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Abandoning a Cat

A PERSONAL STORY

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Of course I have a lot of memories of my father. It's only natural, considering that we lived under the same roof of our not exactly spacious home from the time I was born until I left home at eighteen. And, as is the case with most children and parents, I imagine, some of my memories of my father are happy, some not quite so much. But for some reason the memories that remain most vividly in my mind now fall into neither category; they involve more ordinary events.

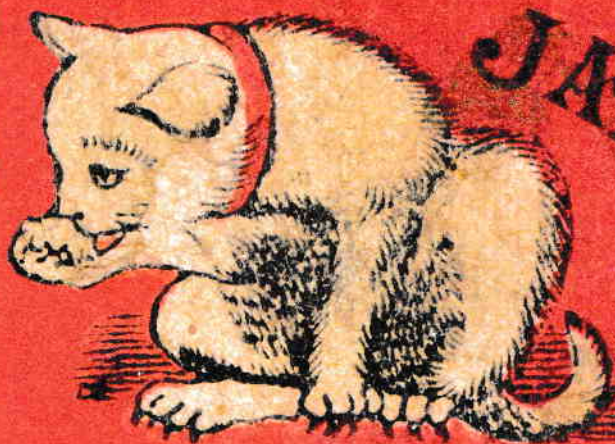
This one, for instance:

When we were living in Shukugawa (part of Nishinomiya City, in Hyogo Prefecture), one day we went to the beach to get rid of a cat. Not a kitten but an older female cat. Why we needed to get rid of it I can't recall. The house we lived in was a single-family home with a garden and plenty of room for a cat. Maybe it was a stray we'd taken in that was now pregnant, and my parents felt they couldn't care for it anymore. My memory isn't clear on this point. Getting rid of cats back then was a common occurrence, not something that anyone would criticize you for. The idea of neutering cats never crossed anyone's mind. I was in one of the lower grades in elementary school at the time, I believe, so it was probably around 1955, or a little later. Near our home were the ruins of a bank building that had been bombed by American planes—one of a few still visible scars of the war.

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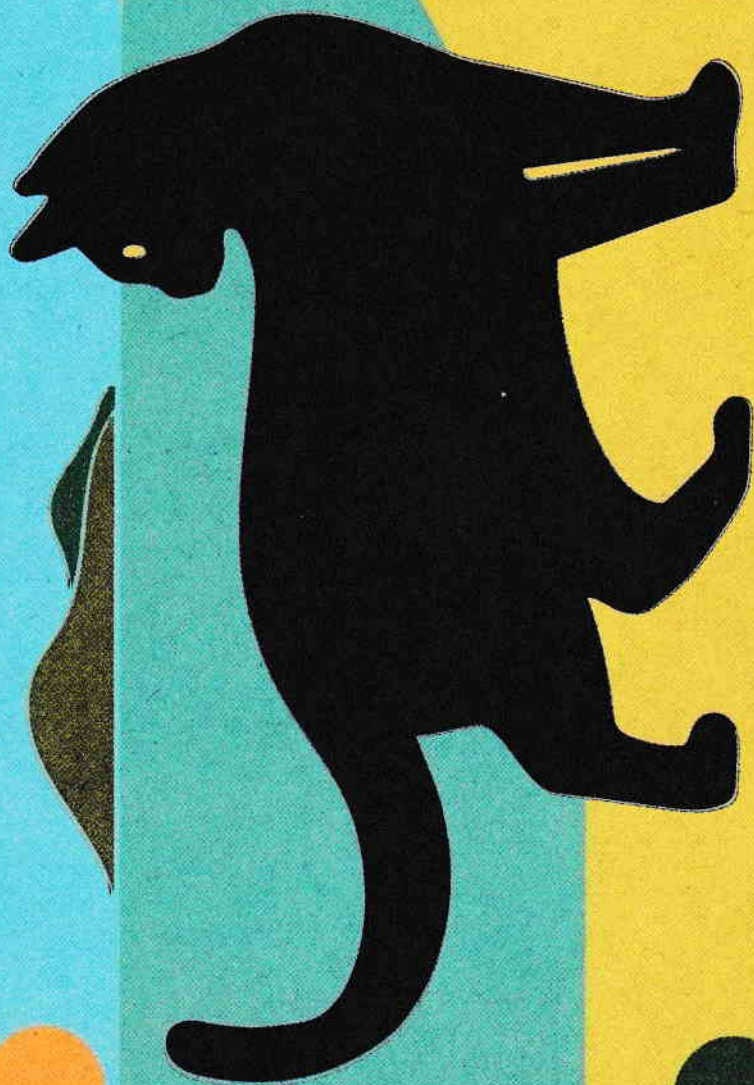
MADE IN KOBE



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My father and I set off that summer afternoon to leave the cat by the shore. He pedaled his bicycle, and I sat on the back holding a box with the cat inside. We rode along the Shukugawa River, arrived at the beach at Koroen, set the box down among some trees, and, without a backward glance, headed straight home. The beach must have been about two kilometers from our house.

Back then the sea hadn't been filled in yet, and the beach at Koroen was a popular place for people to swim. The sea was quite clean, and almost every day during summer vacation, my friends and I went there to swim. Parents didn't mind if their kids went swimming by themselves, so naturally we got very good at it. There were lots of fish in the river, and I recall nabbing a large eel at the estuary.

At home, my father and I got off the bike—discussing how we felt sorry for the cat, but what could we do?—and when we opened the front door the cat we'd just abandoned was there, greeting us with a friendly meow, its tail standing tall. It had beaten us home. For the life of me, I couldn't figure out how it had done that. We'd been on a bike, after all. My father was stumped as well. The two of us stood there for a while, at a total loss for words.

I'll never forget the look of blank amazement on my father's face. That look changed to one of admiration and, finally, to an expression of relief. And the cat went back to being our pet. I think we felt resigned to it, seeing as how it had managed to make its way back to us.

We always had cats at home, and we liked them. I didn't have any brothers or sisters, and cats and books were my best friends when I was growing up. I loved to sit on the porch with a cat, sunning myself. So why did we have to take that cat to the beach and abandon it? Why didn't I protest? These questions—along with that of how the cat beat us home—are still unanswered and remain a mystery.

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