

Faithful dog follows his master to grave

SENDAI—It was a sight to break the heart. Amid the neon lights of Kokubuncho, Aoba Ward, the largest entertainment district in Sendai, a middle-aged homeless man lay dead in mid-October. Clenched in his fist was the leash of his white Akita dog, Chako, who sat nearby and snapped at drunken passersby who tried to touch his master.

But death would not long separate the pair, who for two years had been a daily presence in Aoba's Ichibancho shopping arcade. The day after Chako was taken to the city's animal control center, the faithful dog followed his master to the grave.

Local officials said the man, known only as Sugawara, probably fell while drunk and struck his head. His body was accepted by relatives from northern Miyagi Prefecture.

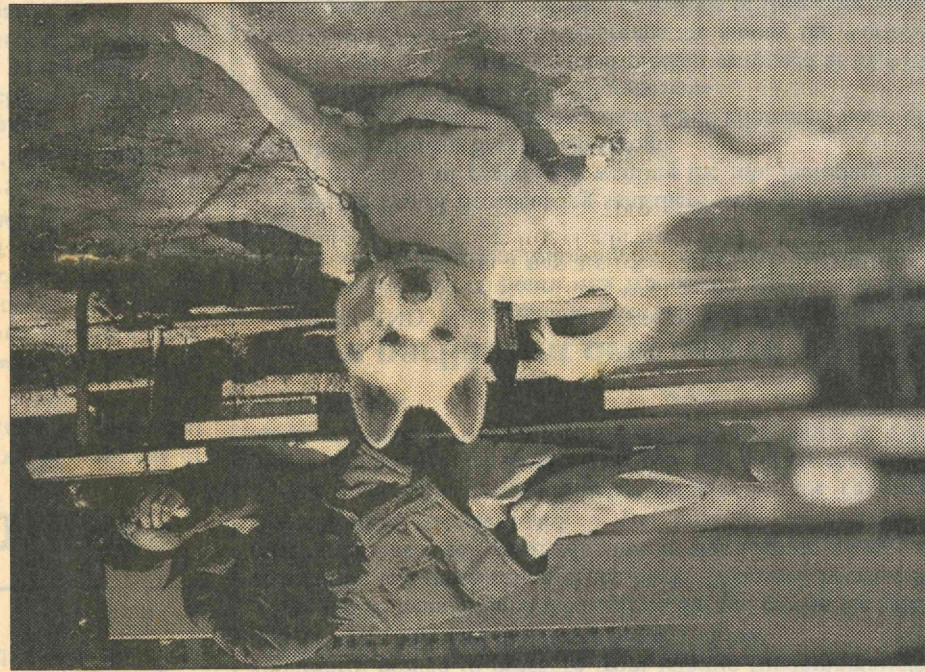
Sugawara and Chako slept and walked the streets together every day, becoming well known in the arcade. Bar hostesses of Yomiuri Shimbun

ten called out a greeting when they went by. Sugawara said he found Chako when the dog was about 4 years old. When he bought a bento, Sugawara would eat only half the food and mix the rest with water. The dog was often seen sitting patiently while his master watched sumo matches on an appliance store's television, and would run to a bar that Sugawara frequented to "inform" the female proprietor when Sugawara collapsed somewhere in a drunken stupor.

After his death, it was learned that Sugawara once worked in Hokkaido as a carpenter but became a vagabond after separating from his wife.

A veterinarian at the animal control center said Chako was weak and in a state of shock when he was brought in. He no longer had any trace of the vigor apparent in a photograph taken last June.

Employees at the center arranged for Chako to be cremated and his ashes placed in an animal cemetery in Aoba.



Yomiuri Shimbun
Chako and Sugawara photographed together in June 1995

Fraudulent pet stores biting perspective owners

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Last February, Ms. "A," a media celebrity, laid out 210,000 yen to purchase a male Labrador Retriever puppy at an outlet of a major pet store chain. Upon the advice of the shopkeeper, she also paid for insurance that guaranteed replacement should the animal die within three months.

Of course, she never anticipated what was to ensue. Just four or five days after taking the dog home, it became ill. She took it to a clinic run by the pet shop, but after three weeks, the animal died of distemper.

Because distemper has an incubation period of at least one week, Ms. A suspected her puppy had become infected before leaving the shop.

The store offered a replacement, but Ms. A refrained from accepting the new puppy they offered as it appeared "unhealthy," and she feared a repeat. When she attempted to delay payments on her credit card, the store threatened to put her on a blacklist. Her efforts to telephone the store manager or veterinarian who treated for her dog were stonewalled.

Her "experience" of being a dog owner lasted for all of five days.

Shukan Playboy reports that pet-related complaints to a consumer advocate organization have increased rapidly. From 489 complaints in

犬・猫 使い捨て国家ニッポンの悲惨

1994, the figure rose to 674 last year. In July of this year, another group opened a "telephone hotline" for people with pet-related problems. On the second day alone it received 42 calls.

"It's rare for pet shops to make refunds to customers," says the Japan Animal Welfare Society's Chizuko Yamaguchi. "In most cases, customers wind up swallowing the loss."

According to Yamaguchi, at the root of the trouble is poor sanitation at the breeding, distribution and sales stages. As opposed to laws in other countries safeguarding the health of puppies and kittens, the Japanese pet business is virtually unregulated; those seeking to change this situation have been given a bureaucratic runaround.

"According to Japan's warranty law, a store is obliged to refund the money for an animal that was already sick at the time of sale," lawyer Yoshiro Morino tells Shukan Playboy.

Clearly, the system in which pet stores designate their own veterinarians is working to cover up liability when things go wrong.

Finally, readers of Shukan Playboy receive some advice from pet experts: Buy it directly from the breeder. If you can't find a breeder, deal with a pet shop close to your own neighborhood, but wait until the animal is at least 3 months old and has pedigree papers. Look for a lively animal without any eye discharge, running nose or diarrhea. And when you pick it up, a healthy young animal should feel heavier than it looks. (MS)

Initials stand for: Mark Schreiber,
Takeshi Ito and Michael Hoffman.

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