

ました。16歳になってますますデリケートで気ままな老犬ころ太も、元気ざかりの新参者のミルクも、ハチの異常な様子に何かを感じたのか、寝室の、彼らにとって一番いい場所を、ハチに譲ってくれました。ハチを愛してくれた人達も次々にお見舞いに訪れてくれました。控えめな性格のせいで、私を独占することが少なかったハチは、死の床について、ようやく全てを委ねて、私を独占することが出来ました。

8月22日、僅か3週間の看護をうけただけで、ハチは旅立っていきました。最期は苦しみもなく、静かに逝きました。ハチ達に大甘の私達夫婦と比較すると、生まれた時から先輩顔の犬達と暮

らしているせいか、シビアで冷静な息子がハチの死を大泣きして悲しがりました。彼はその昔、ハチに隠されて泣かされたお気に入りのヌイグルミを、ハチの旅立ちのお供にもたせてやりました。ハチを斎場で火葬した煙が空にあがった時、夫と息子はハチの姿によく似た形の雲を見つけました。きっとハチはあの雲になったんだねと、私達家族は思うことにしました。

海の見える小高い山の中腹に、ハチはこれ

まで私達と縁あって暮らし先に逝った仲間達と並んで永眠しています。

ハチは推定17歳（あるいは、もっと高齢であったかもしれないのですが）で逝きましたが、但馬では17歳を迎えた犬は長寿犬として表彰されます。ハチもめでたく長寿犬として表彰を受けました。動物愛護運動の一環として、兵庫県獣医師会の但馬支部・豊岡健康福祉事務所主催で、「たじまワンワンフェスティバル」が年に一度開催されます。長寿犬の表彰もその時に行われ、た

くさんの犬や家畜まで参加して、動物好きの大人や子供達とふれあいます。子犬の里親探しもあって、厳しい基準をクリアした里親に子犬達は引き取られて行きます。そして、次年の

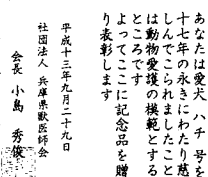
「ワンワンフェスティバル」にはツヤツヤした毛並みで元気いっぱいの姿を、その家族と一緒に会場に見せてくれるのです。ハチを保護した10数年前、但馬では犬を鎖で繋ぐ家の中で一緒に暮らす生活は、ともすれば周囲から奇異の目で見られがちでした。ところが、近年では車の助手席にチョココンと安心きった様子で座り、家族とお出かけする犬達を見掛ける機会が実に多くなりました。こんな地方の町でも動物病院が普

及してきて、心配顔の家族に連れられてやって来る犬や猫達が待合い室は満員になることもしばしばです。

96年にはハチのご縁でオリバー先生にチヨビのお里帰りも兼ねて、香住で講演会をもっていただきました。先生のお話を拝聴した人々・子供達からも確実に、但馬の愛犬家・愛猫家の輪が広がって行きました。

まだまだ絶望的な救いを待つ、悲慘な動物達が多く存在していることはとても悲しいことですが、そんな中、この様なほほえましい光景が見られるようになったことは、私達の良心の痛みを少し和らげてくれます。ハチと暮らした日々、ハチには実に様々なシーンで温かい心の持ち様を教えてもらいました。ハチを通じて、どれほど多くの心温かな優しい人達と巡り会えたことでしょう。ハチに心から感謝しています。

折りにふれて、ハチを氣遣って頂き、良いアドバイスを下さったオリバー先生、アークの皆様、そして、ハチを不幸なままの短命で終わらせないで、仁知兼ね備えた治療で長寿の道を開いて下さった、茨木市の田村先生ご夫妻、ハチのホームドクターとして長寿をサポートしていただいた豊岡市の有田先生、その他多くのハチを応援して下さい下さった皆様方に、心からお礼を申し上げます。本当に長い間ありがとうございました。



表彰

咲花 守人 様

あなたは愛犬ハチを十七年の永きにわたり懸命に動物愛護の機軸とすることです。この記念品を贈り表彰します。

平成十三年九月二十九日
社団法人 兵庫県獣医師会
会長 小島 秀俊

quietly to let us know when he needed to relieve himself. Believing this to be a sign of Hachi's strong will to live, we would pick him up whenever he called every two or three hours, day or night and take him out to the garden. Although he often seemed to be half-dozing, Hachi's ears would prick up at the sound of our voices, and he would follow us with his eyes. Korota, though he'd always been quite selfish and cranky and was now even more so at the ripe age of 16, seemed to sense that something was wrong with Hachi and gave up the prize spot in our bedroom to him. Milk, young and rambunctious though she was, did the same. All the many people who had loved Hachi over the years came to visit him in his last months. With his modest character, Hachi had never been able to have me entirely to himself, but there on his deathbed, he finally did.

On August 22, Hachi passed away quietly, without suffering. Perhaps because we doted on the dogs and he had always had to vie with them for our attention, our son was quite dry and offhand in his attitude toward them. But he cried and cried when Hachi died, and later placed his old favorite teddy bear, the one Hachi had once buried in the garden, in his coffin.

When Hachi was cremated and the smoke rose up into the sky, my husband and son discovered a cloud that looked a lot like him. We decided that Hachi had turned into that cloud. Hachi's remains are buried on a hill overlooking the sea, alongside those of other dogs who had shared our lives before him. Although we could not know Hachi's age for certain, we guessed it to be about 17 when he died. In Tajima, dogs are honored for their longevity when they reach their 17th birthday. Hachi had also received this honor before he died, at the annual Tajima Wan-wan Festival sponsored by the local veterinarians' association and the Toyooka health and welfare office. Lots of dogs and other animals, including livestock, take part in this festival and mingle with animal lovers young

and old. One of the booths at the festival rehomes puppies to families who are interviewed carefully to ensure they qualify against strict standards. They come back to the next year's Wan-wan Festival with their families, looking happy and showing off their glossy coats. A little over a decade ago, when we first brought Hachi home with us, people here in Tajima regarded us as eccentric for living with our dogs unchained and inside the house. Today, however, a dog sitting matter-of-factly in a car with the whole family is a frequent sight. More and more veterinarians are opening clinics here, and their waiting rooms are often quite full with dogs and cats accompanied by worried-looking owners. In 1996, we asked Oliver-sensei to give a speech in Kasumi on the occasion of Chobi's visit to his former home. The people in the audience that day have gone on to help widen the circle of animal lovers in Tajima. Although it is a sad fact that many many animals today remain desperately in need of rescue from homelessness and cruelty, these signs of increased understanding and improved conditions give us some consolation. Hachi taught us so much, in countless episodes during our life together, about love and caring. Through him, we came into contact with many wonderful, warmhearted people. There is so much we owe him, so much for which we are thankful to Hachi. I would like to close by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to Oliver-sensei for her kindness and helpful advice over the years, to everyone at ARK, to Dr. and Mrs. Tamura in Ibaraki for giving Hachi the gift of long life through their dedicated treatment and heroic perseverance 11 years ago, to Dr. Arita here in Toyooka who was Hachi's veterinarian during his many years with us, and finally to everyone else who gave Hachi so much love and support during his life. Thank you.