

第23章

母の手紙

<1973年5月25日、母より>

[4月23日に受け取った手紙に返事を書こうと思いつきながら、とうとう一ヶ月過ぎてしまいました。ポップジョイ一族のイースターの祝い、ジムの同輩の女性弁護士の息子の横死、、、シカゴ南地区の黒人少年たちのこと。お通夜に出かけたジムを心配する亮子を遠く思いつきながら、再び手紙を読み返したところです。

多忙な仕事の中から日本語をやり出した、ジムの深い思慮は、私にはある程度しか分からないけれど、もしも再び会う機会があったら、片言でも通じ合いたいものだと思います。

マンパワーの高橋女史にも、ジムはずいぶん世話をやいてくれたらしく、日本に帰つた高橋さんからの電話で、詳しく知りました。高級アパートに住むジムのマザーのところへも行きまして、大感激の様子でした。私にしきりにお礼を言っていましたよ。

私の毎日も明子も大して変化はありません。私自身はお父さんの世話がなくなったので、庭いじりが少々多くなったようです。今、庭は、ほの暗いばかりの青葉でびっしりです。

Chapter 23

My Mother's Letters

My Mother's Letter Dated May 25, 1973:

< I kept telling myself that I must respond to your letter that I received on April 23, and here I am; a month has passed. Your letter described the Popjoy family's celebration of Easter; the unexpected death of Jim's coworker's son, and the many shooting deaths of black children on the South Side of Chicago. I have just read your letter one more time, thinking about you who are worried about Jim going to the wake.

I understand that Jim has started to learn Japanese in his extremely busy daily schedule. I can only attempt to understand his deep thoughts. If I ever had a chance to see him again, it would be priceless if we could communicate, even a little bit.

It appears Jim went out of his way for Ms. Takahashi of Manpower who was in Chicago last month. She called me as soon as she returned to Tokyo, and gave me a full account of his hospitality. She says she felt honored to be taken to Jim's mother's beautiful apartment. She was extremely thankful to you both.

Our daily life has not changed. Since your father is gone, I may be spending a little more time than before, gardening and caring for the trees and flowers. Right now, thick greenery fills every corner of

「死」が人間の究極のものであることは分かっ
ていながら、起こってみるとやはり人間は驚き
うろたえてしまいます。前田の純一が死んだの
です。去る14日午後1時頃。その二日前に、三
千代と共に神田の救急病院に見舞った時、もう
すでに意識はありませんでした。義徳と同じ脳
出血を出先で起こして、病院へ運ばれたので
す。発作から六日目の死で、細君の逸子の嘆
きは見ていられませんでした。小学生二人の男
の子を抱えて、これからどうしてゆくことでしょう。
私も出来るだけの相談に乗る覚悟です。38歳
という若さだけに、周囲に与えたショックは非常
なものです。(註)]

註: 母が尊敬してた亡き前田叔父の一人息子で、彼女
には従弟に当たる純一さんは、働き盛りの年齢で
急死し、親類一族に大きな衝撃を与えました。

<1973年6月7日、母より>

[二日着の手紙に続いて、今日はまた速達で。

相変わらず大変な忙しさらしく、この家の親子
三人の生活とは比べものになりません。でも健
康のためには、文明国人らしい多忙だけでなく、
時には野蛮人のようにぼんやりしてもらいたい
ものです。ジムと二人で。

勤務先が変わりましたね。私もジムと同様で、特
に驚くこともなくなりました。

our yard, giving an overall grayish and
purplish hue.

"Death" is inevitable, we all know this.
Yet, when it happens unexpectedly, we all
get flustered and become panic-stricken.

Junichi Maeda died on May 14. I rushed to
the hospital in Kanda with Aunt Michiyo.
He was unconscious. Same as your uncle
Yoshinori, he had a stroke at work, and he
was gone within 6 days after being taken
to the emergency ward. I could not bear
to look at his grief-stricken wife, Itsuko.
She has two young boys to raise. I am
determined to help her in whatever way I
can. Junichi was only 38. It was a huge
blow to us all. (Note) >

Note: My mother had an uncle (deceased by
then) who was exceptionally dear to her.
Junichi was this uncle's only son.

My Mother's Letter Dated June 7, 1973

< I received your letter on June 2. And
another express letter came today.

It appears that you continue to have
extremely busy days. The sluggish days
we, the mother, daughter, and son, have
over here is beyond comparison. It is
important, however, for a civilized
Japanese woman living in the U.S., to be
less busy now and then. To idle away the
time not doing anything whatsoever is
important for maintaining your health. This
goes for Jim, too.

I see your work address has changed again.
I'm not surprised any more than Jim is.

現在ヨーロッパでも、アメリカでも、東南アジアでも、評判の良くない日本商社にあなたが勤めるようになったということは、大変興味あることではないでしょうか。あなたの持って生まれた一種の正義感は、商売の根性にはついていけない場合があるかもしれないし、その中で動き回る商人たちが、嫌悪されることもあるでしょう。でもそれも人生行路の一つの出会いですから、その中に入った以上、ベストを尽くすべきだと思います。それに今度は、両国語をあやつる楽しさがあるわけですから、誠意を持って久保行夫氏のためにお尽くしください、、、。

世界中で、日本人とアメリカ人が、一番ガツガツ働いているとのこと、どうか限界前に休息を取ってください、ジムもあなたも。]

結局私は、ジムと母の教訓には従えず、又兩人の「仕事に対する哲学」に徹すること出来ず、その頃、もっと気楽な稼業はないものかと、或る日本商社に職変えをしました。

母は『両国語をあやつる楽しさ』などと言いましたが、日本商社というのは日がな一日テレックスを打ったり、船荷書類のタイプをしたりばかりで実に面白くなく、この仕事も長続きはしなかったのです。

It is quite interesting that you are now working for a Japanese trading company doing business in the U.S. Japanese companies operating in the U.S., Europe, and South-East Asia are generally regarded with contempt. Your built-in sense of justice, so to speak, may find it difficult to go along with the mercenary motives of the businessmen, and you may well be revolted by their business operations. Please make the best effort to consider this as a part of your life's learning experience. The bright side of this new job is that you can now use both English and Japanese at work. That should be fun. Please exhibit your good will and sincerity to your Japanese superiors....

It is said that, among all the nations of the world, Japanese and Americans are at the top in blowing their brains out to make money. Please make sure to rest before coming to an end. I'm saying this to both you and Jim. >

It looks like my mother's and also Jim's respectable work ethics failed to sink into my brain, and I did not follow their advice or admonition regarding uninspiring lawyer bosses and coworkers. I started to work with a Japanese trading company in February 1973. My mother tried to cheer me up, saying "You can now use both Japanese and English at work," but I found typing telexes and shipping documents all day long quite boring, and this particular job did not last very long, either.



Employee recreation day at the Japanese trading company. Front row, far right, is President Yukio Kubo. Jim (huge moustache) and I are in the back.



With Ms. Reiko Takahashi, at the office of Manpower Japan, in Tokyo. December, 1988.

< End of Chapter 23 >