

Today's Interview

Tomoko Hasegawa

Animal Welfare Leader

Every year more than 500,000 dogs and 200,000 cats are said to wind up at public health centers in Japan. Many of them are killed or, in the case of Osaka, sold for 800 yen each for scientific experiments. Of all dogs and cats killed in Osaka in 1985, 70 percent had been brought in by the owners themselves.

"Japan may have become an economic giant. But when it comes to animal welfare, awareness among the public is way behind other developed nations. Our organization still depends on funds from abroad. Last year, we received 7.5 million yen from Britain," so says Tomoko Hasegawa, 58, who has been an active member of the Osaka branch of the Japan Animal Welfare Society for the past 20 years.

The Japan Animal Welfare Society was started 31 years ago in Tokyo, and there are now 11 branches throughout the country. In her office at the Osaka branch, Hasegawa receives many calls from people asking what to do with their pets because they are moving into apartment blocks or cannot find homes for the pets' offspring.

"The number of dogs and cats being abandoned is increasing as more and more people are moving into apartments, and they often don't take their pets with them. As you know, almost all landlords of privately owned apartment houses prohibit their tenants to keep pets. And even those moving into public housing are told that pets are not allowed. But the more important reason why people throw their pets away is because a pet is not considered as a family member in Japan. It's usually a child of the family who asks their parents to buy or bring home an abandoned puppy, and it is that same child again who is told to throw it away when the family has to move.

"There are too many irresponsible adults. What do you think a child can learn about life from parents like that?" Hasegawa says.

Meanwhile, her organization is encouraging the public to have their pets sterilized by providing subsidies of 3,000 yen for females and 1,000 for males. "When we started this campaign about 15 years ago, nobody took us seriously. We were even laughed at. I believe it is our efforts that made the operation so widely known."

Hasegawa and other members of the society regularly visit the Osaka Prefectural Dog Pound where abandoned dogs and cats are kept before being killed, to inspect their living conditions. The society is also providing new homes for these animals by placing ads in newspapers. In 1985, they saved the lives of 80 dogs and 37 cats.

Another important matter they are concerned about is animals used in experiments. The Osaka branch of the society has been donating food for experimental animals kept at the Medical Department in Osaka University.

"I used to think that experiments using animals were necessary to some extent. But I am beginning to wonder if they are really done for the



benefit of the people.

"Before a new drug is marketed, researchers are instructed by the government to test the drug using a certain number of animals. If something goes wrong when someone takes the drug, and the pharmaceutical company is taken to court, the company gives as an excuse the statement, 'We have tested the drug on this number of animals and it proved safe. There is nothing wrong with our product.'

"Another area where animals are often used in experiments is organ transplants. Organ transplants are supposed to save many people's lives. But when I talk to doctors and medical students doing the research, I cannot help thinking that they are working on it just for the sake of increasing their own prestige.

"At one university hospital that we inspected, the animals were left outdoors, crammed in a sort of bird-cage without a cover to shield them from the cold. When I questioned the medical students on this matter, what they said was, 'They will be dead soon anyway. Why is it necessary to give them extra care?' Their attitude toward life really scared me.

"You've heard about doctors who were taken to court because they left scissors or a piece of gauze in a patient's body during an operation. I bet this is how these doctors treated animals when they were doing experiments," Hasegawa says.

Asked why she has been working so hard for animal welfare, Hasegawa said, "As a child, I used to bring home every homeless dog or cat I found on street corners or in vacant lots. And when there was no more space to keep them in my house, my parents would tell me to get rid of some of them. I cried and swore to myself that I would keep all the abandoned cats and dogs in Japan when I grew up and lived in a house of my own.

"When I joined the Japan Animal Welfare Society, my husband said 'What can a housewife who has never worked outside the home and who has seen nothing of the world do?' I had six dogs then, but that didn't solve anything. I was forced to think many times whether I should choose my husband or animals, and at one time, I was ready to take the animals. But now he understands that I am doing the right thing." (By Kaori Kitai)

Feb. 9, 1987 - Mainichi Daily News