

# A LIFE OF DEVOTION

## THE TRUE STORY OF HACHIKO

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**H**ISTORY IS FULL of famous individuals — ambitious kings and mighty emperors, gifted artists and composers, brilliant scientists, brave explorers . . . the list is endless. Often they possess great talents, riches and power, but occasionally you come across a figure in history who is just an ordinary, quiet, humble individual — such as a dog named Hachiko.

Every year in Japan, amid the chaos and the neon lights of modern Tokyo, there is a festival that celebrates the memory of Hachiko. There have also been two life-size sculptures made of Hachiko, a book about his life and a movie called *The Hachiko Story*. There is even a special Hachiko store called Shibuya No Shippo, where you can buy Hachiko gifts and souvenirs. Hachiko's image has appeared on a Japanese stamp, and public places have been named after him.

Hachiko the dog is famous. But why?

Hachiko's life began in 1923, in Odate in the north of Akita, on Japan's Honshu Island. Hachiko was a white male Akita, a breed of dog named after Akita, where they come from. They stand about half a metre tall and are coated with thick, fluffy fur. In 1931 the Japanese Government declared Akitas the national dog.

Maybe Hachiko's story explains why.

In 1924, at the early age of two months, Hachiko moved from Akita in the far north to the bustling great metropolis of Tokyo, about 500 kilometres south. He had been adopted by Mr Eisaburo Uyeno, a professor at what is now Tokyo University. They lived together in the busy Shibuya district.



Hachiko loved his master and the two quickly became inseparable. Mr Uyeno couldn't take Hachiko to work with him but Hachiko would still walk with his master to Shibuya train station every day to see him off, then return in the afternoon to wait for him and greet him as he came out of the station.

For well over a year the two companions followed this happy routine, until one day in 1925. On the afternoon of 21 May, young Hachiko went to his usual waiting place to greet his master. Time passed, and as trainload after trainload of peak-hour passengers poured out of the station, there was no sign of Mr Uyeno. Watchfully, patiently, Hachiko waited. More time passed. Still

no sign of Mr Uyeno. But still Hachiko waited.

Night came to Shibuya station, and with it stillness and silence. But no Mr Uyeno.

Still Hachiko waited.

Then, around midnight, Hachiko went home. Alone.

The next day Hachiko went back to the station to wait for his master. Again he waited, watchfully, patiently. The hours passed. Night fell. Again Hachiko returned home alone.

Hachiko went to the station the next day and the next. In fact, every day for the next ten years Hachiko waited for his beloved master, Mr Uyeno, to come out of the station.



But Mr Uyeno would never come. A few hours after Mr Uyeno had said goodbye to Hachiko on his way to the university on 21 May 1925, he had suffered a stroke. Mr Uyeno died before he could return home.

And so Hachiko kept his vigil at Shibuya station. Was he in fact waiting? Was he mourning? Was he paying tribute to his master daily? Could he see or sense something that no one else could? We can only guess what Hachiko was really thinking and feeling, but not a day passed when he didn't take up his position outside the station, where he had last seen his master alive.

As time passed, Hachiko grew old and his bones stiffened with arthritis. People who knew his story gave him food, and

shelter at the station when it rained. Relatives of Mr Uyeno tried to give Hachiko another home, but he always returned to Shibuya station to "wait" for his master.

Hachiko became famous. A newspaper published an article, "Faithful Old Dog Awaits Return of Master Dead for Seven Years", and people from far and wide in Japan went out of their way to see Hachiko and pat him.

To anyone who saw or heard about Hachiko, the old dog had come to represent many great qualities — devotion, constancy and patience. In the year before Hachiko's death a famous Japanese artist, Teru Ando, sculpted a life-size bronze statue of him. It had been funded by donations from Japanese children and adults, and even people from other countries.

Who could have guessed that over 60 years later a statue of a dog would be an increasingly popular pilgrimage site for countless Japanese people — or that many would choose the statue of Hachiko as a place to express their fidelity to one another.

Teru Ando's statue of Hachiko was erected outside Shibuya station in 1934, on the spot where Hachiko "waited" every day for his master. And it was there at the foot of the statue, with evening snow falling lightly, that old Hachiko, still "waiting" for his master Mr Uyeno, breathed his last and passed away.

That day was 8 March 1935. Maybe then Hachiko did get to greet his master once more.

