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私の子供の頃、半世紀以上前、エスという名の犬が私の家族の一員でした。娯楽のない時代、近所のオジサンから世間話を聞くのが楽しみでした。ある日、エスもいる前で、犬は食用になるそうでっせ。私は思わずエスを抱きしめました。

当時、犬を飼うのは大変で、毎年生まれてくる子犬の嫁ぎ先を探さねばなりません。A兄貴は、目が開かんうちに処分してしまえば気が楽々と教えてくれました。ある朝、4、5匹の子犬が庭から突然消えていました。誰も尋ねもしませんでした。B親爺が夜のうちに何処かに捨てたに違いありません。その家の母も犬のお母さんも、そして悪童仲間も涙をこらえていました。

子犬の引き取り先を確保するために、日頃から良い友達関係を築き、新鮮な地域情報網を確保しておくことに力を注ぎました。食糧難や感染症に責められて人も犬も生きるのに必死でした。猫も同様でした。とにかく酷い

状況でしたが、何か、人と犬猫との間は理解の絆で結ばれていたように思います。

今は21世紀。人にも動物にも「ゆりかごから墓場まで」の福祉は整えられています。食は充たされ、産児制御技術も進歩しました。しかし、捨て猫の数は増加し、動物虐待事例も跡を絶ちません。国内外では、ヒトの「野性」むき出しとしか思えない社会現象が目立ちます。動物もあきれていることでしょう。

「命」の本来の姿は、純粋で、愛と慈悲に満ちています。純粋な命に対しては、人よりも動物の方が正直です。謙虚になって、動物から「命」の大切さを学んでみたいものです。本シンポジウムでは、人と動物の絆を深めるための多くのプログラムが準備されています。原点に戻って、健康社会を復権したいものです。

Let me tell you a story about something that happened more than half a century ago, when I was a child. We had a dog, named Esu, who was a member of the family. A neighboring man used to visit our house, and it was pleasure to hear his conversation as we had little in the way of amusement in those days. One day, while Esu was present, the man remarked that it was being said that dogs were edible. When I heard this, I involuntarily gave Esu a tight hug.

Keeping a dog was very difficult in those days and because puppies were born every year in large numbers the families suffered while looking for people to adopt them. Elder brothers would teach their younger brothers how to dispose of newborn puppies even before their eyes had opened. Their eyes being closed somehow made the sadness easier to control. One morning, a couple of lovely puppies would disappear suddenly from the yard. Although nobody would ask, the father had probably thrown the dogs away somewhere the night before. The mother of the family, the mother dog, and the children that played with the puppies would all be in tears. In those days, people and dogs alike were surviving in desperate circumstances while plagued by lack of food and infectious disease. Although the situation

was severe, at the same time there was a connection and a bond of understanding between people and companion animals.

Now we live in the 21st century, an age in which people as well as their companion animals are provided with “cradle to grave” welfare. Food is plentiful and birth control has also progressed. Nevertheless, in this kind of environment, the number of abandoned cats is actually increasing. Cases of animal abuse have not come to an end either. In addition, abnormal social phenomena that stem from the “wild nature” of humans are increasingly making an ugly appearance, both within and outside Japan. Animals would be shocked if they were able to see some of the things going on in the human world.

The normal state of being for “life” can be said to be ‘pure’ and ‘filled with love and mercy’. In terms of purity of life, animals are more honest than people. We need to learn the importance of “life” from animals. At this symposium, many kinds of programs for deepening the human-animal bond will be considered and discussed. Let us rehabilitate towards a healthy society with a pure heart.