

Part 4: With Visuals

Those first months were absolutely exhausting. By November, I was tired – of everything.

At the time, I'd been working eight-days-straight for ten hours a day pulling weeds and running chainsaws through the same kinds of ugly, thorny, poisonous mesquite branches we had been trimming back for weeks.

Arizona's population wakes up earlier than that of any other state. If you work outdoors, the midafternoon heat will destroy you.

So, every day, we'd watch the sun rise.

We even beat the birds to it. Without fail, I figured around a quarter to seven, we'd see Tucson's entire native bird population wake up, stretch their wings, and fly around for something like twenty minutes.

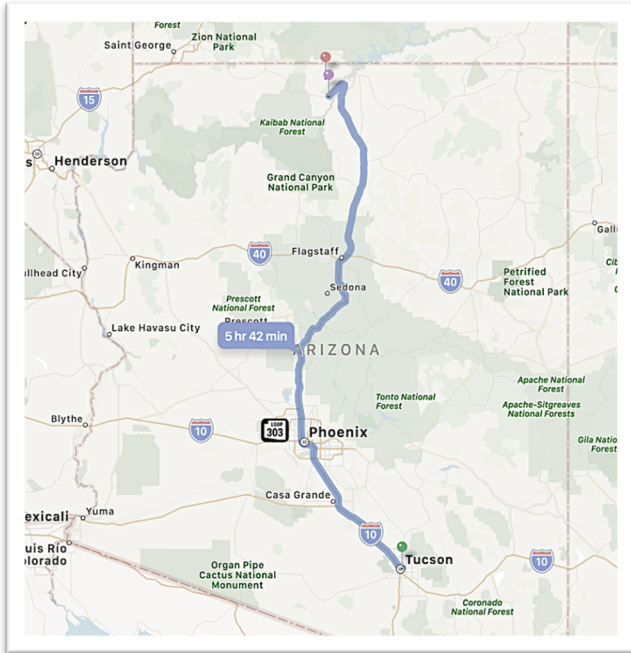
That happened to be around the same time we'd do our morning push-ups and lower-back stretches.



While I remember these moments fondly now, back then, the pressures of real life were starting to get to me.

I was tired of dealing with my annoying new roommates and daily stretch & safety meetings. I was fed up with social distancing and having a temp gun pointed at my head twice a day. I was sick of Trump's bullshit conspiracy theories and pointless statewide recounts. I wasn't dying to go home, but I was itching to get a little further away from real life.

I really needed a vacation.



So, when word came in that our organization was giving all of its employees the week off for Thanksgiving, I decided I wanted to get as far away from civilization as possible. I packed my car and, with a little help from Rudy and his dozens of maps, I was on my way to one of the most remote section of desert in State of Arizona – the North Rim of the Grand Canyon.

With the Coronavirus surging at upwards of one-hundred-seventy-five-thousand cases a day, traffic was light.

Because of the state of emergency, the park's East Gate had been closed to vehicle traffic, and all of the park's facilities had been shut down. The only way to get to the Canyon, then, would be from the North – coming in from Utah.

This made for a pleasant trip. I didn't see a soul after Flagstaff.



I eventually did make it to the Canyon but didn't stick around long. It was getting late, and I needed rest.

The spot I picked sat in the center of a place called House Rock Valley, one of the many flatlands created by the Colorado's floodplain, in the foothills of the Vermillion Cliffs.

A little further upstream is the Marble Canyon, and a little further downstream, cut out of the seven-point-three-thousand-foot mega-mesa that is the Kaibab Plateau, is the Grand Canyon. There were apparently buffalo once, though all I've ever seen there are vultures and dogs.



I remember wondering what they thought they were waiting for. As far as I knew, I was the only living thing for miles.

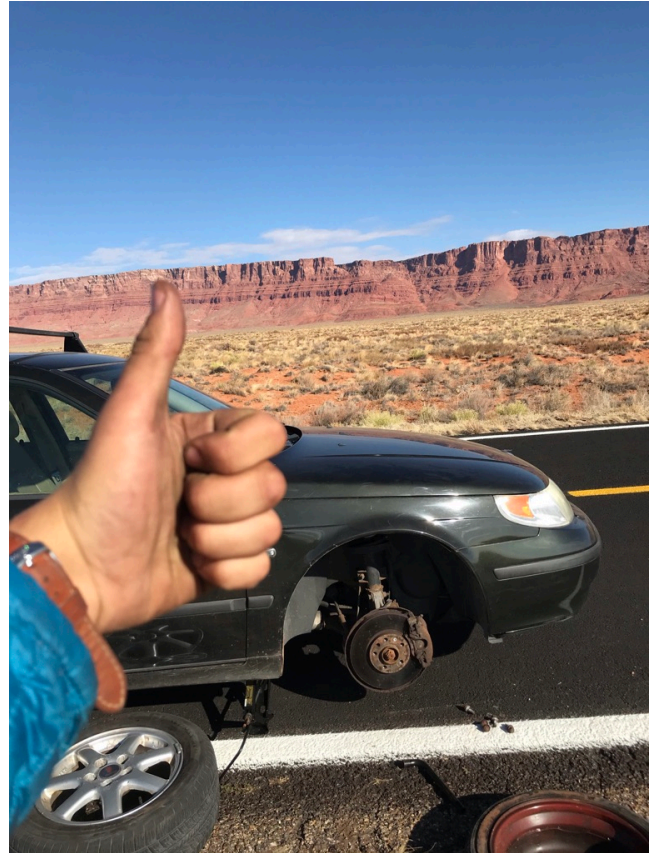
But I couldn't blame them. With no internet, no cell service, and no roommates - I happily defenseless. Better yet, I was alone.

I found the peace I'd been looking for at camp that night on the side of the road smoking joints and listening to Joan Baez.



I woke up with next morning with a flat tire and a vengeance. On Thanksgiving Day, of all days, I was stranded, completely alone, in the most remote traffic corridor in the Navajo Nation without cell service. The whole situation reeked of the most frustrating kind of irony.

So much for a relaxing weekend alone.



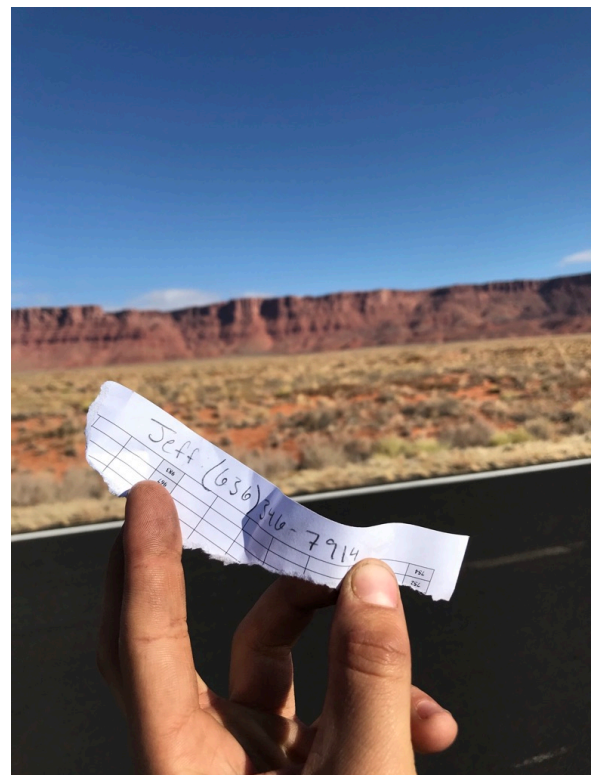
I waited for two hours sticking my thumb out on the side of the road before I found my ride.

Mary worked at the Canyon, Jeff was a commissioned ecologist surveying for California Condors, and Show-Low was a pretty black lab with big, beautiful eyes.

It turns out they were the only people I would speak to that day. It turns out I was alright with that. I still needed a break.

I still had a hole in my tire, but that was fine. I was exactly three-hundred-ninety-five miles from the house, and the leak seemed slow. As long as I stopped to top off with air at every gas station I passed for the next six hours, I'd make it home in one piece.

I pulled in eleven hours later to find my house filled with about twenty drunk people and several dogs. Rudy was having a party.





Thanksgiving Day
11/26/2020