

My Hero is You

Supporting each other
when wars come



The making of “My Hero is You: Supporting each other when wars come (field-test version)”

This storybook is an adaptation of the IASC My Hero is You series.

UNICEF and WHO joined forces to develop this book to support the mental health and well-being of children who are affected by armed conflict, as well as their parents and caregivers.

Living in an unsafe area or setting that is affected by armed conflict may cause feelings such as fear, sadness, anger, and hopelessness. We asked children and their caregivers how they try to manage these feelings and support their well-being during times of war. We also asked them to share their hopes and dreams for the future.

Surveys in different languages were distributed around the world. A framework of topics to be addressed through the story was developed using the survey results. We then shared an early version of the story with children in several countries. They told us what they liked, what they did not like and then how to make the story better.

Nearly 1500 children, parents, and caregivers shared their ideas and offered us feedback on the story. We listened to their feedback and wove their voices and ideas into the book, enriching the text and the illustrations. Our warmest gratitude to these children and their parents and caregivers for generously sharing their thoughts and being part of this story. Ario, Ario’s friends and our global team are grateful.

We thank the IASC MHPSS RG Child and Family Group for providing valuable feedback to the draft version in addition to parents, caregivers, and children from all over the world.

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Introduction

“My Hero is You: Supporting each other when wars come (field-test version)” is a book written for all children in the world affected by armed conflict.

This book should be read by an adult to a child or a small group of children. It is not recommended that children read this book independently without the support of a parent, caregiver or adult.

We recommend that adults take their time while reading this story to children. If children get tired or need a break, we encourage you to follow their lead and come back to the book when they are ready.

You can keep returning to this book as many times as needed. The story offers strategies for coping with big feelings, such as fear, sadness, anger, and hopelessness. To keep children engaged in the story, you might encourage them to try these techniques, simply by asking: Do you want to try breathing slowly like Ario?

Contact us!

This book is a field-test version and we are keen to hear from you how you find the story. If you would like to share your thoughts on the story, or would like to share your drawing of your Ario, please send an email to: myheroisyou.story@gmail.com.

Adapting the story: translating and contextualizing

You are welcome to adapt the story based on the needs of your context. The team would love to hear about your plans, you can always contact us at myheroisyou.story@gmail.com. Contacting the team of this book is not mandatory however please always comply with the IASC creative commons license as outlined below.

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To read other books in the My Hero is You series, or to view all completed translations and formats of “My Hero is You: Supporting each other when wars come”, please visit: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/adaptations-my-hero-you-country-level-initiatives>

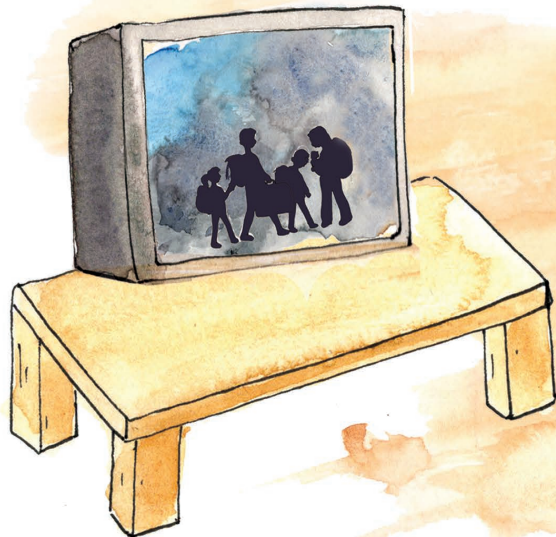
Thank you to Spotify, USAID BHA and NORAD for supporting the adaptation and production of this storybook.

Sara was feeling sad and worried. On television, she saw images of a big fight happening somewhere far away. She saw that people were hurting, and children were without homes and food. She wished she could help them.

Sara asked her mum when it was all going to be okay and children would feel safe and happy again.

"Sometimes we don't know when it will be okay, Sara," said Sara's mum. "But we have to hope it will be soon. There are many people working to stop the fighting and to help the children and their families."

Sara's mum gave her a hug, but Sara still felt sad. The bad news from the world seemed to reach all the way into her heart. She put her hand on her heart and looked out of the window. Suddenly, she saw a familiar shape in the sky...



"Ario!" she cried, as he squeezed through the window.

Sara jumped up from her sofa and hugged her friend. Her hug was so big that Ario fell onto his enormous bottom. In Ario's arms, feeling his soft fur, Sara always felt safe.

"How do you always know when I need you?" she asked.

"I come from your heart, Sara," he said. "I will always be here for you."

Sara held her hand against her heart. She could feel it beating. It made her feel better to know Ario came from there.

"I wish children did not have to live with war," she said. "I want to help them, but I don't know how."

"I understand," said Ario. "When children were worried because of COVID-19, we flew around the world to help them. But this time, we can use a different kind of magic. The magic that lives in every child's heart."

"How?" asked Sara.

"Well, I come from your heart," said Ario. "And other Arios come from other children's hearts."

"There's more of you?" Sara asked.



Ario smiled at this, and brought out a big, dusty book. They began to read it together, on the sofa.

Inside the book were pictures of children across the world, sitting with their Arios. Like Sara's Ario, they looked kind and caring. Some had wings, some had legs, some had fins – and some had tentacles! Some wore glasses, some wore bowties, some wore headscarves – and some wore boots!

"Would you like to meet the children and their Arios and see how we can help?" said Ario.

"But how can we reach them if they live in a place with war?" asked Sara.

Ario placed his hands on his heart and closed his eyes. He took one long, deep breath in, then let the breath out slowly.

"Like this," he said. "Hold your hand against your heart, close your eyes, and breathe in: 1, 2, 3..."

So Sara closed her eyes, breathed slowly, and counted: 1, 2, 3. As she did, her mind travelled to a new place...



Sara saw a little cat, crouching behind a dustbin. She recognised him immediately. It was her friend, Tiger, from earlier adventures!

Tiger looked scared. There were loud noises near his home, and he didn't know how to help the boy he lived with feel safe. His eyes were closed and his whiskers were wrinkled. His friend, Zoozie the starling, tried to comfort him.

"Look, Tiger, your Ario is here to help you!" she said.

Tiger opened one eye and saw a small frog wearing a tiny pair of glasses sitting right next to him.

"I don't know how to protect my family anymore," Tiger told his Ario.

"I think I know someone who can help you feel strong again," said his Ario. "Would you like to take a journey with me, to meet them?"

"Can my friend, Zoozie, come too?" asked Tiger.

When Sara opened her eyes, she saw her Ario, and smiled.

"So Tiger is coming to meet us?" she said, with a small laugh.

"Yes," said Ario. "And Zoozie too."

"Who else?" asked Sara.

"Hold your hand against your heart, close your eyes, and breathe in: 1, 2, 3..." said Ario.



So Sara closed her eyes, breathed slowly and counted: 1, 2, 3. As she did, her mind travelled to a new place. She saw a little boy, asleep in a tent full of people. Sara recognised him immediately. It was her friend, Salem!

But Salem was not at home. He was in a camp with his family and other friends who had to flee from the war. They were safe but they missed their homes. He held his small teddy bear close to him. Salem's Ario was a big, friendly elephant. When she flopped down next to him, he woke up.

"Oh, I'm so happy you are here," Salem told his Ario, as she cuddled him. "I know we are safer here in the camp, but I don't feel safe inside."

"I understand," said his Ario. "I know some friends who can help. Would you like to meet them?"

"But how can we meet them?" asked Salem. "I've already travelled far by leaving my home."

"This is a journey you can take from your bed," said his Ario. "We're going to travel into our hearts and imagination. I can show you how."



Salem agreed, and back in Sara's house, Ario told her there was someone else to find.

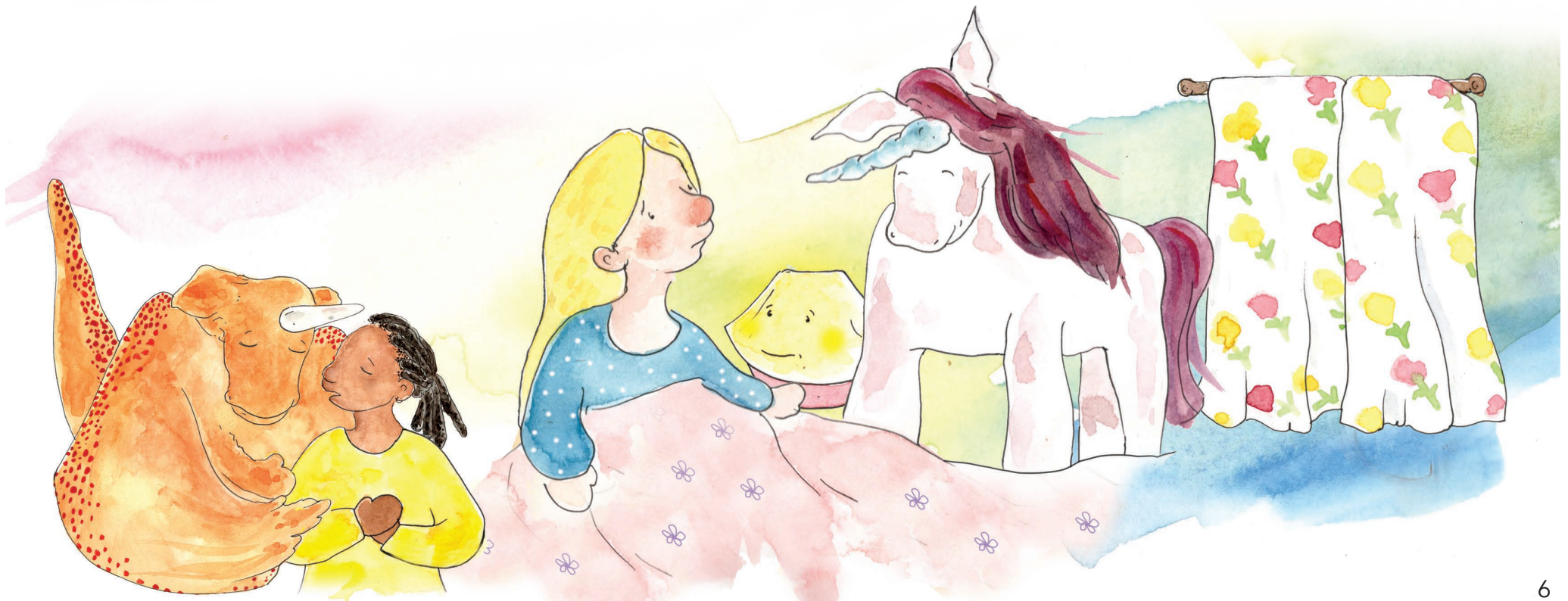
"Hold your hand against your heart, close your eyes, and breathe in: 1, 2, 3..." said her Ario.

Sara then saw a little girl she had never met before. Her Ario was a beautiful unicorn, and they sat together, in peaceful quiet. The girl's cheeks were wet with tears, as she missed someone she cared about very much.

"I want to stop feeling sad," she told her Ario. "I miss my grandmother."

"We can all feel that way sometimes, Anna, especially when we lose someone we love," said her Ario. "But our hearts are so big, they can hold many different kinds of feelings. Even when we feel sad, with our friends we can feel happy feelings too. Would you like to take a journey with me to meet some special friends?"

Anna said yes, although she did not believe anyone could stop her heart from hurting.



The last person Sara saw, when she closed her eyes and breathed in 1, 2, 3, was a boy sitting beside a broken tree.

Once upon a time, there had been a forest behind his village, but now the land was burnt. Only small tree stumps remained. His Ario was a small squirrel, and she came to give him a small hug.

"Where has your smile gone, Lee?" his Ario asked him.

"It's gone, like our trees," said Lee. "I don't know if they will ever grow back."

"I think I know some friends who can help you feel hope for the future," said his Ario. "Would you like to take a journey with me, to meet them?"

"I don't think it's possible to feel hope anymore," said Lee. "But I will go with you, because you are my friend."



Back in her house, Sara opened her eyes again. Ario smiled at her.

"Are you ready to meet these children and their Arios," he asked, "so we can help each other feel stronger, less afraid, less sad, and more hopeful for the future?"

"Yes, let's fly!" said Sara.

Without delay, Ario lowered himself onto the floor so Sara could climb aboard. Then, with a whoosh, they launched into the night sky.

"Where exactly are we going?" Sara asked.

"To a beautiful and safe place," said Ario.

Sara counted a million stars, and many moons, before they began to descend into a small forest...



The sound of birds filled their ears and the moon sent warm rays of light through the trees. When they landed, with a soft flump, a small rabbit bounded up to them.

The rabbit led Ario and Sara into a small clearing, where they found everyone. The children were sitting with their Arios, cosy around a small campfire.

When the other Arios saw Sara's Ario, they immediately jumped up and ran to him. With laughter and happy tears, they hugged their old friend. Once more, he fell to the ground, onto his enormous bottom.

After Ario had hugged his friends, he introduced Sara to all the children and Arios gathered around.

Sara greeted everyone with a smile and wave, and ran to hug her old friends, Tiger and Salem.

When she saw Salem was in a wheelchair, she wanted to ask him what had happened. But she didn't want him to feel different, so she peeled a sticker off her jumper instead.

"I like your new wheels," she said, offering him the sticker.

"Thanks Sara," said Salem, smiling at her. "This will look great on my wheelchair."

When she reached down to hug him, Tiger jumped on her shoulder and began to purr. It felt good to be with friends again.



Sara looked around at the trees, the stars and the fireflies in the forest.

"Ario, this looks just like my safe place," she said.

"This is your safe place, Sara," said Ario. "I thought this would be a great place to meet everyone."

"What is a safe place?" asked Anna.

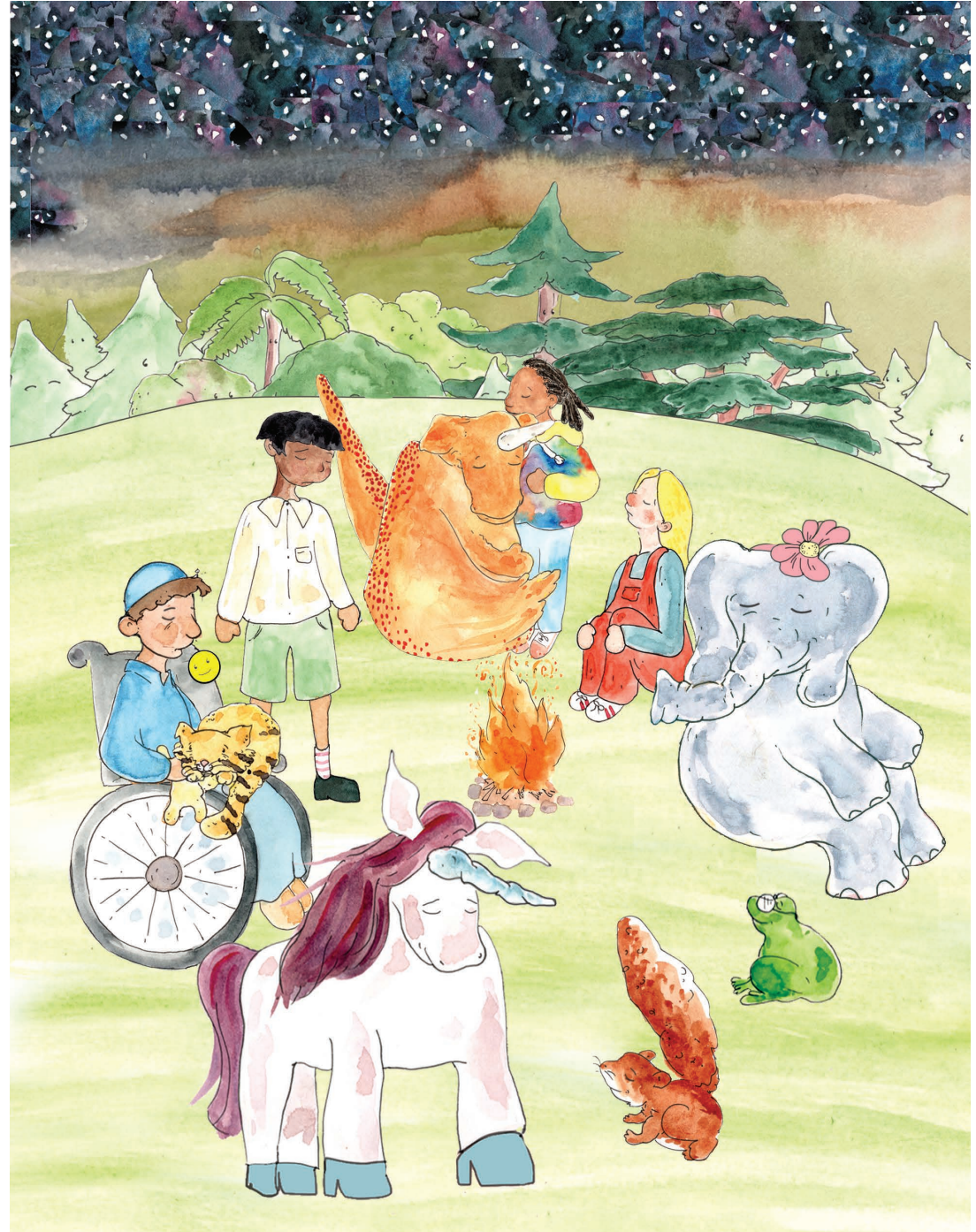
"A safe place is somewhere we can go in our minds, if we want to feel safe," said Ario. "Would you like to try it with me?"

"Sure," said Anna. The group sat down around her.

"Sometimes when we are feeling afraid, or unsafe, it can help to imagine a safe place in our minds," said Ario. "Focus on a memory or a time when you felt safe, or imagine in your mind the safest, loveliest place in the world."

He then asked them what they could see, what they could feel, and what they could smell in their safe place. He asked if there was anyone special they would like to invite into their safe place and what they might talk about together.

"You can go to your safe place whenever you feel sad or afraid," said Ario. "This is your superpower, and you can share it with your friends and family. And remember that I care about you, and many people do. That will help too."



"I liked going to my safe place," said Salem. "I didn't feel so scared."

"When the world doesn't feel safe," said Ario, "we can do lots of things to make ourselves feel safe inside."

"And sad feelings?" said Anna. "Is there a way to help those too?"

"What about angry feelings?" asked Lee.

"We can all feel big feelings," said Ario. "Like when there is fighting and we feel scared. Or when we see the trees are hurt, or someone we love isn't with us anymore. Let's see together how we can care for our big feelings."



"What do you do when you have big feelings, Salem?" Sara asked.

"When I feel scared, my heart beats fast," said Salem. "So I talk to my parents. They hug me and tell me they care about me. I call my friends, too. That helps."

"We found lots of ways to help with scared feelings," said Salem's Ario. "Sometimes it helps to shake them off. Let's try together!"

She started to dance, and called to them all:

"Wave your hands, shake your feet - and wiggle all around!"

Then they all started to dance around the campfire!

"Feel the ground beneath your feet," cried Salem's Ario. "And, of course, your wheelchair beneath your body!"

After so much dancing, they all flumped down to rest.

"These are great ideas, Salem," said Ario. "When we move and relax our bodies, that can help with scary feelings too."

"What about walking, stretching or running?" asked Sara.

"Yes, you can move any way you like," said Salem's Ario.



"What do you do when your sadness feels big, Anna?" asked Sara.

"When it feels too big, sometimes I cry," said Anna.

When Tiger heard this, he climbed into her lap to give her a hug.

"It's okay to cry," said her Ario. "Feeling big sadness also tells us that we feel big love. It's important to ask for help, and to always care for each other."

"Oh yes, I loved my grandmother so much," said Anna. "She always made me laugh."

For the first time, they all saw Anna smile.

"You have a lot of happy memories of your grandmother," said Salem. "Would you like to tell us about her?"

"Yes please," said Anna. "When I talk about my grandmother, I feel closer to her."

The children began to talk about the people they love in their lives.

"Let's all put our hands on our hearts, and send love to the people we care about," said Anna's Ario.

"I liked that very much," said Anna. "And here, with all of you around me, I am starting to have warm feelings. The sadness is still inside, but it's not my only feeling now."



"And what do you do, Tiger, when you feel big feelings?" asked Sara.

Tiger curled up into a ball.

"My boy gets worried sometimes," said Tiger. "And when he gets worried, I get worried. Sometimes I help him relax by painting, drawing or singing, and I try to comfort him. Or we sit quietly and breathe slowly together."

Tiger's Ario suggested: "Let's try breathing together."

He asked them to sit down and said:

"Breathe in together slowly, 1... 2... 3. And breathe out together slowly, 1... 2... 3."

"That feels nice," said Tiger.

"As we relax, we can also notice the warmth of the campfire," said his Ario. "And hear the wind in the trees, and feel the soft grass beneath us."

"How are you feeling now, Tiger?" said Sara.

"My big worries feel smaller now, and my body feels relaxed," said Tiger.

"That's right," said Ario. "Remember too that big feelings may come. They can feel very strong at the time, but they always pass. You won't always feel that way."



"And what about you, Lee?" said Sara. "What do you do when you have big feelings?"

"I still don't know what to do with my angry feelings, and they are so big," said Lee. "It feels like there's nothing we can do to change the world. The forest behind my house is gone. There are only stumps left, so nothing can grow."

All the children understood how it felt to be angry like Lee.

Ario said gently, "Lee, it's okay to feel angry. We all do sometimes, and sometimes our anger helps us to change things that are wrong in the world. Feeling angry sometimes is ok, as long as we don't hurt ourselves or anyone else with our anger. And if we look more closely at our anger, we may find it's because we don't know how we can make things better."

"Why don't you plant a tree, Lee?" said his Ario. "I have some nuts and seeds. Squirrels carry them everywhere!"

"I can start with one seed," said Lee. "And if everyone plants a seed, we can grow a forest."

"When I go home, I will plant a seed too," said Anna.

"But tell me, are you sure nothing can grow from tree stumps?" said Ario. He lifted his wing to show the other Arios, sat around a tree stump. They had turned it into a table and were drawing on pieces of paper. Around it, small flowers were growing.

"Even a tree stump can be a place where things blossom," said Ario. "Although things are damaged, they can be rebuilt and people can find ways to do important things again. We draw the best ideas for feeling better, so we can learn from them."

"What are they drawing now?" asked Lee.

"We are drawing some of your ideas," said the elephant Ario. "So we can use them, when we feel afraid."



“But adults don’t get scared,” said Lee.

“Everyone gets scared, even adults – and even Arios,” said Ario. “We remember hard times, and it makes us feel afraid of the dark. Drawing your ideas, for Arios and adults, so we can practice them, will bring us lots of comfort.”

“And we don’t just have to draw them, we can recreate the conversations too – with puppets!” said the frog Ario.

On his long, webbed fingers, he had made finger puppets, of Salem and his parents, so they could talk about his worries.

When Lee heard this, he wanted to see what the Arios were drawing. In case children felt scared, sad or angry, they played with their toys, cuddled their pets, hugged their families and made plans for the future.

“And I have one more,” said Lee. “Sharing ideas with you all made me feel better.”



"Sara, can we also talk about how to make peace on earth?" said Anna.

"That's a great idea!" said Sara.

"Should we draw it?" asked the Arios.

"No, we should share these ideas with the stars!" said Sara. "In my safe place, you can whisper a wish to the sky, and it will turn into a star."

"That way the Arios will always have light in the dark, so they won't have to be afraid," said Salem.

"And children on earth can see these stars too," said Lee.

"Yes," said Anna. "When I feel sad, I can think about our wishes for peace and remember you all."

And so the children began to whisper their wishes to the stars.



"I wish to walk on the streets with our friends," said Sara.

"I wish to plant more forests in my homeland," said Lee.

"I wish for hugs with our grandparents, sharing meals with our neighbors and dancing," said Anna.

"Yes," said Ario. "We all deserve to spend time with our friends and families, doing things we love, without fear."

"I wish we could talk to each other more, even if it's online," said Tiger.

"I wish for teachers for all the children, and a quiet life - full of games!" said Salem.

"I wish to *become* a teacher!" cried Anna. "And to help children who have missed school learn and feel better."

"And I will become a heart doctor," said Salem. "And make sure children know how to feel love in their hearts."



As the children's wishes went up into the sky, the trees in the forest began to rustle. Something that sounded like wind was moving through their branches.

"Listen!" said Sara. "Is that singing?"

"It's the sound of other children's wishes," said Ario. "Reaching to the stars from all over the world."

And so the children began to listen:

"In a safe future, I wish to learn a trade."

"I wish to be like my dad, always helping others."

"I wish to return to my village and grow our crops."

"I wish to help my mum in the house, so she never gets tired."

"I wish to have a lot of animals living alongside us."

"I wish to ride my bicycle by the river again."

"I wish to go back to school, and study for my future."

"In the future, every child will have a place to live where they are loved."

"And they will dance on their way to school with their friends."



When the children had shared their wishes with the stars, and the rustling trees became still, it was time for them to leave. They hugged each other goodbye and promised to meet again soon – even if it was just in their dreams.

“Remember you are all heroes,” said Ario. “And look, you have so many beautiful ideas! You can share these ways to make people feel better, whenever you feel like it.”

“And whenever you feel scared of the dark, Ario, you can always think about the stars too,” said Sara. “Know that our wishes will bring you comfort.”

The children and their Arios put their hands on their hearts, and breathed 1, 2, 3... and all arrived back to their homes. Even though they were far from each other, they all felt less alone. They had new friends, and this gave them hope, even in these tough times.

From that day on, whenever the children wanted to remember each other, and their hopes for a peaceful future, they just had to think about the stars.



Can you imagine what *your* Ario would look like?

