

2021 International Essay Contest for Young People
[Youth Category – 2nd Prize]

What Sustains Life

(Original in Japanese)

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Over the past year, my family adopted two dogs as pets. They do not live in the wild—rather, they live like us human beings, as members of our family. They get fed, they play together, they get their teeth brushed, and they have their waste cleaned up after them. Without us or their companions, they wouldn't be able to live.

We human beings are the same, both children and adults alike. You might say that's not true, that human beings can do anything all on their own. But is that really the case? In Japanese, we have terms like *ippikiôkami* (lone wolf) and *hitoribotchi* (loner), which are used to express someone who likes to be on their own. But even those people have family waiting for them at home. Or, if they don't, they have people who care about them, like the people who welcome them when they go to eat at a restaurant.

A 'life' is something to be cared for, and the more caring thoughts that life continues to receive, the longer it can be sustained. In my life, there is someone who is doing his best to live as he receives our caring thoughts. That person is my grandfather.

Twice it looked like my grandfather did not have long to live. On both occasions, my grandmother, my mother, and my mother's siblings were called to be with him. Due to the ongoing coronavirus situation, my sister and I weren't able to visit him at the hospital, but we could still send him our thoughts. As I continued to think about him, I felt sure that he would go on living.

My conviction was right. After that, my grandfather's condition quickly improved, and he recovered to the point where he was able to walk on his own. Even now, I continue sending him loving thoughts, in the hope that he will remain in good health.

On the other hand, there are people whom I want to let know that I'm thinking about them, but my thoughts don't reach them. For example, people protesting the tax reforms in Colombia, and people affected by the bombings in Palestine. They are desperately trying to survive, and they need sympathy and support from others. It's difficult to talk to them directly or send them letters, so I signed online petitions and made donations, hoping they would make a difference for those people. I wanted them to know that a lot of people are concerned for them.

Showing concern for others in this way is not one-sided. My grandfather is always praising me, and whenever we see each other, he looks so happy. He thinks about me, too. I also received a thank-you email from the organization I donated to, letting me know how my donation was used. And the online petition I signed made good progress, and I received a message saying "thank you for your support." The people on the other side have never seen my face and know nothing about me, but they showed thoughtfulness in the form of gratitude. I never expected to feel so happy being thanked by people I don't know. The thoughtfulness I showed to them also came back to me.

Caring thoughts can be shared between individuals, or between an individual and an organization. Sometimes, we can even receive kind thoughts from someone we've never actually met. Regardless of whether someone is a family member or friend, or even if we have never met them, we can receive their kindness and compassion.

However, all living things will eventually come to the end of their life. When we die, does our life cease to exist? Are the lives of those we care about bound to disappear? I don't think so. Even when someone is no longer living, we can go on thinking about them, and in that way, their 'life' continues to exist. When we continue thinking about

someone even after they have passed away, their memory doesn't fade, and we become a living witness to their life.

If we keep it in our mind that life is about caring for each other, and that continuing to think about someone lessens the grief we feel when they are gone, we will become more thoughtful towards the people around us in our daily lives, and we will create a society that is overflowing with kindness and compassion. Sustaining life with caring and kindness is the first step to a peaceful world.