

第12章

あくまで若く、逞しいジムのお母さん

ジムは当時お母さんと二人暮らしで、ある日シカゴ市の南部、ミシガン湖を見渡す美しいアパートに、私を連れてってくれ、そのあまりの若々しさに、一瞬お姉さんかと思わせたお母さんに、引き合わせてくれました。彼女はその時63・4歳だったのですが、やや小柄、スラリとした四肢と、輝くようなオリーブ色の肌で、その顔は実に優しく愛嬌があり、マーガレットという可愛い名がぴったり、全身に魅力溢れる女性でした。数年前に親友と二人で、日本へ行った時のスライドなんぞ引っ張り出してきて、嬉々として喋りまくり、私は緊張する暇もありませんでした。

ジムのお父さんは8年前に亡くなったと聞いていたので、部屋の中どこにもその写真が無いことを、私はその時はちょっと不思議に思ったのですが、後にジムのお母さんという人をよく知るようになってから、それが彼女の明るくも逞しい心意気から来るものだと分かり、一層魅力的な人だと思うようになりました。

ジムには結婚したお姉さんが二人おり、双方郊外の大きな家に住んでいました。ジムのお母さんは、独立の町中生活をエンジョイしており、後に歳を取るにつれ、お姉さんの家族たちが一緒に住みませんか、と言うようになって、絶対ノーを通しました。繰り返しになりますが、私が会ったその時点で、彼女が60歳を超えていた

Chapter 12

Jim's Youthful and Spirited Mother

One day, Jim took me to his mother's beautiful apartment on the South Side of Chicago, near the shore of Lake Michigan.

As he introduced me to his mother, I am not exaggerating to say that I thought I was meeting his sister. I believe she was about 63 or 64 at the time. Of rather small stature, she had a radiantly beautiful face, gentle and charming. Her legs were slender and straight. She showed me slides from her trip to Japan with her friend Agnes a few years prior, and talked with joyful exuberance without end, giving me no chance to feel ill at ease.

I knew that Jim's father had passed away 7 or 8 years ago. I saw not one photo of his father in her rooms, and I thought it was a bit strange. Later on, however, when I got to know Jim's mother well, I understood that the absence of her late husband's photos in her rooms demonstrated her unfaltering, positive view of life, or her inner spirit, so to speak. I then found her even more attractive.

Jim had two older, married sisters, with children. While both lived in big houses in the Chicago suburbs, Jim's mother enjoyed living in the city by herself. Later on, as she became older, Jim's sisters suggested that she live with one of them, but she politely turned down their offers. In those early years when I had first met her, no one would have believed that she was over

ということは、どう考えても信じられませんでした。兎に角まだフルタイムの仕事はする、教会関係の仕事に終始携わる、ゴルフはする、外国旅行はする、の活動家、優雅な独り暮らしを楽しんでいました。仕事は、私と同じ、弁護士事務所の秘書の仕事でしたが、なんだかタイプライターを叩いたりするのは、まるで不似合いな、気品豊かな女性でした。

ジムのお父さんは、ジョージタウン大学の一年生から二年生に進む夏休みに、ジムが首府ワシントンからシカゴに帰っていた夏の或る日、久しぶりに家族全員が集まってミシガン湖上でボート遊びをしていた時に、突然心臓発作を起こして、帰らぬ人となった、と私は聞いていました。

その時まだ18歳だったジムは、以後学資は自分で稼ぎ、お母さんを助けて、また母親の方も家はすぐ手放してアパートに移り(娘二人はかたづいていた)、最愛の息子と二人、苦勞を分かち合ってきたようでした。ただ彼女は、苦勞の苦の字も窺えない明るさと、溢れ出るばかりの生気を発散し、母子似たり、と私はその初対面のときに納得しました。

その年のクリスマス・イブ、オフィス街は全部お昼で仕事じまい、やわらかな雪が音もなく降りしきる中、陽気に飾りつくされたダウンタウンのあちこちをジムは私を連れて歩き回り、真っ白な毛がふさふさした温かい防寒帽を買ってくれました。

そのロマンチックなジムと、真っ白な帽子の

60. She was a career woman. She played golf and traveled abroad frequently. By all means, she was enjoying her elegant, independent life.

About the time that I met her, she was working for a small law firm in Chicago as a legal secretary. I thought she was too elegant and graceful to be sitting at a typewriter in an office.

This is what I learned some months later. One summer, Jim was home from Georgetown University between his freshman and sophomore years. The entire family got together one beautiful summer day to go for a boat ride on Lake Michigan, when his father collapsed and died.

Jim was only 18. He then had to earn his school expenses. His mother sold the house and moved to an apartment to live by herself (her daughters had already been married). I believe Jim and his mother went through the tough times together. However, neither of them showed the slightest sign of going through adversity, and I determined that the mother and the son are quite alike.

On Christmas Eve the year I met Jim, all the businesses in downtown Chicago closed at noon. Soft and gentle snowflakes were coming down onto the streets and onto the people who walked to and fro. Jim and I walked together, looking into the cheerfully decorated windows of this store and that, talking and laughing. In

あたたかさが、今、まるで昨日の出来事の如くに思い出されます。

翌日は、クリスマス当日。ジムはまた午前中からメイと私のアパートに現れ、朝のクリスマス・ミサに連れてってくれました。この時、跪いて敬虔に祈りをささげるジムを見て、初めて彼がカトリックだと気がきました。

その足で、郊外に住む長姉の家の、家族団欒のクリスマスの集いへ。27歳の、若々しいバッチェラーの弟が可愛くてならないといった感じの、どちらも陽気な長姉ロイスと次姉メアリー・ジョー、揃って人のよさそうな二人の夫たちエドとボブ、ジムの愛らしい姪や甥たち、家族全員に会ったのでした。

大晦日は、ジムが友人たちと連れ立って、カルフォルニア州パサディナ市で毎年開催される、名高い元日のローズ・ボウル(大学フットボール)見物に行ってしまう、私はなんとも寂しい思いで、事務所の舟井弁護士が招待してくれた大晦日パーティに、ヒューバートと行ったりしました。

翌、元日は仕事で知り合った日本人、奇しくも私と同じ立教出のジョン・松原氏一家に招かれ、夕方帰宅。その夜はメイも居なかったので、寂しさをまぎらすため、知り合いの誰かと長電話をしていました。すると急に電話局のオペレーターが会話に入ってきて

one of the stores, he bought me an all white, soft and fluffy fake fur hat. I remember the softness of my first winter hat against my cheeks as I walked the streets of Chicago with Jim, so warm and romantic, on that Christmas Eve afternoon.

On Christmas Day, Jim showed up in the morning at the apartment May and I shared. He took me to Christmas Mass at the Holy Name Cathedral on Chicago Avenue. I saw him kneel and pray with the huge Christmas Mass congregation, and I realized, for the first time, that he was Catholic.

After the Mass, he took me to the house of his older sister Lois for Christmas dinner. There, I met Lois' husband Ed, Jim's other sister Mary Jo and her husband Bob. I met Jim's young and adorable nephew and four nieces. The young bachelor Uncle Jim, who was 27, was quite popular. I thought he was particularly adored by his two older sisters.

On New Year's Eve, Jim went to California with his friends for the traditional New Year's Day college football game, the "Rose Bowl," held in Pasadena. Feeling totally lonely, I went to a New Year's Eve party at Mr. Funai's house, with Hubert. On New Year's Day, I was invited to John Matsuhara's house. John went to Rikkyo University, as did I, and I had met him at the Masuda Funai law offices where he was a client. That evening, I was back at the apartment alone, for May was out on a date with Hiroshi. I called someone on the phone to forget about my loneliness. All of

「緊急電話が入っていますから、この電話を一旦切ってください。」という。

ええ一つ、なんのことか？と驚いて待てば、ああ嬉しや！懐かしいジムの、明るく弾んだ声が飛び込んできました。もちろん緊急というのは口実で

「ハッピー・ニューイヤーって、ひとこと言いたかったんだ！」

その魂も溶けるばかりのやさしい声を聞けば、もうその後は、寂しさなんぞどこかへ吹き飛び、私はすぐさまキッチンのテーブルに坐り、父母への長文を書いていた。

<1970年1月12日、父より>

[イブから書き出された長文、今日落手。]

愉しく忙しく実に嬉しいが、余裕を持つことも大切也。この暮れは、おせち料理も造らず、我等老境に入ったること慥か(たしか)也。

亮子が晴れ晴れとしてさへおれば、儂(わし)はもう言うことなしである。]

本章閉じる前に、最初のページで述べた、ジムのお母さんの「明るくも逞しい心意気」を実証するイベントを一つ付け加えたいと思います。

a sudden, a telephone operator interrupted our conversation, and said,

“You have an emergency call. Please hang up and stand by.”

I cut the conversation with my friend, and waited, in astonishment. And then, I heard the cheerful and animated voice of Jim coming from the other end. Of course, it was not an emergency. He said,

“I just wanted to say Happy New Year to you!”

What a sweet and soothing voice from Heaven! How I had longed to hear that voice! I was no longer lonely. I sat down at our small kitchen table, feeling as if I were in Heaven, and started to write a long letter to my parents.

My father's letter dated January 12, 1970

< *We have just received your long letter that you started writing on Christmas Eve. I am glad to know that you are keeping yourself busy and you are having fun. But, pray, have time to relax, and slow down every now and then. We did not bother to prepare the New Year's Day "Osechi" dinner (Note) this year. Surely, your mother and I are both getting on in years. We have no complaints, however, as long as you are happy and safe. >*

Note: *"Osechi" is a variety of traditional Japanese New Year's Day foods. The dishes that make up "Osechi" each have a special meaning celebrating the New Year. The tradition that started quite early in Japan's history is followed by millions today.*

大分後になってからですが、ある時、彼女が古い、大きな家具類をポイと捨て去り、部屋中全部、全く新しい家具を取り付けたことがありました。私がそのことをすぐ母に報告したら、もう早くからマーガレットさんに惚れ込んでいた我が母が、次のように手紙に書いてきました。

[、、、殊に家具という、長年使用してきた、又亡きご主人の思い出も染み込んでいるであろう大切なものを、一思いに新品に取り替える、ということは、アメリカ人にせよ、日本人にせよ、普通の女にはできないことです。しかも、それを彼女の年齢で実行した、ということは見上げたものです。]

Before closing this chapter, I'd like to add the following:

It was several years later, but one day, Jim's mother threw out quite a few pieces of large furniture in her apartment, and replaced them all with brand new furniture. I reported this event to my parents. My mother, who had previously expressed her admiration towards Jim's mother, responded, saying:

< ... to let go of the furniture that she's been using all those years, to certain of which she must be specially attached because of the memory of her late husband, demonstrates her unfaltering strength. I understand she and I are the same age. I don't think I could do that. An average woman, whether American or Japanese, would not do that. I wish you learn a lot from her. >

< End of Chapter 12 >

I am inserting just a few photos of Jim and his family in the next page. Two are from 1969, the year that I met him. Two were taken several years before 1969.



Jim in 1969 — 私を魅了した、この優しい眸！



From left, Jim's sister Mary Jo, her husband Bob, Jim's mother, Jim, his sister Lois, and her husband Ed, in 1969.



Jim and his Mother. Circa 1965



Jim's Mother in 1961, at the Inaugural Ball of John F. Kennedy.