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This small block in South Minneapolis means more to our family than we can express. We have been here since 1986—yes, we hit 40 years this May—which feels surreal to even write. We are a second-generation family-owned business that has always put our employees and customers first. That will never change. Since Wednesday, January 7th, I've had hundreds of conversations with employees, customers, vendors, and family members of employees. I've been overwhelmed by the generosity, **love**, concern, and sincere desire from everyone to help—however they can—supporting our team, our families, and our community. That spirit is what I **love** most about this neighborhood: we show up. **Always.**

**WE LOVE** Minneapolis.

**WE LOVE** Nokomis.

**WE LOVE** Cedar Ave.

**WE LOVE** Minnehaha Creek.

Honestly, the list could go on forever.

To our team – thank you isn't enough. Thank you for stepping up, for caring, and for carrying us forward.  
To our customers – we share your fears, your anxiety, your anger, and your sadness. We are right there with you. We will continue doing our very best to provide the service you expect from Carbone's. Please be patient if we miss a step or two; there are many moving parts in **this new normal. Together**, we will be stronger.

All our **love.**

**WE LOVE  
WE LOVE  
WE LOVE  
WE LOVE**

**A series of found poems  
for Minneapolis and St. Paul**

sara lynne puotinen

**a note about the cover:** The cover is made out of a Facebook post from Carbone's Pizzeria on Cedar Avenue in South Minneapolis. Thank you to Scott Anderson ([room34.com](http://room34.com)) for taking my idea of turning the text into the distinctive shape of Minnesota and making it real.

**a note about the author:** Sara Lynne Puotinen is a poet who lives near the Mississippi River Gorge in South Minneapolis and believes that love always wins. You can reach her at: [sara@room34.com](mailto:sara@room34.com) (email), [sarapuotinen.com](http://sarapuotinen.com) (site), and @slpuotinen (Instagram).

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## **Introduction: Love, Minnesota-style**

It is 2026 and Minnesota is occupied by ICE. It is terrible. It is terrifying. And, it is full of hope and love as Minnesotans care for one another. So many beautiful, complex, and rich expressions and practices of love that are hard and fierce, generous and soft.

In this Valentine's Day month, I am celebrating one particular practice of that love: the public declarations on Facebook and Instagram by local businesses in Minneapolis and St. Paul of their support of and participation in the Day of Truth and Freedom on January 23rd, 2026. The idea behind this day, organized by Ice Out MN, was "no work, no school, no shop," and encouraged Minnesotans to take a pause from economic activity.

Even before this call to pause, I had been noticing restaurants and tap rooms and bookstores posting messages online condemning ICE and expressing support for their workers, their neighbors, and all of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Their words helped me. The acknowledgment, publicly, that something terrible was happening here and that we needed to speak out against it, and the declaration, publicly, of love – we love our immigrant neighbors! we love our workers! we love you Minneapolis! – made me feel less alone. And it created a crack in my cynical belief that too few people cared, and that democracy had always been too flawed in the United States.

So when the posts of solidarity for January 23rd began, I felt moved to do something with the words. I started collecting statements by different businesses each day, printing them out, and then reading each of them closely. What a balm to surround myself with these words! I found different expressions of love and then turned them into cento and erasure love poems.

### **Not Just Empty Words**

More than a gesture, the words expressed by restaurants, coffee shops, bakeries, tap rooms, butchers, beauty/skincare salons, and stores (bookstores, toy stores, knitting/yarn stores, bike repair stores, record stores) were done so in tandem with other acts of care: donations; food drives and delivery services for families afraid to leave their homes; structured plans for the protection of workers and neighbors; the offering of space for gathering, for grieving, for making posters for the downtown Minneapolis march, for emergency medical support.

The words themselves were more than simple announcements of closure on January 23rd. Business owners shared origin stories and memories of workers and customers

and their communities. They described how difficult financially it was to make the decision to close on the busiest night of the week and how they were committed to doing it anyway. They confessed grief, fear, frustration, and anger. They expressed their strong commitment to protecting the rights of everyone, especially those most vulnerable. And, they offered strong condemnations of ICE and equally strong declarations of love for Minneapolis and St. Paul.

As I read more of these posts, I was reminded that words do more than describe something, they do something. What the words written by hundreds of local businesses across the cities and Minnesota have done is imagined a world in which our rights matter, our neighbors matter, love matters and then making that world more real with every declaration of care, of support, of protection, of love.

The following poems are a series of Valentines to Minneapolis and St. Paul, to the local businesses who have helped develop and support loving communities here, and to the power of words, when offered with care and love, to matter deeply, and to begin making real the world we need.

# Love #1

## Love is Not Business as Usual

Love is not  
business  
as usual.

Love is not  
a business.

Love is  
a warm place  
to land.

Generous  
open  
big enough  
to hold  
all who sit  
who stand  
who show up  
for each other  
even in fear  
and grief.

Love is a  
space where  
our hearts our  
mouths our  
feet our hands  
our eyes  
activate  
love making  
love living  
love resisting.

In this heavy moment,  
we want to be  
clear: we  
no longer accept hate.  
And with these words,  
we affirm  
what we know  
always to be true:

We love,  
We love,  
We love,  
We love.

## **Love #2**

### **After Consulting with our Team, We Are Choosing Love**

This is a call to everyone.  
This is a call to anyone.

In Minneapolis, our hearts are open.  
In St. Paul, our hearts beat strong.  
In Minnesota, we are choosing to take the day  
and fill it with love.

And we will find each other.  
We will gather, we will  
keep moving, we will  
raise our voices to acknowledge  
now is not okay.  
ICE's ongoing occupation is fascism.

Of course we are afraid,  
We are angry,  
We are exhausted.  
And we are here  
for one another.

This is not about choosing sides,  
this is about choosing love.

## **Love #3**

### **This is How We Love**

We are called upon  
to find the fire inside us –

the fire of compassion, of care, of hope,  
of anger and outrage and grief –

and to take that small light,  
make it bigger, and  
spread its warmth to others.

## **Love #4**

### **I Hope You Know**

It's not too late  
to do the right thing.

It's late, and I've been going back and forth all week about whether to post this and whether closing tomorrow is **the right thing** to do. With that being said, I have come to the decision that tomorrow, January 23rd, we will be closed in solidarity with our immigrant community and in support of our staff and neighbors. I **don't** usually talk about myself much, but this feels important to say. I was adopted from Korea when I was five years old. I'm a naturalized U.S. citizen. Minnesota has been my home for most of my life. I built my family here, and I built this business here. **Lately**, I've been feeling something I never thought I would - less than. Like I need to prove I belong. I feel afraid to leave my house without carrying my passport. That feeling is hard to explain if you haven't lived it, but for me, it's real, and it's heavy. No one who calls this place home should have to live with that kind of fear. This decision hasn't been easy. Running a small business means weighing everything—your values, your responsibilities, your employees, your bills—all at the same time. Closing for a day affects more than just me. It affects our staff, who lose a day of pay, and that really matters to me. It affects a business that already operates on tight margins in a tough time. But this isn't just about business. It's about people. Our team has been incredibly supportive, and I'm grateful for them more than I can say. If you're able, the best way to support us is to come see us when we reopen. Thank you for reading, for listening, and for continuing **to support** our little restaurant. It truly means more than I can put into words. As a business, **it's not** "recommended" to get "political." And to that I say, what's happening in Minnesota, and beyond, goes far beyond politics. We love our immigrants; our friends, neighbors, community members. And we certainly do not agree with what is happening to our beloved friends. You make us great. We love you. Period. We hold space for every iteration of what this day looks like for you. **I hope you all know** that many of my small business friends put lots of time, tears, and thoughtful consideration into making the best choice for them, their business, and their community. For many of us, silence is no longer an option. We hope that this day brings reflection, safety, peace, belonging, and warmth. We will see you Saturday. Love to you. If you'd like to support our bakery and staff, please continue to show up for us—and feel free to drop a little extra in the tip jar. If you'd like to help us support our broader community, we have a plan for that **too**. Beginning Saturday, we will serve as a drop-off point for essential supplies.



## **Love #5**

### **It is important to say this**

People in the margins matter more  
than our comfort.

Love is meant for  
everyone.

Silence is no longer  
an option.

Children should not be terrified  
to go to school, or leave their homes.  
No one should.

## **Love #6**

### **How to Be a Better Human**

Hold space for pain, anger, confusion.

Make hope happen for others.

Open the door for love, close it in hate's face.

Wear boots, a lot of wool scarves and mittens, bring extras to share.

Believe in small acts; they matter.

Demand the exit of ICE from our beautiful cities.

## **Love #7**

### **At the Heart of Everything**

Every body is worthy,  
every neighbor is important,  
every government that does harm  
should be stopped.

## **Love #8**

### **The Only Ice Worth Keeping In Minnesota is Ice Cream**

On this chilly day,  
we will be the sun  
for all who need it.

We will believe in summer  
on our streets,  
in our homes,  
through our voices.

And when the brutal cold of this crisis  
makes it difficult to imagine  
feeling warm again,  
we will serve ice cream  
and act as if it's May.

## **Love #9**

### **After**

We are still here.

We are still loving our neighbors,  
still supporting our community,  
still caring about the constitution.

We are staying warm,  
staying strong,  
staying impossible to ignore.

## **Love #10**

### **We Continue Delivering Love**

Our message to all:  
Violence & Intimidation  
have no place here.  
100% of this space  
is reserved  
for hope,  
for care,  
for solidarity,  
and for love.

## **Love #11**

### **For the soldiers in our streets**

And for a government that won't protect us—  
We will shape the future  
by our hearts.

Join us as we find  
what it means to be part of  
the people.

## **Love #12**

### **That is the American way!**

Everyone  
has  
the Constitution  
civil rights  
the decision of the majority  
protest  
and justice under the law for all.  
That is the American way!



Dear Guests and Staff,

Minneapolis and the state of Minnesota have had a very challenging month. **Everyone** within our communities **has** been affected by **the** actions of our federal government these past few weeks. Their original promise, purpose and intent was to ensure safety and to administrate with decent behavior and professionalism. However, it has evolved into a climate and behavior that is unfair according to the principles of our **Constitution and individual civil rights**

Day and night, our owners and staff have been assembling aid in many forms for our immigrant community. During these unprecedented times, we have kept our restaurants open to continue serving our guests and to ensure our workers can remain employed. Any past, current, or future closure of our restaurants in support of a **protest** **was and will be the decision of the majority** of the team at each location.

The generosity and care our staff has shown for each other is unselfish and truly inspiring. Many have sacrificed their money, time and efforts in the interest of helping other human beings without asking for anything in return.

**That is the American way!**

We are seeing neighbors and communities come together all around us, **and** we hope this can be a time for all Americans to unite behind our collective shared values: life, liberty, and happiness.

We believe in civil rights for all and equal **justice under the law**. Our immigrant-friends and neighbors are one of the many things that make our country great.

In the name of **peace, calm and law and order for all**

Nova Restaurant Group

## Love #13

### My Heart Breaks

*I tell you this  
to break your heart,  
by which I mean only  
that it break open and never close again  
to the rest of the world.*

*—Mary Oliver*

Today is the day we break  
open and stay  
open to everything.

## **Love #14**

### **Cold City Compassion**

We are a winter people.  
In the bone-deep Minnesota cold  
we will gather together  
and keep each other warm.

## **Love #15**

### **This New Normal**

We are with you.

We love you.

love

Always.

WE LOVE

WE LOVE

WE LOVE

WE LOVE

this new normal together,

love

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All our **love**

## Notes

1. The love poems in this collection are found poems. Most of them are centos. "From the Latin word for 'patchwork garment,' a cento is a literary work collaged entirely from other authors' verses or passages" (Poetry Foundation / <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/education/glossary/cento>). A few of them, including the cover, are erasure poems, "a poetic form in which a poet blacks out or in some way erases words from a preexisting source to create new poems" (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/education/glossary/erasure-poetry>).

2. The words and phrases used are taken from Facebook and Instagram and the home page of one local restaurant group. Some of these were encountered in my daily scrolling, but most were found through a list on Bring Me the News of businesses participating in the Day of Truth and Freedom (<https://bringmethenews.com/minnesota-lifestyle/growing-number-of-minnesota-businesses-announce-plans-to-close-for-jan-23-strike>).

3. My method: Select several announcements a day. Copy and paste them together in a document. Print the document out. Sit and stare at the words, then jot down, with a jumbo Ticonderoga no. 2 pencil, words and phrases that offered some form of love on a scrap piece of paper. Put those words and phrases together in new ways to create a poem. Often, but not always, share the poem on Facebook or Instagram.

4. Statements from the following local businesses were used to create these poems: Lynette, Hai Hai, Dogwood Coffee, Fireroast Coffee, Arbeiter Brewing, Venn Brewing, Mother Earth Gardens, Bull's Horn, Black Coffee and Waffle Bar, Wrecktangle Pizza, Carbone's Pizzeria, Longfellow Grill, Merlins Rest Pub, Twin Cities in Motion, Fireside Restaurant, Sticks and Stones, Minnesota Made, The Foundry Home Goods, Guthrie Theater, Eclipse Music, Edelweis Bakery, Black Stack Brewery, Rhino Wine Bar, Herbivorous Butcher, Buttered Tin, Canteen 3255, Center for Lost Objects, Curiosity, Drop Dead Gorgeous, Face, Family Tree Clinic, The Finnish Bistro, George and the Dragon's Pub, Headflyer Brewing, Henry and Sons, Lodge of Lazarus Crowe, Rise Bagel, The Sample Room, Sebastian Joes, Small Hours, Parkway Pizza, Norseman Distillery, Olio Vintage, Red Balloon Bookstore, Reverie Cafe + Bar, Postmodern Times, Nova Restaurant Group.

5. The epigraph in Love #13 comes from Mary Oliver and her poem "Lead" from *New and Selected Poems Volume Two*.

## **A Few Ways to Give Love**

If you would like to give some love back to local businesses in Minneapolis and St. Paul, here is one way: Support the businesses on Eat Street, like Glam Doll Donuts, located across the street from where Alex Pretti was murdered by Border Patrol Agents, or the Copper Hen, who provided an eye-wash station for those who had been tear-gassed by ICE and CBP. For more information, including a long list of wonderful restaurants and shops and specific ways to help this area, see Show Up for Eat Street (<https://showupforeatstreet.com/>).

If you found these love poems helpful in any way and would like to give me (Sara) some love, please share them widely. You can also support one of my favorite Minneapolis businesses:

Lynette: a neighborhood restaurant (<https://lynettemn.com/>)  
Arbeiter Brewing ([arbeiterbrewing.com](http://arbeiterbrewing.com))  
Moon Palace Books ([moonpalacebooks.com](http://moonpalacebooks.com))