

Negra

By Gary Winters

I will never forget the day I opened the door for my dog and there stood a panting policeman in a blue uniform.

"Is this your dog?"

"Sure, everybody knows that."

"We got a leash law. I have to give you a citation. It goes up in multiples for each infraction," he said.

"I don't have a leash because I don't need one for this dog. He goes everywhere with me. And if he gets lost he goes back to the car, jumps in the window and waits for me in the passenger seat."

Still got a \$10 buck citation. That was in the early '70s in Berkeley, California.

Now we are in San Felipe, Mexico, in the late '90s. My Doberman/Shepherd cross does not have a leash. There are very few venues where she is not welcome because she zips right under the table and cools it without bothering anybody. Her name is Negra.

One Mexican owner of an Americanized bar downtown tells me that American dogs are welcome, but not Mexican dogs. That is as good a definition of a tourist trap as you can get. I don't go in there anymore because the American dogs tend to drool all over you, make a lot of noise and are a general nuisance.

I have never had a problem in a real Mexican establishment. Negra seems to know where we are going before we even get there. She likes air conditioning, tacos, fish heads and tortilla chips. I miss her when she is not there. I don't think I could ever put a leash on her. She would think I had lost my mind and did not love her anymore. She would probably be right. She is

devoted to me and sits in the corner while I mingle and then we return to our table or bar stool if I am having a cerveza in a cantina.

How many times have I seen dogs locked inside a car with the motor running and the air conditioner on, the owner inside having a beer, while Negra is tucked up under my feet at the bar.

"I feed Rin Tin a specially balanced formula that costs \$28 a ten pound bag," the proud master proclaims to me at the Ponderosa. I do not tell him that Negra's core diet is kibble which costs 75 cents a kilo and is 27% protein and especially don't let on that she likes chicken bones--all of them--veggies and tortilla chips dipped in most anything and whatever is left on my plate, including horrors of horrors, the entire whole fish carcass.

"I just took my dog to El Centro for her semi-annual checkup," a man dressed in a safari outfit pipes up.

"Oh, uh-huh. How much does a thing like that cost?" I casually wonder.

"Three hundred and eighty dollars."

"That include the travel expenses?" I inquire.

"No, that's just the vet."

"He find anything?"

"Clean bill of health," the conscientious owner replies.

I keep my mouth full of beer and do not mention the time I wormed Negra and she had trouble evacuating, looking up at me for a little help, and I pulled a three foot tape worm out by hand. That made her happy and we went romping off to the cantina to see what kind of botanas they were serving that day.

When you see Negra racing and barking with joy alongside the taxicab which is taking me home so that she can be there to greet me, many North Americans might take umbrage. The Mexicans think its wonderful.

Do you see why I love this Country?