

## The Prodigal, part 1

by Donald Schmidt

Scripture reference: Luke 15:11b–32

Cast:

Father: Donald

Son: Ralph

*An aspect of this story that has always intrigued me is that the father ran towards his son. For a man to be able to run in those days, he had to hike up his long robes and expose his legs, and this was simply not done—it would be like someone today running down the street in their underwear. So great was the parent’s enthusiasm to embrace the lost child that custom, protocol, and appearances became irrelevant. That is how eager God is to welcome us, Jesus says.*

*God is not just willing to receive us when we repent, but indeed is overwhelmed with an enthusiastic joy about it.*

Allison: (INVITES DONALD TO READ THE STORY HE’S WRITTEN)

D: I do some of my best thinking when I’m showering. It’s a quiet, peaceful time, and I’m all alone. I like that.

The bathroom mirror affords a wonderful reflection through the top of the window, and I can see the road stretching off into infinity.

Ah, that road.

Sometimes I'll see a car or two driving by. Maybe an early morning bird checking out last night's road kill. If I'm running late, I notice the local kids heading out to the school bus.

I think of the times I have traveled down that road—a short jaunt to town, or the beginning of a journey to places far and beyond. And, of course, I think of coming down that road in the other direction, tired in the evening, and glad to be coming home.

It's down that road that my son left.

So many times I had watched him and his brother walking with their friends, headed for school. Or maybe riding their bikes, laughing and claiming ownership of the whole world.

But one day, my son went down that road, and didn't come back.

Ralph: Dad, I was wondering, um, you know, um, you said that everything you owned would go to my brother and me when you and Mom died? Well, I was, um, just thinking that, um, well, my brother likes the farm and seems bent on sticking around here, so, why

don't you give him the farm? I mean, I don't want it. Then you could, um, give me that money you've got saved in the bank, and we'd call it a deal? What do you say, Dad?"

D: He paused for a short second but, before I had a chance to say anything.

R: And, well, maybe I could have it, now? What do you think?

D: Did it matter what I thought? We both knew what I would do. We both knew what he would do. Why argue with fate?

The day I handed him the cashier's check, we knew what was next, although we both clung briefly to a bit of denial.

R: I think I'll maybe spend a bit of this, do some traveling. But I'll save the rest for college. I'm just going to take a few months to find myself, and then I'll go back to school in the Fall.

D: He left the next morning, without saying goodbye.

We heard from him once, a postcard in January from Florida. That was it.

Three years went by. We wondered and worried. Each story of a hurricane, a riot, a bitter cold snap, unemployment, drug wars—

they all made us look at each other a little more fearfully, and wonder, but we didn't talk about him. It seemed that words might somehow seal his uncertain fate.

The farm continued. We continued. But we ached.

How we ached.

Each morning, while I was shaving, I would notice that road. I thought at one point of even boarding up the window, so I wouldn't have to look. Tried drawing the shades a few times, but it felt wrong somehow. I needed to wonder. And after a while, it got easier to look at the road. But the pain never went away. Where was he?

One March morning, as a particularly cold winter was fighting to hang on against the inevitability of spring, I saw the road in the mirror. I stood, as usual, in my underwear and lathered up my face. I looked down as I rinsed the razor and, when I looked up, I saw a distant figure on the road. I couldn't identify it, but I didn't need to. I knew who it was.

I dropped the razor, dabbed at the cream on my face, and ran out of the bathroom. Taking the stairs two at a time I leapt out the door and ran up the road.

He stopped as I got closer, as if he didn't know what I was going to do. I held him, not

caring if I crushed his bones, so long as I could just feel his heart.

R: Dad, I'm so sorry, I...

D: (INTERUPTING) I didn't want to hear it.

I only wanted to savor this moment, this homecoming, this holding. It was too good to cloud it with words.

After a long, long, hug, and heaving tears, I stood back and focused on him. He looked awful: not an ounce of meat on his bones, and that gaunt, pained, sickly look on his face from too many drugs and too much fear.

But he was alive. And he was home.  
(SMILING AT SON) Let's get you inside.  
Your mother's got some coffee on.