

Connected in Quarantine, By Anja Prien, 19 years old

I've never considered myself to be exactly Jewish. I've always been a Jew, -ish. I never had a Bat Mitzvah, I rarely went to synagogue, and my only Jewish experience is the summer camps that I attended and worked at as a kid.

Joining Hillel at Towson was one of the best decisions I've ever made. Before we were sent home, I got to help plan Hillel's Pesach celebration. I knew next to nothing about the holiday, but I felt that it was important for me to learn. I was welcomed into the community with open arms. After we were sent home, I was able to continue working with the group and we celebrated Pesach virtually, with different events for each day.

The first few weeks of being quarantined were manageable. I FaceTimed my friends, caught up with former teachers, and found ways to keep myself active and entertained. I thought that we would reopen soon. After the third week, things changed, and I felt myself go into a downward spiral.

Just about everyone in my family suffers from some form of mental illness. Being stuck at home exacerbated all of that. We were all arguing with each other, and my sister and I considered moving into my father's empty house for a while to get some space from my mom. It was really hard. There was one night in April when I realized that my sister was going through a really hard time. I couldn't leave her room, because I was so afraid of what would happen when I left. It was just the two of us, sitting on her bed, crying because I didn't know how to fix her problem. I slept on the floor outside her room that night.

I was able to connect with Mikey and with the rest of the Hillel community. They gave me a place to focus on myself. At home, I had to put my own feelings on the back burner so that I could make sure that my sister was safe. In Hillel, I could have a little bit of respite from my family and be a part of my own separate community.

I still am going through a pretty challenging time. I feel really lonely, even as things reopen. Putting myself back into the Jewish community this fall will help me get myself back on track to succeeding. I can't really imagine my life without Hillel at this point, and it's crazy to me that I feel that way less than a year since joining the community.