

The business session on the way back from Fort Ross failed to make an impression on Young Whiskers or my brother Walter. They showed not the slightest inclination to entertain my complaint of the way our account was being handled to take advantage of complimentary wine and subsidized beverages at outings and cocktail parties.

Tried using as a parable an old story of a couple of racehorse guys, neighbors at the old ranch, who used to partner on every expense at the New Mexico tracks, from stall rent to hotel rooms. (Been a long time since I told this story, so perhaps it's forgotten). Every night the one named Hack bought a quart of whiskey out of the pot. Every night Fred, who didn't drink, poured his half of the whiskey down the lavatory.

Another tender spot I felt as a one-third sponsor of fine vintages and non-participant in the drinking of fine vintages, was that the stuffy stewards never once recommended a California wine. Drive-in groceries sell a California wine under the brand name for "Rooster" in Spanish or Italian, one for eight to 10 bucks a gallon.

It's easy to open; street guys in San Francisco just step onto the sidewalk and unscrew the lid. "Rooster"

drinkers don't make a big show using a corkscrew or draping a white napkin over the arm, either. Cannot recall an occasion before or after my dry date of hearing a cork pop worth \$40 for the explosion.

Next difficulty involved drinking, too - gas guzzling by the rental heap. Remember that back at the San Francisco airport, Whiskers received a discount on the rental car based on a family connection in Florida. Too bad this hitherto unheard-of member of our family worked for a car rental outfit instead of a hang glider company.

Six gallons of regular gasoline cost \$15 at discount stations. (Keeping a full tank decreases evaporation). Idling the motor waiting in the lines to reach the pumps burned one gallon every 30 minutes, or \$2.50 worth of gas. Counting rest stops and toll stations, our down time expense equaled our motion time expense.

Whiskers did all the driving. Refused to cut the engine to coast downhill. Made me wonder if the \$45 a barrel crude he sells from his oil business in Texas is tied to his mysterious connections in Florida in the car rental business.

Might have been, too, that the carbon monoxide fumes and nicotine withdrawal affected his behavior. He quit smoking three months previous to the trip. In the heavy

traffic leading in from the airport, the air smelled better, but somewhat similar to the cigarettes he used to smoke. Several times en route, he inhaled deep enough to loosen his seatbelt.

Another supposition is that Whiskers allowed the managing of the pot to go to his head, like, without caucus or consensus, sending a mutual friend flowers after surgery in a San Francisco hospital. Had to remind Mr. Whiskers that patients in California hospitals look out the window to the sight of so many budding trees and flowering vines that they grow so tired of flowers, they order the nurses to draw the blinds.

Reminded of President Reagan's affinity for jelly beans and his attachment to California, I suggested we send our friend a big bag of jelly beans. Told him the last flowers I priced in Texas cost 15 bucks delivered to the hospital. Be no jump at all to find the same ones at twice as much on the Coast.

Also, timing is important in sending flowers to hospital rooms. Need to know if the patient is critical, and how critical. Might save duplication by waiting and sending a spray to the widow or the widowed after the fact, if you get what I mean. A guy lying under an oxygen tent gasping for breath doesn't need to be exposed to hay fever.

Doesn't matter if his jaws are wired shut, he can still dissolve a jelly bean on his tongue.

Took time to understand why Walter remained calm and non-committal. One morning the reason hit. Walter's flight home was earlier than Whiskers' and my return flight. By departing San Francisco earlier, he had better connections in Dallas back to San Angelo. Once home, his impenetrable answering service and his sanctuary on the university campus forestalled any contact with the results of a wild spending spree in California.

Though I never knew more about Hack and Fred's deal than splitting the whiskey, I wish now I had seen a settlement sheet. Haven't heard much from Whiskers here at home. Goat shearing and lamb shipping will hold his attention until the credit card bill arrives. Faced with the reality of his trade, he's going to wonder where the idea came from to throw all that dough around in the flower shop.