foot, and some are
80 moving about the city in cars, plugged into their hyperlocal
81 Signal chats with a dispatcher directing “commuters” to certain
82 coordinates to check for suspected ICE and to call in car models
83 and license plates.

84 “I can’t believe I have to do this,” [one observer reflected](#)
85 to *Racket*. “I can’t believe I have to respond to an abduction in
86 progress. I can’t believe I have to patrol school pick-up. I can’t
87 believe I had to learn the difference between an Expedition and
88 an Escape. [...] I don’t want to do this! I have to do this!”

89 * * *

90 MY FRIEND’S BROTHER told us ICE has recently attempted
91 to evade detection with vegan bumper stickers and rip-away
92 temporary license plates. Once a vehicle becomes “confirmed
93 ICE” — either by license plate or a visual on its masked, armed
94 agents — then commuters honk their horns, and any pedestrians
95 or observers who happen to be out on the block flock to the
96 vehicle and start blowing their whistles.

97 Everyone has a whistle.

98 Adam Serwer [wrote](#) in *The Atlantic* that perhaps Trump’s
99 menacing delegation expected a walkover.

100 “Instead, what they discovered in the frozen North was
101 something different: a real resistance, broad and organized and
102 overwhelmingly nonviolent, the kind of movement that emerges
103 only under sustained attacks by an oppressive state. Tens of
104 thousands of volunteers — at the very least — are risking their
105 safety to defend their neighbors and their freedom.

106 “If the Minnesota resistance has an overarching ideology,
107 you could call it ‘neighborism’ — a commitment to protecting

108 the people around you, no matter who they are or where they
109 came from.”

110 * * *

111 ON OUR SECOND DAY, we drove through a neighborhood
112 where barricades had been constructed (especially near schools,
113 it seemed) to slow down traffic and give observers the chance to
114 monitor, record, and report ICE vehicles. This, [apparently](#), was a
115 new tactic.

116 The barriers were crude — cobbled together with
117 whatever was on hand: wooden pallets, living room chairs, a
118 grocery cart, an elegantly-drawn homemade sign indicating the
119 new roundabout traffic pattern.

120 More than anything else we’d seen up to that point, these
121 roadblocks caught my breath in a “holy shit” kind of way — in
122 part because rerouting traffic was, I assumed, crossing a line into
123 murky legal territory.

124 But more than that, it was a clear display of people
125 taking matters into their own hands. In this act of piling shit in the
126 street in front of ICE’s path, I intuitively understood, neighbors
127 were also placing their bodies.

128 The gatherings at the blockades had the flavor of turf
129 pride, a high-stakes block party: *This is our block, damn it.* And
130 yet there were volunteer medics on hand and observers posted as
131 guards with scarves wrapped around their heads and faces,
132 evoking what could be recognized instead as participants of a
133 revolution.

134 Charles Homans observed in *The New York Times*
135 *Magazine* that ICE had, for some time, “been actors in a kind of
136 theater of power.” But what became clear to the journalist once
137 he witnessed it all from the ground was that “the agents had no
138 capacity to maintain order or much apparent interest in doing so.
139 Their presence was a vector of chaos, and controlling it was not
140 in their job description.”

141 * * *

142 WHEN WE CAME across the blockades on Monday, they
143 were so new there was not yet police presence on site or law
144 enforcement pressure to dismantle them. There was no higher
145 authority monitoring these encounters.

146 Instead, there was a feeling of lawlessness in these
147 neighborhoods with checkpoints and safe houses — but not on
148 the part of the residents. The law, it seemed, could be broken
149 right in front of us, and no one would be there to hold the federal
150 perpetrators accountable — or, for that matter, to protect us.

151 And this was certainly true when we found ourselves
152 behind an ICE SUV, approaching one of the blockades.

153 The vehicle had just ripped through a red light. Instead of
154 stopping or slowing down at the roundabout, it sped up toward
155 the group of five or eight observers standing amidst their
156 household items.

157 At the ad hoc traffic circle, ICE took a right at high speed,
158 almost hitting an observer. Nearly simultaneously, another
159 observer picked up a metal folding chair and swung it at the car,
160 smashing it over the back window and bumper as ICE fled.

161 Even in the blur of these seconds, I was aware I was
162 witnessing exactly what Homans had described as the “latent
163 combustibility of these encounters.” The flash point would further
164 ignite for us when, moments later, ICE spun around to return to
165 the checkpoint, only to encounter our vehicle behind them,
166 slowing their progress.

167 The ICE agents who approached our car were relatively
168 sedate as they spoke to my friend’s brother behind the wheel,
169 threatening arrest.

170 Sitting through the encounter in the back seat, ICE
171 standing right there through my open window, not unlike Renée
172 Good’s open window, I found myself frozen. At the bifurcating
173 fork of the fight/flight/freeze stress response, I froze — with my
174 hands up.

175 Afterward, I couldn’t be sure if it had been one agent or
176 three, one minute or five, if running the red light had happened

177 before the blockade or after, if the agent outside my open
178 window had in his holster pepper spray or a gun.

179 While sitting there, waiting for the combustion to burn
180 hotter or burn out, I was experiencing a tightening on my
181 freedom of movement — a constitutional right that, as a white
182 woman, I normally take for granted had vanished.

183 And then we were let go, allowed to leave, to drive away
184 from the blockade into the bright sun of the day, toward lunch
185 and a warm home.

186 Would four non-white people have been granted this
187 movement?

188 * * *

189 THE NIGHT BEFORE I left home, I talked to my younger
190 brother on the phone, who is adopted from Peru. Since infancy,
191 he's been a U.S. citizen, growing up in Vermont in our very white
192 family in our very white town.

193 Now, he told me, he's making decisions based on the
194 likelihood of encountering ICE. Contemplating a trip to visit our
195 older brother in Australia this coming spring, he decided not to
196 leave the country for fear of not being let back in. Last weekend,
197 he thought twice before driving to Denver to see a concert.

198 He lives in small Colorado town that hasn't been targeted
199 per se, but is full of immigrant families. Going to work at his
200 landscaping job, he doesn't fear he'll be rounded up with the rest
201 of his crew, many of whom are undocumented — though he
202 acknowledges this possibility and carries a photo of his passport.

203 Instead, he's afraid of his own flammability. If his
204 coworkers were taken in front of him, he doesn't trust he could
205 remain calm. His suspicion of all law enforcement runs deep, he
206 says.

207 And now he's aware that his own volatility, however
208 justified, carries a sharpened risk.

209 In the *Atlantic* article "Welcome to the American
210 Winter," Robert F. Worth [describes](#) talking to someone whose
211 neighbor was hiding their "adopted brown kid" in the basement.

212 “This kind of thing no longer sounds weird in
213 Minneapolis,” Worth noted. “Many people are hiding indoors —
214 so many that, in a city with a substantial minority population, I
215 hardly saw any Black or Latino faces on the street.”

216 This is a time when the constitutional right of freedom of
217 movement is being stripped away on account of skin color, when
218 what is purported to be an immigration crackdown feels more
219 like ethnic cleansing, when people with brown skin are hiding in
220 their homes.

221 And this is a time when white bodies can still move
222 relatively safely about the world.

223 I chose to go to Minneapolis, and I chose to leave, and
224 both of these movements were founded on privilege. As a visitor,
225 I could jet in and jet out of a city-sized zone of risk, like some
226 sort of perverse adrenaline junky.

227 But here in the city, the resident observers and
228 commuters, like Alex Pretti and Renée Good, are choosing every
229 day to put their bodies in ICE’s path.

230 Imagining the lengths I’d go to guard the stretch of road
231 where my daughters attend school — the elementary on one side,
232 the preschool on the other — I could taste the desperation to
233 protect one’s neighborhood, I could shake with righteous
234 indignation. How dare anyone keep these children from learning
235 in peace, from walking home in safety?

236 This indignation could spill over; flash points were likely
237 if not inevitable. But Minnesotans were taking what felt like
238 calculated risk. Prompting the piling of this wood, the blowing of
239 these whistles, the beeping of these horns, was a sense of
240 responsibility to let neighbors know to hide, or businesses to lock
241 their doors, or schools to keep the kids inside until the coast was
242 clear.

243 Within the courage of these bodies to turn toward danger
244 lived a refusal to remain frozen, to remain blind.

245 * * *

246 EVERY DAY, more Minnesotans pour peacefully into the
247 streets for protests and strikes. They're showing up in droves for
248 constitutional observer trainings. By the thousands, they're
249 [singing to ICE](#), inviting them to defect. People who have never
250 protested before have been driven to action by what they deem
251 intolerable. They consider themselves not protesters so much as
252 humanists or protectors.

253 While moving about Minneapolis's neighborhoods, and
254 certainly while attempting to put this experience into writing, I've
255 asked myself about the value of being a 40-hour witness. I'm
256 mindful of the risk of telling someone else's story and not getting
257 it right, making an errant assumption, misrepresenting.

258 And yet I've also been overcome lately by that
259 foreboding feeling that descended just before the pandemic —
260 like what is taking shape is too big and unsparing for any of us to
261 understand. The only certainty is that it's coming. And while it
262 will, in its cruelty, wreak havoc discriminately, it will no doubt
263 touch us all.

264 In visiting Minneapolis, I wasn't quite sure if I was there
265 to pay honor or to bring some of that honor back home with me
266 — to share what these first responders have learned about this
267 federal virus, what they have built on the foundation of the
268 [American Indian Movement](#), on Black Lives Matter, on what the
269 recovery community in Minnesota calls "Mecca" for its vast
270 support system — aka mutual aid — for people overcoming
271 addiction.

272 * * *

273 ON OUR FIRST DAY in the city, we'd had lunch with my
274 friend's 95-year old grandmother. She told us exactly what she'd
275 do if she saw an ICE agent. She'd look him right in the eye and
276 ask him earnestly: "What would your mother say?"

277 She would appeal to his humanity.

278 I never looked the ICE agent who stopped us in the eye.
279 Like the rest of me, my gaze had frozen up. I was only aware of
280 his looming presence, a foot away. No doubt he saw me there in

281 the backseat: a white lady. He took in the outside of me, the
282 external contours of another body, assessed my skin and age, saw
283 me without seeing me.

284 I didn't see him, either.

285 * * *

286 ON OUR SECOND and final night in the city, we walked to
287 the Alex Pretti memorial to attend a gathering organized by [Brass](#)
288 [Solidarity](#) — “part of the soundtrack of resistance” in Minneapolis
289 since George Floyd’s murder, as described by NPR.

290 With a few hundred others, we encircled the site where
291 Pretti sheltered a woman from pepper spray, where he tried to
292 help her up, where he was shot 10 times in the back for his crime
293 of caring.

294 We sang to the steady pulsing of drums and peals of
295 trumpet: *O-o-h child, things are going to get easier, o-o-h child,*
296 *things’ll get brighter. Some day, yeah, we’ll walk in the rays of a*
297 *beautiful sun Some day, when the world is much brighter.*

298 We sang “Stand By Me,” overlaid with “The people
299 united will never be defeated.”

300 In the swell of this music was a fleeting sense that the
301 world we long for was actually right there before us, that we are
302 a part of it already.

303 I would not describe myself as a hopeful person, but
304 surrounded by those vibrations, I was carried by the melody into
305 what felt like hope.

306 But like so much of what I experienced in Minneapolis,
307 there was a distinct contrast between this life force and the
308 people hiding in fear, people grieving a loved one already taken,
309 people imprisoned in detention centers thousands of miles away
310 from their home.

311 If my adopted brother were here visiting with me, would
312 he be out on the streets with us? Perhaps not. And I don't think I
313 would want him to be. If the combustible material of fierce
314 protection were to ignite here on the street, he would certainly be
315 among the first hauled away.

316 * * *

317 SINCE RETURNING HOME, tears have been a frequent
318 visitor. It's hard to decipher if they are for what I just left behind
319 or for what could be coming.

320 And like the honor I paid and the honor I brought back
321 to share, perhaps there is no real difference.

322 On the plane back to Burlington, I looked out my
323 window at the familiar backbone of the Green Mountains. I saw
324 the two peaks and long spine between them, sheltering the
325 valleys below. My partner and girls were tucked into those folds
326 of frozen forest and streams — I could almost pinpoint our house.
327 Beneath us, Lake Champlain appeared, vast and frozen.

328 The wind had pushed the snow into hieroglyphics across
329 the ice — a mesmerizing, indecipherable language beckoning us
330 home, into a future we could not predict but could perhaps
331 prepare for together.

332 * * *

333 *Editor's postscript: Since Liza Cochran wrote this*
334 *account, posted on Feb. 9, the surge of immigration enforcement*
335 *in Minneapolis has receded substantially — perhaps because of*
336 *the community reaction that she saw firsthand.*

337 *But as described in a May 5 [joint report](#) by NPR and the*
338 *Economic Hardship Reporting Project, a journalistic nonprofit,*
339 *“the surge left a mark that enforcement statistics can't capture,*
340 *including a hollowed-out local economy that immigrants and*
341 *their neighbors say they are struggling to rebuild.”*

342 *“Together, [the stories reported from Minneapolis] map*
343 *what the crackdown left behind: shuttered restaurants,*
344 *households rationing groceries, mounting debt, mental health*
345 *woes and, for some, a serious reckoning with whether to leave*
346 *the United States to return to their home countries,” NPR*
347 *Immigration Correspondent Sergio Martínez-Beltrán reported.*

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

348 **LIZA COCHRAN** is a writer and educator whose work
349 has appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *The Gettysburg*
350 *Review*, *Colorado Review*, and elsewhere. She and her mother,
351 Lorni Cochran, of Guilford, write [Brave Little Voices](#), a Substack
352 site that advocates for a more just world as it celebrates Calvin
353 Coolidge's famous remark about Vermont: "If the spirit of liberty
354 should vanish in other parts of the union and support of our
355 institutions should languish, it could all be replenished from the
356 generous store held by the people of this brave little state of
357 Vermont."

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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VIDEO:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

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