

State of Society, 2020

Earlier this week, in the storm that blew through, I was standing at the window and watching the trees sway in the wind. The wind was really, really strong but the trees held on. In the past year, I've had so many moments like that. I've had to realize who I am, and who my friends are. I've had to help people who are in really hard places. I've had to deal with some crazy technological disasters. I've had to survive seeing my friends only three times in the past five months. But I've grown to be like those trees. I've swayed really far, but I've never broken because of the connections I have here, with my family, and with my friends. - JH'er

This really describes our community this year. We've had to be flexible, and grow. We've shared so many of these challenges as a community.

We have been challenged by all the changes that have arisen. We have not been able to give each other hugs or blow bubbles together. We haven't been able to eat meals or clean dishes together. *We have found strength* in our community and have realized how lucky we are to have it. So many of us have kept hanging on, even though we don't know what will come. We have learned that our commitment has kept this community going and helped us all adapt in all the ways that we've needed to.

We have learned to be flexible in how we connect with each other. We don't get to hug each other, but we can send packages and letters, have phone calls and Zoom calls. We can't do Sunday morning chores together, but we can find silliness and laugh at staffers giving us all chores to do at home. *We have grown in our ability* to stay connected, no matter how we have to do so. We have learned that retreats via Zoom and UPS can work when they have to. And we've learned that they don't just have to work, but that they can be good, too.

We have found our roots in inclusivity, laughter, silliness, and gratefulness. Through a ministry of bubbles, games, music and so much more, we've grown closer in a lot of ways.

We have stretched our capacity to accept mistakes and imperfections. We have been learning that it is okay to be messy, and bold, and bright, and that mistakes aren't things to get stuck on but instead things that we can use to grow.

We have opened our community in ways we've never before been able. Some JHers or JH staff live in places that inhibit their ability to come to retreats, but virtual retreats have allowed them to join us again.

Roots are where nutrients come from, where you get food and water. They also keep you firmly in the soil. Roots are what keep you alive and yourself. We have found our roots in our community in JH.

When the water rises, you have to grow mangrove roots. You stay basically the same, but you have some different roots, more of them, sometimes stronger ones, and together with the other trees' (people's) in a forest that can be identified firmly as a forest. We grew our mangrove roots this year through the high water of virtual meetings during a pandemic, and they will stay with us individually and collectively.

Junior High Yearly Meeting, NEYM
August 9, 2020