

ハチを見送って 豊岡市 咲花 篤子

珠恵ちゃんの励ましもハチにとって大きな力になりました。一度快方に向かうと、ハチの回復力はめざましく、食欲も出て、どんどん元気を取り戻しました。田村病院の診察室に出してもらって、ピョンピョン走り回るほどでした。左右にずれて、カタカタ鳴っていたアゴも手術して治し、ハチはチャーミングな口元になりました。3ヶ月の長期入院で、持ち前の馴れから、ハチは田村動物病院のアイドル的ヌシになっていました。7月8日、念願の退院、帰途アークに立ち寄り、オリバー先生にお礼のあいさつもすませ、ハチはやっと我が家に帰って来ました。ハチの輝かしい生命力は、珠恵ちゃんに伝わり、彼女はハチを看護したこと、ハチのポスターを描いたことで、すっかり自信を取り戻して猛勉強、みごと希望の高校に合格したのです。

人と犬とが快適に暮らせることを考慮して建てた新しい家で、ハチは先住のころ太に少し遠慮がちに、それでも自由闊達に暮らしました。不慮の事故でポテト亡きあと、男同士のころ太とうまく同居してくれました。庭をいつも元気に走り回っては、お気に入りの花壇の中に大きな穴を掘って、(せっかく私が育てた花を、すっかり土にうめこんでしまっても、無邪気なすまし顔で、) 昼寝をしたり、犬用のサンルームでくつろ

いでは、お腹をみせて甘えてブラッシングをせがんだり、夜は私達の寝室でバスケットに入って眠りました。一緒にドライブに出かけて、但馬の自然を満喫したものです。私達に子供が授かってからは、ハチは彼に優しく接し、芝生で遊ぶ子供の傍らで、お守りをするように、付き添ってくれていました。時には、子供のお気に入りのヌイグルミを自分の穴に埋めて隠して、彼を泣かせることもあったけれど。

ハチの晩年は、これまた捨て犬だった女の子のミルクが加わり、ハチはころ太とミルクの間で、ちょうど中間管理職のような気苦労があったようだけれども、生来の馴れさと我慢強さで、彼なりに工夫した暮らしぶりや遊びを見せてくれて、私達は、3頭も犬のいる生活を楽しませてもらえました。また、ハチは、番犬の仕事を自分の義務のように思っていたようです。門の前に人や車、ほかの動物の気配を感じるや否や、すぐさま家族に知らせてくれました。不審者の歓迎すべからざる来訪を教えてくれて、家族の安全を守ってくれました。ハチに吠えられないようになること、そうなることにどれほど多くの知人達が、努力してくれたことでしょう。ハチは、とても幸せ者でした。

そんな元気なハチでしたが、今年初め頃か

ら心臓病特有の咳をし始めました。茨木市の田村先生にも診ていただいたのですが、放浪時代に患ったフィラリアの後遺症の心臓疾患で老齢のこともあり、完治はもう難しいという診断でした。私達は、少しでも良くなるという希望を捨てず、ハチの苦痛を和らげるように漢方薬まで加えた多種多様な薬で、治療につとめました。が、寄る年波にはハチもかなわず、7月には腹水が溜まり始めました。それと共に、食欲もだんだんと落ちていきました。8月、とうとう呼吸困難に陥り、やむなく腹水をぬきました。それ以後、ハチは、急速に衰えていきました。注射器で水を口にふくませ、チューブ食を口に運んでやらなくてはならなくなりました。少しでも体力がつくようにと、ハチの好物のチキンフライや、ヒレ肉を細かく裂いて食べさせてもみしました。

ハチは、すっかり衰弱してもう自力では立ってない状態になってからも、意識はしっかりしていました。失禁することなく、クークーと、か弱く啼いて尿意や便意を訴えるのです。これもハチの生きようとする意志に違いないと信じて、昼夜問わず2・3時間ごとに、ハチを抱いて庭に出ては、放尿させました。ウトウトしているようでしたが、ハチは耳をそばだてて家族の声を聞き分け、目だけ動かしては私達を見つめてい

Goodbye, Hachi

every day, until he was running around when brought out to Dr. Tamura's examining room on our visits. Hachi's mouth was no longer warped, his lower jaw having been fixed with surgery, and he looked simply charming. During his three months' stay at the clinic, Hachi's droll character had made him the clinic's star. On July 8 he was finally able to leave Dr. Tamura's clinic. We stopped at ARK to say thank you to Oliver-sensei, and then brought Hachi home to live with us. Hachi's indomitable spirit had a tremendous effect on Sumie. Through caring for him on her weekly visits to the clinic and drawing posters of him, she had regained her self-confidence. Throwing herself back into her studies, she was able to get into the high school of her choice. We had built a new house specially designed for sharing our life with dogs, and while showing deference to Korota, who had been there before him, Hachi settled in happily. Potato had died in an accident, and Hachi took her place, getting along well with Korota although both were male. He would run gaily around the garden, digging big holes in the flower beds (happily burying my carefully tended flowers without the least sign of guilt). This might be followed by a nap, or a lazy afternoon in the dogs' sunroom, where he would show us his stomach and ask for a brushing. At night, he slept in a basket in our bedroom. Sometimes we would go for a drive together and enjoy the great outdoors of Tajima. When we had a son, Hachi was very gentle with the baby, and would stay by his side when he played outside on the grass, as if guarding him. Once in a while, though, he would make the child cry by taking his favorite teddy bear and burying it out in the yard. In Hachi's final years, he played a mediatory role

between Korota and the newly arrived Milk, a female stray we brought home. Like a middle-manager, he went back and forth trying to keep everyone happy, and while this may have been a little stressful for him, his good humor and patience stood him in good stead. Thanks to his efforts, we were able to enjoy our life with three dogs. Hachi also seemed to consider himself the family watchdog, and took it upon himself to guard our home. He always alerted us to the presence of any suspicious person, car or animal in front of our gate. All of our friends went to great lengths to curry favor with Hachi and



be accepted into the "inner circle" of those who did not trigger his barking. Strong and healthy though he was, early this year Hachi developed a cough that was typical of heart disease. We took him to Dr. Tamura in Ibaraki, and found out this was the legacy of the filaria he had contracted in his time as a stray. Given Hachi's advanced age, Dr. Tamura did not believe a full recovery was possible. Nevertheless, hoping to improve his condition and alleviate his pain, we treated him with Chinese herbal medicine and a full range of other drugs. By July, however, his abdomen had become swollen with dropsy and he was gradually losing his appetite. In August, his breathing became severely labored and we were forced to drain the dropsy from his abdomen. Hachi's

deterioration after that was rapid. We had to give him water with a syringe and feed him through a tube. We tried chopping up his favorite foods, fried chicken and steak fillet, with the hope that these would give him some strength. Even when he became so weak that he could not stand by himself, Hachi was fully conscious. He never became incontinent, instead whimpering