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Understanding with your Heart

When I was six years old, I lived in Sienna, in Italy. There, I met Sarfet, a 16-year-old boy from the former Yugoslavia. During the ethnic war in his country, he had stepped on a landmine, and a piece metal had pierced his head, from his right temple to below his left eye. While still unconscious, Sarfet was taken to a national hospital in Italy. Although he had been able to escape death, he lost both his eyesight and sense of smell due to this accident.

Because the civil war grew more violent day by day, and his hometown, Mostar, had turned into one of the greatest war sites, Sarfet could not go home, so he entered a school for the blind in Sienna. Once a week, I went with my mom to help him out, and we also studied Italian together. After a few years, when the war had ended, Sarfet returned home. I came back to Japan, but because I couldn't stop worrying about Sarfet, I asked him on the phone once if he needed a seeing-eye dog to help him in his daily life. Sarfet burst out laughing and refused my offer. He said: "In my country, even the smallest child reaches out a hand to help people like me. If I were to have a seeing-eye dog, people wouldn't be laughing at me but at the fact that I was being pulled by a dog!"

In Japan, signals often tell people what to do, and people don't easily lend a helpful hand to others. I think this is unnatural. In schools too, children are bullied, and some of them end up committing suicide. Why don't we help a child who is being bullied in front of our eyes and stop the suffering? I think that encouraging friends, talking to them to check if everything is all right, and sympathizing with others is in a way the same as offering help to a blind person. Sarfet told me that, although the people in his country had lost almost everything due to the war, they are still very warm-hearted people. This is perhaps what's lacking most in the economically affluent society of Japan. From now on, I want to be helpful to my friends and all the people around me at school.

I said to Sarfet on the phone: "Wouldn't it be nice if we could meet again?" He replied: "We live under the same sky. Isn't that enough?" I love these words, and feel so happy we all live on the same earth.