

## Walking the Dogs in the Canyon

*by Diane Holman*

The day is early, green and fresh and lovely. I can't wait to be off on my adventure with the dogs. I lift the leashes from their hooks in the broom closet and click them onto three collars. Once outdoors, Hecate and Hera and Beauregard pull me to the car, where I open the back door so they can pile in.

I pull out of the driveway and drive down Calle Zacatel, already alive with people. There are children in uniform, walking to school. There is the housewife watering the dirt road to cut down on the dust. There is the fellow bringing the cow up to his mother to be milked.

I pull onto the paved street, shift into low gear and begin the ascent into the world at large. Hecate pokes her head outside the back window as far as it can go, taking in the intoxicating air. I breathe deeply, too, and drive with an abandon that I can only indulge at 6:15 in the morning.

The dogs and I weave and wind past children and other dogs and the women who walk every morning until we finally reach the main road to central Atenas. At the bus stop there, many people are already congregated. I wave to them and they wave to me—out of sheer exuberance, I imagine, for what else is there to do with this incredible morning, this air and light and promise?

The dogs and I hurtle along to Vista Atenas, where we climb the mountain and pull into Julie and Michael's driveway. The dogs wait for me as I shut off the motor, open the door and walk around the car to get them. Beauregard—still new to the routine—balks at jumping out of the car, but eventually we are on our way to the backyard. I am propelled by the dogs, of course, who sniff and poke ecstatically at the prospect of THE WALK. Once on the back lawn, I unhook them from their leashes and they RUN. Beauregard makes a mad dash to the dog chow still remaining in Mookie and Susie's bowls. Hera and Hecate head for the hills.

I greet Julie and Michael and Carol who is there with Maya and—sometimes—A.J., who is there just for the walk. We grab our walking sticks and set off down into the canyon. The morning wraps itself around us as we descend along the path. Down, down we go, past trees of remarkable bearing and vines that we say Tarzan could have swung on and then over the bridge with rainwater beneath, water that Hera wallows in, rolling over and over in complete contentment. Eventually we begin to ascend, and Mookie and Susie and Maya and Hera and Hecate and Beauregard begin to regroup around us, falling over themselves, nipping and nudging, full of utter gratitude for it all. For a time there are only humans and dogs and trees and sky. Then Julie takes my walking stick and Michael collars Hera and I leash my three dogs and walk them to the car.

I drive home with a happy heart.

