

# Mufflers and Guardian Angels

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By Are We There Yet



Photo credit: Forest Service [www.fs.usda.gov](http://www.fs.usda.gov)

An ice bank ripped off my muffler.

At first it was just a rattling sound. Being the great mechanic that I am, I fixed this problem by turning up the radio, and bingo! The rattling was gone. This worked until I had to muscle through a particularly stubborn snow bank blocking our way out of a parking spot. A snow bank that came up to my waist. And that was covered in ice, cementing it, and everything around it, to the ground.

When no amount of banging or ice-picking made this block of ice move, I decided we would simply go over it. Or plow through it. Which we did. That's when the rattling turned into a frightening clanking sound, even louder than the radio on full blast. I pulled over to the side of the road, grabbed the flashlight, and got out of the car. Turned out I didn't need the flashlight, it was big enough to see even with no light.

There, on the ground, attached by only a thin piece of pipe, was a large chunk of metal.

"Mama, what's that?" asked the kids.

"That's our muffler" I said.

"Why is it on the ground, isn't it supposed to be attached?"

Silence. "Yeah."

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“How bad could it be?” I thought, “It’s still sort of attached.” I looked around hopefully, thinking maybe a guardian angel would somehow magically appear and fix everything. An angel with a muffler pipe and a tool kit, for example. I waited. It didn’t happen. I decided I’d just drive very carefully. At least we had a muffler. So for the remainder of the day, it was the kids’ job to look out the back window and make sure we didn’t leave the muffler behind.

I soon realized that driving 5 km per hour on the side of the road with my warning lights flashing and the kids shouting “muffler alert!” was not a good long-term plan, so we drove – slowly – to our neighbourhood garage.

I love this garage. As long as you pay cash, the price gets cut almost in half. They can fix or patch anything for not much money. Unless, I found out, you’re talking about a muffler.

“Oh”, he said as we pulled in, “that’s bad.” Not a good start. This was followed by even worse, as he examined the underside of the car and extrapolated: “It’s really bad.” My garage guy is not a man of many words. They waste time, he explained to me once. Better to spend the time working.

The price of the muffler alone, not including labour, was close to \$700 – approximately ten thousand times over my budget.

“What I am supposed to do”, I said calmly wailing.

“No problem”, he said. “I’ll fix it so you can drive”, and he took out a piece of rope and tied up my muffler.

“Problem solved!” I thought, and drove away.

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The noise was deafening, but we quickly learned to keep the radio on at full volume and speak really, really loudly. The muffler was noisy, but we had one.

A few days later, we pulled into a gas station.

I was putting my card in the pump, when the guy at the pump next to us leaned over and his mouth dropped open. Then he turned pale, and said: “You know your front pipe is broken?” “Yeah, I know”, I said, looking at his shiny black Porsche. “It’s okay, it’s held up by a thick piece of rope.”

“But there’s exhaust going straight into your car, and all the windows are closed” he gasped. “Quick, open your windows. Here’s the name of a good garage. Go there, go wherever you like, but for God’s sake get it fixed, don’t drive unless you have to, and keep your windows open.”

I was driving around in a box of carbon monoxide. My kids freaked, and I pretended not to. “It’s okay”, I yelled, “Don’t worry! We’ll just open the windows and then we’ll get it fixed.”

Except it was 28 below and the windows were frozen shut. Ok, plan B. The doors still open. I’ll just drive with my door open, and then we’ll get lots of air in the car. Buckle up everyone, we’re going home.

Driving with the door open works as long as you drive in a straight line. Then I turned a corner. Open doors, I discovered, rip out of your hand when you go around a corner. Not wanting to lose a door along with my muffler, I pulled it, and almost got yanked out of the car by centrifugal force.

“Mama!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” screamed the kids.

“Not to worry”, I shouted back, “I’ve got my seatbelt on, everything’s fine, I’m still in the car! See, that’s why we wear seatbelts! Safety first!” I’m very good at reassuring.

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The next day, we were at the muffler repair shop, the one recommended by Mr. Shiny Porsche. I wasn't sure we should stay, or even go in, as we were met at the entrance by a very large man wearing a glaringly bright red muffler specialty shop shirt, flanked by two dogs. Each dog came up to my shoulders. It was a little alarming. But as I had already spoken to him over the phone and worked out a deal for \$330, we stayed. He looked at the car. The underside of the car was completely destroyed. He gave me a new price that matched total destruction. A much bigger price. A deal at only \$750. Plus tax. I looked at my kids and told them we were walking home.

The garage guy looked at me. He looked at my kids. He told me to wait. He went back into the garage, and 15 minutes later came back out again, with yet another new price: \$100.

"But how?" I asked. "How can you possibly do that? Would it be safe? Would it even work?"

He said: "There are always two ways to do something – the cheap way and the expensive way. Both ways work. One just a little better than the other. But you can't drive around in carbon monoxide."

"I like the cheap way", I said.

"I thought you might", he smiled. Then he put cartoons on for the kids on the oil-covered TV in the corner, and disappeared back into the garage.

An hour later, we were driving back down the highway with a wonderful new muffler. He took out an extra part, a fancy bit that completely absorbs all sound. It rumbles now a little more than the original muffler, but it's safe. He sent us off with a diagram explaining what he did, instructions to the girls to do their homework, and another smile.

My guardian angel did come by, I just didn't recognize him at first. To all the guardian angels out there, thank you. They work a lot better than trying to drive with the door open.

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