

Inside the Weeklies

Canine Death Announcement Makes Journalism History

By BOB HORIGUCHI

Vying for space with the paid obituary notices of Who's Who personalities, a leading newspaper on May 16 reproduced a hand-written announcement of the death of a dog.

It was the first time in the annals of Japanese journalism, observes the *Shukan Bunshun*, that the demise of a pet canine was given equal prominence in a print medium as that of a human being.

The epoch-making advertisement was placed by prize-winning dancer Yasuko Nagamine to mourn the loss of her 17-year-old miniature Doberman pinscher "Pipi" and to advise her friends that its funeral would be held at a downtown Tokyo Buddhist temple a few days later.

The black-framed notice appeared in the *Asahi Shimbun* coinciding with the obituaries of Kyuichi Maeda, a mass-communications tycoon who built Tokyo Tower, and of Isao Yokoya, the chairman of a manufacturer of magnetic plaster, who was a well-known TV figure.

This did not sit well with Maeda's relatives nor with Yokoya's associates, according to the magazine.

Maeda's nephew, Ken Maeshima, who is the president of the Ashiya bookstore, told the weekly that "being a relative, that advertisement rubbed me up the wrong way." But he

added that he was not in a position to "file a claim" over its publication in that he did not consider it to be "a major problem."

Yoshiji Matsuura, president of the Pip-Fujimoto company, maker of the "Pip-Erekiban" plaster, said he was shocked to see the notice about the demise of "Pipi" but added he had not heard any complaints from his staff. "However," he is said to have remarked, "a number of people said they found the advertisement strange."

According to the *Asahi Shimbun*, three people telephoned complaining either that the obituary placed by Nagamine showed "disrespect" toward people or that it "lacked dignity."

When Nagamine announced that she wanted to run the advertisement, her stage manager, Yoshihiro Abe, sought to dissuade her, the magazine reports.

His reasons were that the attendant publicity might revive Nagamine's running feud with the owner of the three-room apartment in Tokyo which she shares with 50 cats and 5 dogs.

The landlord wants to evict her but she insists on staying until she moves in the fall to Bandai in Fukushima Prefecture, her hometown, where she plans to build a Buddhist temple dedicated to animals.

Abe was also opposed to her

spending ¥1.5 million for the 5-centimeter 2-column notice which he felt would make people look upon Nagamine as "eccentric."

The daughter of school teacher who made a fortune by going into the construction business in the immediate postwar years, Nagamine, who is now 50 years old, went to Spain when she was 24 to learn flamenco dancing. There she became so adept in this Spanish art form that she came to be featured in *Tablao* houses, devoted exclusively to flamenco performances.

On her return to Japan 17 years ago, she was given "Pipi," then a 10-month old pup, by one of her fans. From that time on, the dog was her constant companion.

In her memoirs titled "Like a Flame, Like Fire," Nagamine wrote that the only occasion "Pipi" was not beside her was when she was on stage.

Nagamine began adopting stray cats five years ago after running over one with her car. On her family altar today are 17 Buddhist memorial tablets of dogs, cats and birds that died at her home, and 31 more tablets of cats she had found on the streets, says the weekly.

Abandoning flamenco dancing for a more original and traditional style, Nagamine won the prestigious official Artistic Grand Prize in 1980 for her rendition of the classic "Musume Dojoji" dance.

She also created a dance with a Buddhist motif "Mandala," to the accompaniment of sutras being recited in the background.

Yuko Moriyama, deputy abbot of the Jorakuen temple, who provided the vocal accompaniment for Nagamine's stage performance, officiated at the funeral of "Pipi."

It was the first time such rites had been held at the temple for a canine, he told the magazine.

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With an eye to convincing women that they can safely frequent horse races, the monopoly operating such tracks has turned to television to improve the unsavory image of the sport.

The Central Horse Racing Association, says the *Shukan Shincho*, has earmarked between ¥700 to ¥800 million this year to pay for TV spot advertisements and programs as well as to subsidize productions that will show the equine sport in a favorable light.

One of these programs, now being aired, features women's fashions, only briefly referring to horse racing.

The association is also paying part of the production cost of the screen version of the prize-winning autobiography of Michiko Yoshinaga, a sports newspaper reporter who became the wife of a widowed jockey.