A Dog’s life in Mexico

Background

In the pecking order of desirable animals in Mexico, dogs are on the bottom of the list. For the most part they are left to fend for themselves. Their survival skills include, stealing, begging, turning over trash cans, squeezing through fences, avoiding rocks and staffs, and foraging through yards.

Martin’s aunt Rafa has two, one is a pit bull and the other is a mutt. She makes food everyday to sell in the evening. The menu is always chicken, fried chicken, chicken enchiladas, chicken tacos, chicken tortas etc. While she cleans the chicken at the pila the skin and bones are thrown to the dogs. During dinner, the dogs are incessantly shooed away, only to sneak back at the soonest opportune moment. This is the diet for most dogs. So if the family isn’t eating much, the dog isn’t.

There is dog food available, both Pedigree and a generic brand made in Mexico. (Once we bought some of the generic dog food for Lucas, he wouldn’t eat it.) I don’t see many people feeding it to their dogs.

Several of the dogs in Los Bancos were limping and scrawny. This one came around every evening.

There were a couple of puppies that also came around. We fed them from our scraps. One became our watch dog. Only he watched to be sure no other dog came close enough to steal his meal ticket.

The female in the picture was the worst one in Los Bancos. I wondered what happened to her leg, was she hit by a car, kicked as a pup or mostly likely it was an injury that occurred while fighting for food with another dog. There are several limping dogs around the area. Most dogs seem fearful of people. I watched one lady throw several rocks at a dog she felt got to close, but I wasn’t sure if she missed on purpose.
Most dogs aren’t on leases nor are they restricted to their owners yards. There are no tags, don’t know if any of them ever get shots. The neighbors seem to know which dogs belong to whom. Just like the free range chickens and the burros in the street belong to someone. They have names that match them, Black, white, Cinnamon, or just Dog. No one seems to even care enough to give them real names. Even dogs in the pet stores look starved.

One thing I can’t figure out, is keeping the dog on the roof. I’ve been on a roof during the summer, my toes were burned through my tennis shoes. But sights like the one below are common in Mexico.

So if anyone from Mexico says “What’s up Dog?”, it may not be a compliment. To be called a dog here is an insult.

Now to begin our little story:

Week one

Returning home from grocery shopping, looking down the road from the house we see what looks like a dog with 4 birds following it. Martin and I look at each other in disbelief because we think they can’t be puppies, they would be too little to be out on the road.

So we drive down to the front of Casa De Paz, the orphanage next door to our house, and it is a mother dog with 6 puppies. She was in a panic. So far she had left two of her puppies by the side of the road and was running off into the field in front of our house. I asked one of the children playing in the yard if the puppies were theirs, and I was informed a car had dropped them off in a box.

I pick up the puppy furthest down the road. She is the smallest, her stomach is extruded, her ears are covered in fleas and she is sitting in shade under a tree. She couldn’t keep up with mom, she was the first to fall behind. The next puppy is a few yards closer to the house and has gone into the orphanage.
I grab the puppies and we put one in the field where the others are. Mom has run into the field but the puppies weren’t fast enough to keep up with her. But the smallest I want to keep. She is adorable, even with the fleas.

This is her next to Lucas’ chew toy, Squeaky Man IV.

Lucas feels a little threatened at first. He snaps at her when she gets near his food. But I had a little talk with him. I held the puppy to his face and pointed out how she was sooo much smaller and he needed to protect her. That he was her big brother now. Afterwards he let her eat from his bowl. (Lucas didn’t let Jewels, his protector and adopted mom, eat from his bowl.) You never know what a dog will understand.
We decided to feed her canned food and milk. She seemed too small to be on solid food alone.

She ate so ravenously I thought she would explode before she knew she was full. But to my surprise she stops after a few minutes. She eats more in about 20 minutes. This continues for most of the night. She seems pretty content to stay with us until night fall. When I put her in a box to keep her safe for the night, she whimpers and cries until she falls asleep, which took an hour. Only to wake in about 4 hours for a late night feeding.

The next day I take Lucas for a walk, and the puppy wants to go to. My first surprise was when we passed a dead bird, the puppy cracks through the bones and eats it without hesitation. My second surprise, she actually walks to the river and back. That little bit of food has done wonders. And maybe she is older than we think.

One the way back I see the mother, she is collecting all the puppies. She has five of them, I have her sixth and final one. She looks at me and I present the puppy to her, I tell her I am going to take good care of her. I hope she understands. (I think I saw this in a movie somewhere.) She just looks at me, but she doesn’t try to take the puppy from me.

We decide to call her Dulce. In means sweet or candy in Spanish.

That night her whining is almost incessant. Then around 11:00 at night I realize there are two dogs whining. When I open the back door, the mother is there. She had braved Lucas, slinked in the shadows around the house to get to her crying puppy. So I gave Dulce back to her, and escorted them out of the yard.

The next morning about an hour after we got up, Dulce comes trotting through the fence looking for breakfast.
The mother had taken her pups to the neighbor’s yard. She doesn’t seem to have a lot of milk. As I watch them nurse, the other pups push Dulce out of the way. She comes to me after several failed attempts to nurse, she knows where to get food, she isn’t a dumb dog.

Week Two

Dulce stays with the mom and pups less and less during the day. The neighbor has a mattress outside in the front yard. It makes a perfect bed for mom and the puppies through the chilly nights. I would hope that the neighbors would feed them, but this is the dog that stays in their yard.

It doesn’t look like he is getting much food does it?

It doesn’t take long before the mom and puppies learn that Dulce is getting food and follow her to our house. We don’t let them in the yard. They sneak in when they can. Lucas doesn’t like any of them. He snaps at them. They are still avoiding him, but their hunger drives them to try him a little more each day.
I repeat to myself” You can’t save them all. You can’t save them all.” And try to avoid looking at them. Meanwhile Martin makes a stew out of leftover soup and stale tortillas. He then takes a board and places it outside the fence. There he serves them tortilla soup. Every few days he also puts some dog food out there. So much for Mr. Toughguy.

Dulce seems to have a very bad case of cradle cap. I put oil on her, just to have her break out in a rash. I’m not really sure what to do. She is starting to scratch a lot. I could really use the internet right now to figure out what it is.

This is mom and 4 of the puppies. They are all showing bare spots and scratching. While waiting to take this shot, trying to get all 5 puppies in it, I swear the mom looked at me like I was nuts. It was as if to say
“Why on earth would you pick the smallest of the litter? I have 5 other puppies stronger and bigger, why didn’t you pick one of these? Or me? Why not feed me?”

Week 3

The mom and puppies spend the afternoons waiting for food, in the yard. I put food down for Lucas and all the puppies rush the bowl. They have no more fear. Mom has even less milk and isn’t very willing to let them nurse anymore. I am afraid Lucas is going to draw blood.

During the night Lucas acquires a lope eared rabbit. It looks like it might have been a pet. He tried eating it from the head down, but he only tasted fur, threw that up, and didn’t want anything to do with anymore. The next morning the puppies and their mom came, they tore into that rabbit. In a couple of hours only the fur was left. Everything, meat and bones was cleaned out. The fur, except for the head was intact.

Lucas disappears the next night. So now I wonder if he stole that rabbit. I’m really glad there isn’t any evidence left. So before someone shoots Lucas, we go through the extra effort to seal the fence. Martin puts in boards between the fence and concrete and I put extra wire in the holes that the puppies get in.

Lucas seems to calm down a lot. The only puppy he has to deal with is Dulce. He still lets her in his bowl, but now he starts to eat her food. She doesn’t leave anymore, she can’t, but she doesn’t cry about it either. She stays with Lucas. He lets her have a back corner of his sleeping area below the barbeque pit.

Dulce has mange, or scabies, very contagious around dogs. Lucas has gotten it too. He has a large bare spot on his tail from licking. It’s on the spot where Dulce will lay her head when she sleeps with him. All the dogs have it. The mom has almost no fur left on her hind parts, she has several open wounds from scratching.

The Mexican homemade treatment is used motor oil. I smear some all over Dulce, only Dulce licks the oil. That can’t be good. Right now in the Gulf millions is being spent to clean oil from animals and here I am dipping mine in oil. It seems so absurd.

I get several treatment remedies on the internet, Pine sol and shampoo, hydrogen peroxide and borax, and mayonnaise and vinegar. The internet has stories of dogs that understood they were being helped and sat through the treatments. I use the mayonnaise on Dulce first because of all the open sores, she squirms and squeals like a greased pig and is just as hard to hold on to. More mayonnaise ends up on me than on her. Then I poured the vinegar on her, without thinking, she lost it and almost leapt from the pila to the concrete floor 3 feet below.

For Lucas I use the shampoo and Pine sol, he has only had two baths in his entire life, he’s not going to just sit through this. After wrestling with him, while trying to keep his chain from wrapping around my ankles so he doesn’t break them, I maneuver him into a position to give him a bath. He lowers his head in submission with an occasional whimper as he gets bathed.
Week 4

Martin is working, so I take Lucas and Dulce out for a walk. The mother dog is across the street facing the house. Usually when we head out she stays close to Lucas, as if flirting with him. I figure she must really be sick. She doesn’t even move. When we get back she is still there.  When Martin gets home, I mention it and realize she hasn’t moved at all in hours.  Martin checks, she’s dead. She had been hit by a car or something. Martin hooks the body to the back of the truck and drags it to a gully down the road.

Then we realize we don’t see any of the other puppies. They moved to the neighbor at the side of us, so Martin goes and asks him. He tells Martin they all died and he put the bodies in the fire. I wonder if they all died or if they were killed. Our neighbor works on cars, maybe there was some antifreeze lying around, very deadly to dogs and people, did they drink poison? was it accidental or premeditated?

The next night the largest of the puppies, the only male, is whining at the gate. The night after that he returns with one of his sisters. Dulce and these two are the only ones surviving.

It seems a neighbor a few doors down is giving them a little bit of food. The female stays there most of the time. The male comes here more. He is on his own.

We tried letting him stay with us to give him more of a fighting chance. Maybe when he gets bigger he can fend for himself a little better. But he irritated Lucas, which wasn’t too bad, but when he pushed Dulce out from her bowl, (he had his own) he lost his welcome. I put him out. Dulce is my baby now, you don’t mess with my babies.

We also notice the sickly old dog that was next door is nowhere to be seen.

Week 5

We are still fighting the mites. And the male is still coming to the house, I had dipped him in oil once before. His mite infection wasn’t as bad as Dulce’s.

There is a garden in the neighbors yard where the mattress is. We were given permission by the owner to put a small vegetable garden there. I throw food over the fence for him. I can’t watch him starve. And I don’t what him to think it comes from me. (Later I realize how foolish that thinking is, my scent is all over the food.)

These are their pictures. Some of Dulce’s lost hair is returning and she’s gotten longer, she reminds me of the flying dog in Neverending Story. The puppies are all so different I wonder what kind of dog she really is. If anyone has any suggestions drop me a line.
Dulce and Lucas a quite a pair. When we go walking she wants to go with him, but there is no way for her to keep up with him. She has become a bouncing biting machine, she chews on his tail, his ears, and even plays tug o war with his lip. He does protest, but he doesn’t hurt her. She also chews on arms, fingers, toes, tablecloths, curtains, slippers and shoes, if it can fit in her mouth it gets bit.
Dulce, Lucas and Squeaky Man V

Week 6

We are still fighting mites. Dulce has gotten a lot better, Lucas is a lot worse. After a minute of protest he lets me do what I need to. This week I rinsed him without having him chained or otherwise restricted.

The female puppy shows up, she is more starved than the male. Apparently the residents of the house she is at don’t feed her. She starts throwing up on her own bile. I put out some food, but she is too weak to move. I don’t think she will live much longer. Even the male who is always near by, doesn’t always eat all the food I leave out. Once I put him on top of it, so he could find it, he still didn’t eat much. He is losing his battle to live as well.

It is a lot like being the narrator of an Animal Planet segment. You watch but don’t interfere. The only difference is this isn’t really the wild and this problem was created by men. I wonder if it would have been more merciful to feed the puppies antifreeze several weeks ago.

Week 7

Dulce has doubled in size.

Still fighting mites.

No sign of the female. Martin saw the male earlier in the week and gave him food and water.

But another puppy shows up, twice the size of Dulce, starving, with mange foraging in the garden for food. Also saw the old dog that was at the neighbors house. He looks much worse, as if that is possible.
There hasn’t been any rain for weeks. I wonder now if the problem with the dogs appetite is because of the water. Lucas lost a lot of weight and his appetite when he was drinking tap water. Without rain all the water puddles have dried up. Even the horses are starting to look emaciated.

Conclusion:

Something should be done about the way dogs are treated here. I agree but the true problem isn’t with how men treat dogs but how men view themselves.

In Mexican films and music, men complain about being treated as dogs or feeling like one. They toil in the fields all day, making only enough to get by. The boss always wants more, but doesn’t pay more. Then their wives or girlfriends leave them for someone else. Everyone wants to escape to a dream lifestyle like the ones portrayed on the television. Men use alcohol, women find other men.

If a man sees himself as a dog, will he help others? Or will he fight to survive, not caring what happens to anyone or anything?

If we view ourselves as created by God, being children of God, subduing the world, having authority over all the animals, and using that authority in a manner to please our Father, wouldn’t our actions toward animals and men demonstrate that belief?

Perhaps if we teach our children when they are young to care for animals, we would be teaching them they are responsible for animals. Then they would have a glimpse of who they truly are in the eyes of God.