

Our first encounter with Chobi was like this; it was the spring of 1990, when the fields and mountains of Tajima were filled with beautiful sunshine and fresh leaves began to shoot in that region of Hyogo Prefecture.

There was a rest area for drivers at the highest point of the only road leading up from the Habu Pass, Kasumi-cho, Kinokuni-gun. Two benches were lined up in the space along the road. Behind the benches, some ten shrubs of 'ajisai' (hydrangea) were planted, and their shooting young leaves looked like a hedge, making a quite thick bush. And it was the hiding place for 'Chobi', an abandoned dog. It seemed he had been starving off hunger by eating food drivers had thrown into the rubbish basket beside the benches.

One day my husband was taking a rest at the spot on the way back from work. There he got a glimpse of something like a brown animal moving about among the hydrangea shrubs. "Could it be a fox?" "That was his first impression of Chobi. The animal tried to step back into the bush, as my husband moved forward and squatted down just before the bench. It looked quite embarrassed with a man just gazing at it without doing any harm." "It's a dog, not a fox." On noticing that, my husband held out his hand as a sign of friendship, and instantly the dog crawled back beneath the hydrangea shrubs and slipped away deep into the thick bush out of my husband's reach.

After that, when driving through the pass morning and evening, my husband was looking for the dog behind the benches. The dog seemed to be hiding away from people. Sometimes he was not there; another time when approached by someone, it had already disappeared behind the hydrangea shrubs. My husband made it a rule to put a bowl of dog food at the root of the shrubs. Our daily topic started with the dog, and ended with the dog.

After a week or so, we noticed that the dog seemed to wear a collar too tight on its neck, so we thought we should rescue him first before worrying about the future. One evening, we drove up to the spot to meet Chobi. We saw him with closed eyes resting his jaw on his paws. When approached by us, he started moving backward into the bush just as we feared. Talking to him, "Good boy. Good boy," we caught him by his forelegs, and pulled him out from under the bench slowly. "Quite a big boy!" was what I said on seeing his body clearly for the first time. Far too big for a fox.

Chobi was wearing a red leather collar, which was pressing his neck so tightly there was no room to insert a finger. He had kept growing after being abandoned with the collar on. It was lucky, though, that it had not yet eaten into his flesh. Chobi did not resist much, but when touched by us, he gave a little growl. When the collar finally came off his neck, we were so relieved that we even thought as if every problem yet to come had already been solved.

チョビの思い出

私がボランティアとして初めてアークを訪れたのは1996年夏のことです。犬がたくさんいて、最初のうちは名前と顔を覚えるのが大変でしたが、やがて、何頭かが特に強い印象を与えるようになり、もちろん、チョビもその中の1頭です。彼に話しかけると、細心の注意を払って受けとめてくれ、安心させるような視線が返ってきました。妻がよく言うのですが、最も賢い人は、口数が少なく、しかし、他人の話には耳を傾けるものだ……まさに、チョビの場合がそうです。あるボランティアによると、彼の夢は、人里離れた丸太小屋でチョビと「ふたり」だけで暮らすことだとか。

様々なフェスティバルやバザー、その他の催しにアークが招待されると、私はチョビと一緒に参加しました。彼はアークの任命大使として出席し、部屋に入るや、みんなの注目の的でした。そのフレンドリーで穏やかな態度は、最も疑い深い連中のかたくなな心まで溶かしてしまうほどでした——とりわけ、子供らの場合は。5、6人の子供が同時にチョビを抱きしめようとしたとき、私は彼とテレビシーによる会話を交わしました。少々あきらめたような視線を送ってきたチョビに——「ごめんね、相棒。」「いいんですよ。これも仕事ですから」——という具合に。

チョビの「性格の良さ」は、いつも人々の畏敬的でした。「こんなに良い

The next day Chobi had his health checked by a vet. He was supposedly about one year old because he still had some milk teeth left. Although he was undernourished and his legs were too thin, he was healthy in general. And he seemed to have a nice character, too; he was patient enough to keep still during the medical examination. He soon made friends with our two pet dogs, Korota and Potato. On walks, Chobi, who was the biggest, though the youngest, enjoyed trotting after his 'elders' without a lead. I often remember the days when we played together happily on a weedy sandlot, and also Chobi's occasional looks with his eyes cast far away.

Oliver-sensei understood our circumstances that we could not keep him at home, and kindly took him in at ARK. How vigorously and fabulously Chobi worked after that is well known to many people; he became a member of Oliver-sensei's family and grew up to be a representative of ARK. He even had his own column 'CHOBI SENSEI' in ARK's newsletter.

In 1994, Chobi visited his hometown, Kasumi-cho as a representative of ARK. He was invited as a guest by a local international friendship association and stood on the stage with Oliver-sensei who made a speech on animal welfare. On arriving in Kasumi-cho, Chobi was welcomed by great many people and children, who put a garland around his neck. He played the part of the representative calmly and nicely all through the ceremonies.

"Chobi, chobi" means "little by little" in the Tajima dialect. It was soon after rescuing him that we noticed the dog had the habit of being somewhat reserved; he walked in smaller steps, and ate in smaller bites than the others. That was why we called him Chobi.

Poor Chobi used to hide behind the hydrangea shrubs. 'Ajisai' is also called 'seven changes' by another name, and its floral language is 'changeable.' At ARK, Chobi played many different parts such as P.R. manager, control tower, teacher, good-will envoy, mascot and so on. He seemed to actively make 'seven transformations.' He was not changeable, though; he was consistent in trusting people, instead.

We had a guilty conscience about Chobi all the time; although we had managed to rescue him, he who had shown a total trust in us, we could not live with him for various reasons. Later, we were relieved to know, however, that Chobi was really happy at ARK, loved and cared for by Oliver-sensei and others.

We will always remember Chobi every spring from now on, when young hydrangea leaves shoot out and grow into a beautiful hedge.

Thank you so much, Oliver Sensei.

Thank you so much, Chobi.

ジェフ ブライアント

子に育てる秘訣は？」と尋ねられたりしました。「何か「秘訣」でも飲ませたのですか？それとも、手術を受けたとか？」

「彼は家族の一員として、可愛がられ、大切にされています。毎日、何回も、みんなが愛情を持って触ったり、抱きしめたりしています。それだけのことですよ」と私は答えました。

年をとってからは、チョビが集会に姿を見せることも少なくなりましたが、その穏やかな性質は変わりませんでした。私が彼を知って8年になりますが、その間、一度だって、人間や他の動物にうなったり、かみついたりしたことはありません。そして、最期にあっても、平安と満足そのものでした。愛するスタッフと犬仲間に見送られ、チョビはみんなの前から静かに姿を消し、永遠の眠りについたのです。悲しみの涙を流しながらも、みんなはわかっていました——旅立って行くチョビにお別れをする時が来たことが。私どもは、悲しみに打ちひしがれながらも、アークで彼と一緒に暮らしたときに感じた喜び、驚き、暖かさ、本物の愛は決して消えることがないと思っています。いつまでも残るのは、この真実の思い出だけ……

さようなら 愛する友よ。安らかに眠り。空の虹に君を偲ぼう。