

The most memorable road trip that I have been a part of took place during Thanksgiving Break, in the state of Arizona, where my family and I visited a close family friend for the first time in almost a decade. This trip marked my first visit to Arizona ever so to me, it added to the factor of excitement which I relied on for any trip that I would be a part of. I relied on this factor because when I was younger (less than double-digits in regards to my age), I traveled North with my parents to bounce between New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, but I was an incessant punk that complained about the smallest things, which in the end, tainted the overall trip with a bad lens. A few years later, I went back to New York for a wedding with a more mature mindset, and I found myself more excited to actually observe my surroundings, take photos, and not be a nuisance. It is important to note how vital the anticipation of a trip can impact the outcome of every event that follows, so with that mindset applied, my family landed in Phoenix, AZ in the early evening.

Upon arrival, we went to a place that offered car rental services. I was confused as to why we simply did not just order an Uber or wave down a taxi to get to our friend's house, but my father informed me that the service that we were requesting had more to offer than just going from the airport to the house; the service would allow us about a week's worth of time to rent a car of our choice which granted us the opportunity to visit different parts of Arizona. What made this so surprising for me was the fact that I was under the impression that we would stay in Phoenix for the break, even though my parents gave no other hints or indicators that it would be the only city we would visit. This, of course, made me more thrilled and I felt my original excitement significantly increase. There was a small back-of-the-mind thought that I had before learning that we would visit different cities, and it was basically that I would more than likely get bored around the third or fourth day of the trip because of how intensely my parents tour places, leaving us with half a week's worth of simply staying inside and doing nothing. This thought was

immediately eliminated because I knew how hard it would be for my parents to even attempt expending our time and energy visiting the individual cities my parents planned for us to see.

My father had the most influence on deciding which vehicle we would use to traverse throughout Arizona. He used what he called common sense and settled for a hybrid Jeep Willys 2023. His decision was backed by the obvious: when you drive around Arizona, you will encounter changes in elevation and you will also need a reliable car that can go through different types of terrain. When we were introduced to the Willys, I was impressed with its presentation. It was mainly dark gray and had subtle blue highlights on the tow hooks which were on the front of the Jeep. It was sleek, and when we drove the Willys out of the lot to make our way to our friend's house, the car performed extremely smoothly, and it sounded so elegant. The Willys 2023 model is an electric hybrid vehicle, further reinforcing the steadiness of the ride solely from the absence of vibration from a typical gas engine. It also felt like we were in a tank because of the car's set elevation in addition to its frame which is relatively bulky compared to other SUVs. Considering both the grace and build of the Jeep, I felt quite powerful despite being a passenger in the car. There was a sense of invincibility that came with being a subject in the vehicle, and I am sure that my father felt the same since he felt confident with his choice even before we were introduced to the car.

We spent a night at our friend's house before departing to Sedona, the city that we were advised to start our trip. We drove North for about an hour and we still had yet to see an attractive scenic route. Unless any of us enjoyed a tan, deserted area with dry levels of vegetation, we were not in for a memorable ride. The monotonous view paired with a boring atmosphere ceased when my parents informed my brother and I that we would visit the Agua Fria National Monument located near Black Canyon City. Instantly, my excitement was rejuvenated because I wanted to document my experiences through taking photos, but I did not

want them to be dull. The Agua Fria National Monument had a peaceful environment as there were not too many tourists present, and the sycamore tree leaves were becoming orange and yellow. It felt like a serene start for fall. We were not at the monument for too long, so shortly after we continued northbound towards Sedona. During the drive to Sedona from Black Canyon City, there was a lot more vegetation, and the sun started to set offering us quite the scenery. This part of the trip was important to me because I began to feel more connected with my parents. We were able to hold more stable and uninterrupted conversations while we were in the car, and since we still had about an hour left to arrive at Sedona, there was more to talk about. My maturity definitely developed some amount during this part of the trip just by being able to remind myself that my parents were doing all of this for us, so I could feel my appreciation for them grow.

My family stayed in Sedona for one night before leaving for Flagstaff. My family made several stops during this stretch of the trip, and each of them were worth it. We continued to drive through long, empty roads surrounded by rock formations that were deep and orange. I felt as if this was the most beautiful part of the desert-dense area in Arizona since the sights were by far more breathtaking than the common tan that we encountered after leaving Phoenix. My family stopped at a small town called Arcosanti. This town was unique because it was made as an experiment to test whether a community could be built by combining unique methods of architecture with resources that were auto-sustainable. This concept as a whole is known as "arcology". We learned about the town by entering one of the buildings that was open to the public. Here, my parents followed a tour guide, but my brother and I snuck away to the souvenir shop out of boredom. We believed that we would have a better experience learning without an instructor. We found ourselves in an area with massive wind chimes that were not meant to be touched as they were going for sale, but we had other plans. Disobediently, we would silently touch the chimes to get a better idea of what they would actually sound like because the only

other way to understand what sound they produced was by reading a pamphlet located at the bottom of each windchime. After pacing around a little more, we found highly durable stickers that each went for \$5. This was ridiculous to me because who in the world would throw away five bucks for a sticker? After this thought, I promptly pocketed one of the stickers and rushed my brother out of the building so that we would not be caught. This sticker is now on my water bottle. Since we left the building before our parents, we got to the Willys before they did. About two minutes later, my parents got to the car, completely unaware of the stunt I pulled off. Since I felt a small rush from the mini-robbery that I committed, I asked to drive the Willys to Flagstaff. My mother was the only one who was concerned with me driving, but my father had faith because he was instructing me how to drive months before this trip had started. Of course, I ended up behind the wheel while my dad instructed me in the co-pilot seat. The experience of being granted access to the Willys was different from every other time I drove my father's Mini Countryman back in my hometown. The Countryman is a smaller, more compact SUV, while the Willys is larger, defined by its tanky features. I was a tad bit nervous as I was not familiar with the dimensions of the car, but of course I persevered. The uneasiness more than likely stemmed from the fact that I knew this car was rented, so the consequences would be worse for us since I was also driving without a license.

I was not permitted to make the full drive to Flagstaff, but nonetheless, I was satisfied with the experience. My father took over again, this time a little bit more attentive than usual because part of the route to our next destination was uphill. I really enjoyed this stretch of the trip because we were surrounded by red-rock buttes and pine forests. The scenery and the tempo during this stretch had to have been one of the best moments for me because of how reconnected I felt with nature. Being able to admire rock formations and tall trees is not something I commonly do, but during this point, it was almost as if doing so was a passive hobby of mine. By the time we arrived in downtown Flagstaff, it was already late in the evening,

so our parents checked a room out in a hotel called "High Country Motor Lodge". This hotel was very unique compared to the hotels that we would commonly check out as it had an extended layout, an undisturbed ambience, and felt more welcoming and warm. Unfortunately, we only stayed for one night, but we left a five-star review for the great service. The next morning, we woke up earlier than usual to grab breakfast at a diner five minutes away from the hotel. The parking situation was difficult because of spot availability, and when we could find parking, it was too small for the Willys. We drove around for a good ten minutes before finding a large enough spot for the car, but the parking that we did end up finding was timed, so we did our best to rush to the diner, eat quickly, then leave. Our efforts were not good enough because we ended up with a ticket. Afterwards, we slowly drove around downtown to make our way to Northern Arizona University because I was still searching for possible universities to attend. Shortly after, we made our way up more mountains to visit the Arizona Snowbowl Resort. On the way there, we saw more pines covered in snow. The way up to the resort had to be driven with precaution because of ice that was forming on the road, but because of the tire traction, it hardly worried my father as it normally would have.

The Arizona Snowbowl Resort was our last destination before heading back to Phoenix. It is safe to say that without the Willys, we would not have been able to cover as much ground as quickly as we did. This car permitted us to trek our way through different biomes scattered throughout Arizona, which is something that has adhered to how I view road trips. I was able to drive confidently and more importantly, safely. Given that I was able to drive a larger vehicle despite not knowing how to drive perfectly, I have better conviction when it comes to automobility, more specifically, being behind the wheel. I was commonly afraid of driving cars in the past and it would hinder my ability to practice when I was given the opportunity. Being in a car that felt tall and protective of other forces provided me an unspoken reassurance that my fears were incredibly drastic and almost irrational. The trip to Arizona has changed my

perspective on automobility, finally allowing me to consider participating in more road trips that I once viewed unappealing.