As we took the left and began travelling west on route 66, I sunk back into my seat as the opening lick of “life is a highway” by Rascal Flatts faded in on my Bluetooth speaker. The sun came in from the back of the bus, casting orange-gold rays of light as the scenery quickly transitioned from arid desert to vital pine wood.

I was in the middle of Arizona, riding in a tour bus with a group of friends from churches around New England. We were there to attend Nazarene Youth Conference, a once-every-four-years get-together for high schoolers from Nazarene churches across America. While we were in the southwest, we had planned for a week of travelling and sightseeing. This was the first day there, and we were already hours behind schedule.

The day started smoothly, and the group departed from Boston on the nearly seven-hour plane ride that would deliver us to Arizona around 11:00 am Pacific Time. From there, the plan was to take two tour busses to the small town of Williams, AZ, the inspiration for the fictional town of Radiator Springs in the Cars movies.

The busses had made it nearly halfway when the front bus pulled over to the side of the road. The engine had overheated in the scorching 114-degree sun. Our bus dropped us off at the nearest rest stop and went back to pick up the stranded passengers.

As I got off the bus, I was met by bone-dry, blazing wave of heat. The fiery, parched, and dead desert extended past the parking lot in every direction. Short shrubs and cacti peppered the sandy tan landscape with green splotches. We neared the building and our shoes began to stick to the grey, worn asphalt. Nearby, there were some small chain stores that sold to the nearby town. As we entered the gas station store, we felt a crisp breeze of tamed air rush at us, trying to escape into the midday heat.

One item I had taken comfort in through the trip thus far was the detailed itinerary that was crafted for us. I had figured that the trip would proceed just as the pink paper in my pocket showed. However, it was the first day, and there had already been a delay. About an hour after arriving, we learned that the backup bus that the company sent also broke down on the way, throwing our plans even more off track. I needed a walk. I wandered around the small store, but I needed more space. I exited the building and began to pace lightly near the front of the store. I went back inside and sat at one of the tables in the subway, rapidly tapping my feet. I knew that eventually the bus would arrive, but I couldn’t shake the nervousness of not having a plan, the fear of missing the festivities planned for Williams.

After five hours of being stranded at the rest stop, a bus arrived to pick us up, and we were on our way. I put in my earbuds and listened to “On the Road Again” by Willie Nelson, thankful to finally have some semblance of a timetable, albeit five hours delayed from the original. Soon after, we passed Flagstaff, where we took the left onto historic route 66.