

Profile

by Ann Lockley

Lorraine Chittock On A Mission From Dog

Dog people come in two types: those of us that were born into the lifestyle and those that immerse themselves into dogdom after coming to the realization that man's best friends really are our canine companions. Lorraine Chittock is one of the latter.

"I've been hustled by thousands of mutts," laughs Lorraine Chittock, nomad, writer, photographer, and dog lover. "Meandering across Latin America in an ex-surveillance van puts me nose to nose with an endless procession of four-pawed con-artists at gaslineras and supermercados. Watching their acts has reinforced my suspicion that, while cats are cunning, dogs excel at manipulation. Wending their way from the wild to our campfires over 10,000 years ago ensured them a better shot at outlasting the competition. To survive our modern-day streets, strays are forced to ratchet their tactics up several notches. It is no surprise that the term used for street dogs in countries such as Colombia is *los callejeros* o *criollos*, which translates literally as "natives of the road."

Native of the Road

Before she was six, Lorraine had travelled back and forth over the Atlantic twelve times with her British parents. At eighteen, she bought a motorcycle and travelled around California alone. The next year saw her trekking in Europe. After finishing a two-year degree in photography in California, she was back on the road, this time in Africa to photograph people. Three months later she was once again in California at the University of the Pacific to finish a four-year degree in Liberal Studies.

In 1991, after a year mentoring under Pulitzer Prize winning photographer Michael Williamson, she was back in Africa, this time working for *Egypt Today*, an American owned magazine based out of Cairo. For two years, Lorraine was on assignment in Sudan, Morocco, Pakistan, Jordan, and throughout Egypt. Her subjects were everything from ex-presidents to film directors, from fashion to open heart surgery.

Lorraine left the magazine to start teaching photography to expatriates and hosting gallery exhibits of her work. Between jobs she took on advertising assignments and produced greeting

cards with an Egyptian slant – camels chewing on Christmas trees and Santa riding a camel were two of the popular Christmas themed cards.

An opportunity arose the following year to accompany two hundred camels, eight Sudanese men, and American writer Angela Stephens on the Forty Days Road, an ancient caravan route across the Libyan Desert. *Shadows in the Sand – Following the Forty Days Road* became her first published book.

When in Rome . . .

Lorraine's first animal love had always been the feline and the free roaming cats in Egypt became the theme for her second book, *Cairo Cats*. Now in its third printing, *Cairo Cats* allowed Lorraine to become an 'urban wildlife tracker' and incorporated her many haunting images with text from Arabian and Egyptian folklore.

Finally settling down at the age of thirty-eight, Lorraine married and moved to Kenya. The extreme isolation she felt from living a mile from where Out of Africa was filmed was eased by the befriending of two neighborhood dogs, Dog and Bruiser.



A move from the suburbs to the edge of a game park sparked *On a Mission from Dog – A Woman's Walking Adventures in Africa*. Her walks with the dogs continued but now in a wild part of the country where nature rules and a leisurely stroll can include spitting cobras, warthogs, or big cats. Her need for the nomadic life convinced her to leave her husband behind and pack her 1983 Land Rover for life on the road – but instead of alone, she was a pack of two with Dog riding shotgun.

Across the Pond

After twelve years living overseas, it was time for Lorraine to return home. With both dogs, she jumped in a Jeep and continued her nomadic lifestyle but this time in the United States.

“After two years, 30,000 miles, and twenty-two states, the pack headed south in a 30-year-old Chevy van, once used by the Arizona police department as a surveillance vehicle. Purchase price? Seven hundred and fifty dollars,” smiles Lorraine. She travelled through Mexico and five other countries before reaching a fishing village in Costa Rica where she would stop for a year.

A dog advocate of a different breed, Lorraine believes that a common problem in North America is how much we restrict natural interaction between dogs.

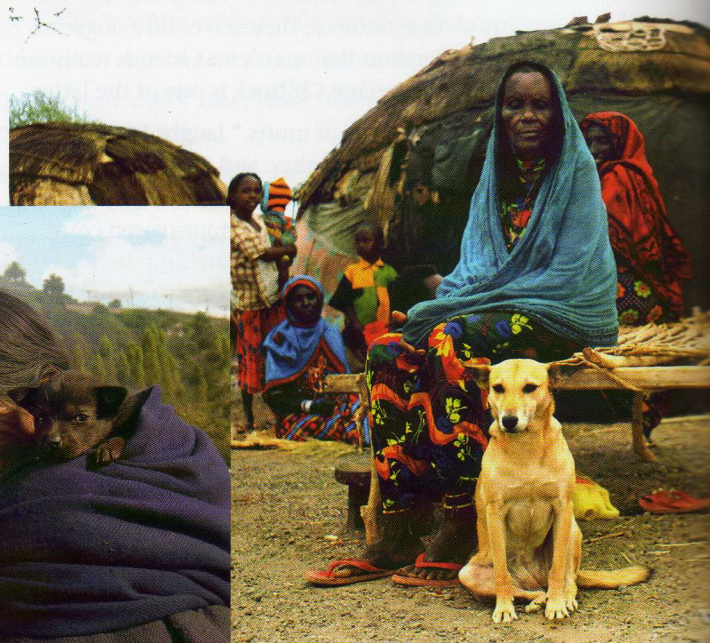
“Unlike canines in the Northern Hemisphere, who live within strict property lines,” explains Lorraine, “many Latin dogs are allowed to come and go at will. Gringos often consider this irresponsible ownership. A dog’s opinion might differ.

“During my first months in Mexico before heading further south, I was stunned by how few people used leads, until I learned most dogs naturally walk to heel. On quiet streets, and with strict instructions, I cautiously began doing the same with my Kenyan-born canines. Wandering off-lead gave

Dog and Bruiser the freedom to sniff dogs they liked, and avoid those they didn’t. Four years of nose to groin contact with hundreds of Hispanic hounds resulted in only one scratch on each of Dog and Bruiser’s face. After our Latin tour, America’s streets seemed devoid of furry beasts except those being yanked away from us by owners hoping to avoid potential conflict with my hounds. The result? Timid or overly aggressive dogs without the skills needed to lead socially fulfilling lives.

“Shortly after my mutts were unleashed, I realized I had the unique opportunity to learn how locals felt about strays by taking the collars off mine,” and since Dog and Bruiser have the pointy ears, generic coloured fur, and overall look of any street dog, Lorraine was allowed a glimpse into how stray dogs were treated.

“While they wandered incognito down calles in Belize and through crowded tiendas in Bolivia, I followed close behind, observing first hand how street dogs were perceived by the treatment mine received. Women crying, “O mi amor! Precioso!” and gestures of kindness were tarnished by rocks thrown in their direction and old women wielding canes—methods used to keep curious canines at bay in Kenya too.”



Similar to North American perceptions, Lorraine found that Latins also distinguish between purebred and mutts.

"The haves and have-nots of the canine world," she laughs. "While onlookers go gaga over a fluffy Maltese, Dog and Bruiser are often viewed as common mutts. One evening in Copacabana, Bolivia, a young man trying to impress his girlfriend assumed Bruiser was "just" a stray, and kicked him. He was unprepared for my verbal assault.

"By comparison, in the twelve Latin countries we've toured I've witnessed countless individuals leaving bowls of water and food outside their doors for strays. Many others offer time, money, and resources, or donate their hard-earned medical skills to assist underprivileged dogs. Some families adopt far more canines into their household than might be considered sensible, knowing strays confront daily dangers."

In the Trenches of Animal Welfare

A proponent of spay and neuter programs as well as non-surgical birth control for strays, Lorraine was a keynote speaker at the *Alliance for Contraception in Cats & Dogs* symposium, bringing,

as one spectator wrote, "the humanity of the animal world to those of us who have not had the same opportunity to travel to the corners on earth!"

In Ushuaia, Chile, the southernmost city in the world, she came across a 'revolutionary method of animal population control' and a city where there were no stray animals. *Los Mutts*, Lorraine's soon to be available book based on her four years traveling in Central and South America, tells the stories in words and pictures of our four-legged friends in Latin America.

"Here in Chile we have a saying about dogs,' a gas station manager told me," explains Lorraine, "while rumpling up the fur of one - "Mejor amigo de hombre". Man's best friend. Not only are our sayings identical, but both cultures have assigned specific roles to our canine companions. At one end of the scale, dogs scavenge on scraps and hump in public; at the other they're programmed automatons that sit and stay on command. Perhaps a wider middle ground is needed, one where the animals who've given us companionship and guarded us for over 10,000 years are given both freedom and protection from dangers. Only then can we claim to be best friends with man's best friend." 🐾

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