

À Cause de La Guerre

Category: Silver Linings

written by Pamela Adelstein | March 1, 2021

It was the winter of 1991. We were a group of 25 or so Dartmouth College students on a language study abroad (LSA) program in Lyon, France. A few days after our arrival, the United States led a multinational coalition in an intensive bombing campaign against Iraq. This made Americans quite unpopular in Lyon.

When we'd enrolled in the LSA, we'd envisioned train-hopping through Europe during our free time, *notre temps libre*. We'd imagined bonding together over cheap French wine, chocolate croissants, and buttery baguettes. Instead, we had the war. *La guerre*.

Our activities were curtailed "because of the war"—à *cause de la guerre*. We pledged to our professors to speak only French, so as not to stand out as Americans, à *cause de la guerre*. Our vacation week was cancelled—and my Eurail pass sadly refunded—à *cause de la guerre*. We were instructed to avoid congregating in large, loud groups that made us look too American à *cause de la guerre*. The phrase "à *cause de la guerre*" rolled off our tongues as if it were one word. It punctuated all of our sentences, as does another phrase that we now utter countless times a day—"because of COVID."

Because of COVID, we cannot hug people outside of our pods. Because of COVID, homeschooling and job changes have thrown families into chaos. Because of COVID, those of us who staff community health centers have been working harder than ever. Because of COVID, people feel more depressed or anxious, and eat or drink too much to numb loneliness.

We all are too familiar with these negative "because of COVID" effects. So to pull myself out of despair, I consider the silver linings. Because of COVID, we now provide medical care via telemedicine; patients feel comfortable with phone behavioral health and nutrition visits, and the use of these services has skyrocketed. Because of COVID, the medical directors at my health center came together to plan new workflows, forging deep trust and friendships. Because of COVID, health care flexed rapidly in previously unfathomable ways, setting the stage for potential long-lasting reforms. And because of COVID, as we have brought to light the plight of those less advantaged in our society and have more forthrightly conveyed the profound ramifications of systemic racism, some of us have found new expression for our voices.

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