

THE SECRET OF A FINE DIY PROJECT? DO IT TOGETHER!

TEAL ROWE recounts the story of replacing the radiator on Peggy La Cerra's old Miata.

I MET PEGGY LA CERRA (*Lah-Chair-ah*) in the dining area of a local health food store. Like me, she was there for a weekly Italian conversation class. We were both new to this group of enthusiastic Italophiles. For more than a year, we spent one hour a week in this group, expanding our Italian vocabularies. Then, whenever we'd meet in town, we'd strain to communicate in Italian, as though we were building a transatlantic bridge with our efforts. That was the beginning of what has become *un'amicizia con gusto!*: a gung-ho friendship.



Over the years, Peggy and I have shared our knowledge and skills. I've listened to her passionately share her understanding of the human mind. (Peggy frequently writes about neuroscience for S+H.) Our talks have broadened my mind and clarified my thinking. In turn, I've shared knowledge gained from a lifetime of roaming the mountains that surround the Ojai Valley. I've taught her how to traverse narrow shale paths on the edges of cliffs, how to identify edible plants, where to search for water, how to track animals, and how to find "honey in the rock." We've supported each other through the isolation and mental strain of the pandemic and set and achieved goals after her recovery from covid-induced pneumonia ("Let's summit Chief Peak by September!"). So, I was not surprised when Peggy asked me if I would help her put a new radiator into her 33-year-old Miata.

If you've spent any time in Ojai, California, you may have spotted Peggy in this little red sports car tagged with the plate "UCREATU." She acquired the car via cosmic coincidence when it was a mere 22 years old and in near-perfect condition. Now, a third of a century post production, the car's original radiator was in its last days. Tired of filling it up and daunted by the cost to have a new one put in, Peggy wanted to take on this DIY challenge. "Teal,

would you help me put in a new one? All we have to do is take off two bolts and change it out! It'll be easy!"

Though I've been around machines and am hands-on with a project, I've never really been a great mechanic. A bit hesitant, I said, "Uh, I guess so. Sure!"

The night before my date with Peggy and her Miata, I watched the YouTube video she'd sent me and made a step-by-step checklist. I created a station in my yard, laid out the tools I thought we'd need for the job, and fashioned a makeshift car lift by spacing two cement bricks roadster-width apart for her to roll the car upon so we could get to the radiator plug.

It took about five minutes before we were "off list." As Peggy drove up to the bricks for the ascent, the car just shoved them through the gravel. I replaced the bricks, and on the second approach I yelled, "Give it some gas!" It was a no go. And on the third approach, I shouted, "NOW!" There was no way that car was going to climb those bricks. So much for the home-made hoist and the carefully prepared station.

A new idea emerged. "Peggy, we are going to have to straddle the car over the culvert to get under it." So she backed the car over the ditch, and we prepared to start again.

The first task on the list was the easiest: Remove drain plug and empty the radiator. Nope. The plug threads were stripped. Argh! "Peggy, will you call the mechanic?" I felt defeated and we had barely started.

(Note: The mechanic Peggy had on speed dial was Bill Erickson, my former husband, who crossed the Gobi Desert in a 1928 Buick Truck. I knew he could help!)

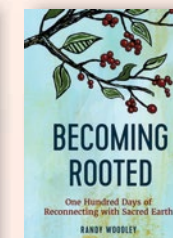
Simple!" Bill said. "Just cut the hoses,"

"Okay, I'll get the loppers."

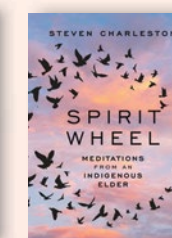
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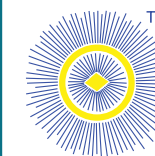


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At this point, I reflected on the YouTube video and Peggy’s cheerleading before the project started:

“Two bolts! It’ll be easy!”

I don’t know why I thought that one simple slice would sever the hose like a dead tree branch. Well, it didn’t. At this point, Peggy asked me, “Would you like to stop and have tea?”

The sun was getting high, I was sweating. I wanted so badly to follow a step-by-step list, just like the YouTube video had laid out; to calmly use logic and leverage. This was chaos. My frustration level was rising, and we were on Step 2 of a 13-step list! The project felt doomed, and I could sense that Peggy’s confidence was dipping, too. “Yes, the tow truck is just a call away. And, no, please don’t call!” I now wanted to do this thing if it was the last thing I did on earth.

I began to channel my inner mechanic: What we need is a sharper tool. I know! Grandma’s bonsai saw! It was super small and razor sharp. “No tea for me!” I ran and found the saw. It sliced right through the hose.

Antifreeze sprayed out the hose into the dish pan basin below. Then came my neighbor. We live in a close-knit community, and we care about each other. On her way to town, seeing us hovering around the car, she asked, “What are you doing? Do you need anything?”

Both Peggy and I were sort of proud to say, “We’re changing a radiator! We’re good.”

“Right on! Bad asses!” she said with a smile, and off she went.

We steeled ourselves to pry off the petrified hoses fused to the engine pipe from decades of heat. When our

reddened hands failed, we got creative with a hammer and a two-by-four. By this time, I was really feeling weak. The sun was glaring down on us. We were sweating. And no, I was not giving up.

Between the two of us, we somehow jiggled the tightly knit hoses off. (When I think back, I have no idea how.) We used white ink to put a guideline on the electrical plug to the fan so we could put it back just how we found it. And we finally undid the two rusty bolts that were marinating overnight in industrial-strength rust solvent and numbered them for correct replacement. The old radiator was free!

At this point, I reflected on the YouTube video and Peggy’s cheerleading before the project started: “*Two bolts! It’ll be easy!*”

With the radiator resting on the ground, Peggy easily disconnected the fan. We numbered the screws. Now, for these C clips. They looked easy to snap off in the video, but these were rusted on. I didn’t want to break them or have them spring off into the brush. Better safe than sorry. So, we drove down to the auto parts store in Ojai. No, they didn’t sell these clips. I asked a guy with a beard if he would come out to see what I have going on.

He came out and looked. “Oh, easy!” He walked back to get a screwdriver and popped them right off—just like the guy in the video!

The fan and bushings were ready for the new radiator. (Wow, it is light and clean! And, whoa! Silicone hoses! Swanky!) We had everything marked:

the direction the hoses needed to be on, the sites where the screws and bolts belonged. “We’re home free!” I thought. And we were. Almost.

It was time to attach the new hoses to the engine. *These must be two sizes too small!* The fit seemed impossibly tight, and before getting them fully in place, they kinked. (I knew from somewhere in my travels that this was not good.) Breathe. By this time, it was late afternoon. This had become an all-day project.

We got one hose barely on and another to attach that’s all way down at the bottom of the engine. We could barely reach it, no less squeeze it into place. I felt stumped. We were exhausted.

My neighbor returned. “Oh honeys! You’re still here? What can I do? It’s been five hours! How long does it take a radiator shop to do this? Isn’t it just a sit-and-wait-for-it type of job?”

I lost my edge; Peggy wrestled with the hoses without luck. My neighbor jumped out of the car and said, “What goes where?” She reached in, grabbed the hose, and snapped it in place—and it’s up to the ridge on the pipe where it belonged, no kink, no space!

She twisted on the second hose, and *voila!* Success! After my neighbor left, Peggy remarked that she has very long arms. That’s because she’s a supermodel. A month before she was twisting radiator hoses onto the Miata, my neighbor, Shalom Harlow, was modeling Ralph Lauren haute couture at the Met Gala.

We lined up the electric plug, tightened the bolts, filled up the radiator, and let it burp while the engine ran to make sure it was full. This part was as easy as the YouTube video made it look.

The sun was getting low. It’s taken all day. We’re spent. But it was another great adventure for the books and *ne vale la pena*: so well worth it.

Teal Rowe is an evolutionary astrologer and glass blower, and has co-piloted road races around the world.

Prosthetic Heart

Verse:

Well we went down to the battlefield and had ourselves a war
Now that the smoke has cleared you need to be reassured
Well you know I’d love to help you honey, but my chest is full of shards
I think I need a prosthetic heart

Chorus:

Prosthetic heart, that’s just exactly what I need
Prosthetic heart, to keep on tickin’ no matter how much I bleed
I think I’ll take myself on down to good old Walter Reed
And say please help me sir, I’m a heart amputee

Verse:

They say that when you lose a limb you can feel it tingle in the air
And while I’d like to shower the love, I still don’t really care
It’s hard to feel that special feeling when my heart’s not even there
I’ve gotta get a prosthetic heart

(Chorus)

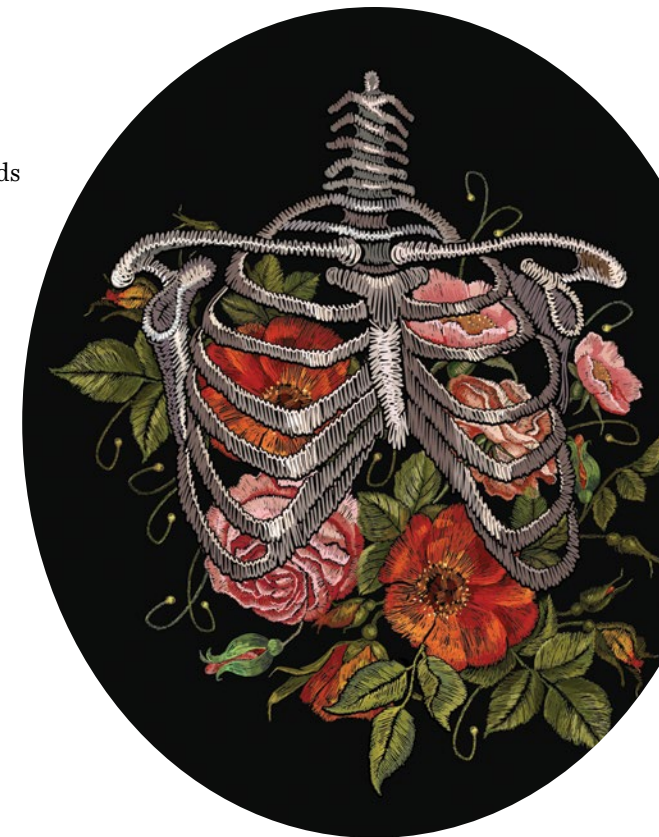
Verse:

I’m gonna do some mental work, some physical therapy
The healing time’s uncertain getting back to the old me
This heart will be a benefit, you’ll have to wait and see
I’m thankful for the technology

(Chorus)

I said please help me sir I’m a heart amputee

—JOAN CAMPBELL



Joan Campbell is a singer-songwriter, venue manager, house concert host, and mom based in southern Oregon. She writes songs with bittersweet themes and embraces everyday delights. She recently sang this cheerful-sounding song at Roxy Ann Vineyard in Medford, Oregon. It seemed appropriate for the issue, and we were able to get a recording. You can listen at spiritualityhealth.com/prosthetic-heart