

Welcome to Storytime with Dad. Today we will be reading Wilbur's Escape.

The barn was very large. It was very old. It smelled of hay and it smelled of manure. It smelled of the perspiration of tired horses and the wonderful sweet breath of patient cows. It often had a peaceful sort of smell as though nothing bad could ever happen again in the world. It smelled of grain and of harness dressing, and of axle grease and old rubber boots, and of new rope, and whenever the cat was given a fish head to eat the barn would smell of fish. But mostly, it smelled of hay, for there was always hay being pitched down to the cows, and the horses, and the Sheep.

The barn was pleasantly warm in winter when the animals spend most of their time indoors, and it was pleasantly cool in the summer when the big door stood wide open to the breeze. The barn had stalls on the main floor for the workhorses, tie ups on the main floor for the cows, a sheep fold down below for the sheep, a pig pen down below for Wilbur, and it was full of all sorts of things that you find in barns. Ladders, grindstones, pitchforks, monkey wrenches, scythes, lawn mowers, snow shovels, axe handles, milk pails, water buckets, empty grain sacks, and rusty rat traps. It was a kind of barn the children like to play in, and the whole thing was owned by Fern's uncle, Mr. Homer L. Zuckerman.

Wilbur's new home was in the lower part of the barn directly underneath the cows. Mr. Zuckerman knew that a manure pile is a good place to keep a young pig. Pigs need warmth and it was warm and comfortable down there in the barn cellar on the south side. Fern came almost every day to visit him. She found an old milking stool that have been discarded, and she placed the stool in the Sheepfold next to Wilbur's pen. She sat quietly during the long afternoons, thinking and listening and watching Wilbur. Sheep soon got to know her and trust her, so did the geese who lived with the sheep. All the animals trusted her, she was so quiet and friendly. Mr. Zuckerman did not allow her to take Wilbur out. They did not allow her to get into the pig pen. But he told Fern that she could sit on the stool and watch Wilbur as long as she wanted to. It made her happy just to be near the pig, and it made Wilbur happy to know that she was sitting there right outside of the pen. But he never had any fun - no walks, no rides, no swims.

One afternoon in June, when Wilbur was almost 2 month old, he wandered out into a small yard outside the barn. Fern had not arrived for her usual visit. Wilbur stood in the sun feeling lonely and bored. There's never anything to do around here. He walked slowly over to the food trough to see if anything had been overlooked at lunch. He found a small strip of potato skin and ate it. His back itched, so he leaned against the fence to rub it against the boards. When he tired of this, he walked indoors, climbed to the top of the manure pile, and sat down. He didn't feel like going to sleep. He didn't feel like digging. He was tired of standing still tired of lying down. "I'm less than 2 months old and I'm tired of living," he said. He walked out to the yard again. "When I'm out here, there's no place to go but in, when I'm indoors, there's no place to go but back out in the yard!"

"That's where you're wrong, my friend, my friend," said a voice. Wilbur looked through the fence and saw a goose standing there. "You don't have to stay in that dirty-little, dirty-little,

dirty-little yard," said the goose, who talked rather fast. "The boards are loose, push on it. Push push push on it and come on out!"

"What!" said Wilbur, "say it slower."

"At-at-at the risk of repeating myself," said the goose. "I suggest that you come on out. It's wonderful out here."

"Did you say that a board was loose?"

"That I did that I did," said the goose. Wilbur walked up to the fence and saw that the goose was right! One board was loose. He put his head down, shut his eyes, and pushed. The board gave way in a minute. He squeezed through the fence and was standing in the long grass outside is yard. The goose chuckled.

"How does it feel to be free?" she asked.

"I like it," said Wilbur. "That is, I guess I like it, actually." Wilbur felt a little weird to be outside the fence, but nothing between him and the big world. "Where do you think I better go?"

"Anywhere you like, anywhere you like!" said the goose. "Go down through the orchard, root up the sod! Go down through the garden, root up the radishes! Root of everything! Eat grass! Look for corn! Look for oats! Run all over! Skip and dance, jump and prance! Go down through the Orchard and stroll in the woods! The world is a wonderful place when you're young!"

"I can see that," replied Wilbur. He gave a jump in the air, twirled, ran a few steps, stopped, looked all around, sniffed the smells of afternoon, and then set off walking down through the orchard pausing in the shade of an apple tree. He put a strong snout into the ground and began pushing, digging, and rooting. He felt very happy. He plowed up quite a piece of ground before anyone noticed him.

Mrs. Zuckerman was the first to see him. She saw him from the kitchen window and immediately shouted for the men. "Homer!" She cried, "Pig's out! Homer! Lurvy! Pigs out! He's down there under that apple tree."

"Now starts the trouble," Wilbert thought. "Now I'll catch it."

The goose heard the racket and she, too, started hollering, "make for the woods, the woods! She won't never never never catch you in the woods!"

The cocker spaniel heard the commotion and he ran out from the barn to join the chase. Mr. Zuckerman heard and he came out of the machine shed where he was mending a tool. Lurvy, the hired man, heard the noise and came up from the asparagus patch where he was pulling weeds. Everybody walked toward Wilbur, and Wilbur didn't know what to do! The woods seemed a long way off. Anyway, he had never been down there in the woods and wasn't sure he'd like it.

"Get around behind him, Lurvy," said Mr. Zuckerman, "And drive him into the barn. And take it easy, don't rush him. I'll go and get a bucket of slops."

The news of Wilbur's Escape spread rapidly among the animals on the place. Whenever any creature broke loose on Zuckerman's farm, the event was of great interest to the others. The goose shouted to the nearest cow that Wilbur was free, and soon all the cows knew. Then, one of the cows told one of the sheep, and soon all the Sheep knew. The Lambs learned about it from their mothers. The horses in their stalls in the barn perked up their ears when they heard the goose hollering, and soon the horses caught on to what was happening.

"Wilbur's out?" They said. Every animal stirred his head and became excited to know that one of his friends had gotten free, and was no longer penned up or tied fast. Wilbur didn't know what to do or which way to run. It seemed as though everybody was after him.

"If this is what it's like to be free, I believe I'd rather be penned up in my own yard!"

The cocker spaniel was sneaking up on him from one side. Lurvy, the hired man, was sneaking up on him from the other side. Mr. Zuckerman stood ready to head him off if he started for the garden, and now Mr. Zuckerman was coming down towards him carrying a pale.

"This is a really awful," thought Wilbur. "Why doesn't Fern come!" He began to cry. The goose took command and began to give orders.

"Don't just stand there, Wilbur! Skip around, run towards me, slip in and out, in and out, in and out. Make for the woods! Twist and turn!"

The cocker spaniel sprang for Wilbur's hind leg. Wilbur jumped and ran. Lurvy reached out and grabbed. Mrs. Zuckerman screamed at Lurvy. The goose cheered for Wilbur. Wilbur dodged between Lurvy's legs. Lurvy missed Wilbur and grabbed the spaniel instead.

"Nicely done!" cried the goose. "Try it again, try it again."

"Run downhill!" suggested the cows.

"Run toward me!" yelled the gander.

"Run uphill!" cried the Sheep.

"Turn and twist!" honked the good.

"Jump and dance!" said the rooster.

"Look out for Lurvy!" called the cows.

"Look out for Zuckerman!" yelled the gander.

"Watch out for the dog!" cried the sheep.

"Listen to me, listen to me!" screamed the goose.

Poor Wilbur was dazed and frightened by this hullabaloo. He didn't like being the center of all this fuss. He tried to follow the instructions his friends were giving him, but he couldn't run

downhill and uphill at the same time, and he couldn't turn and twist when he was jumping and dancing, and he was crying so hard he could barely see anything that was happening. After all, Wilbur was a very young pig, not much more than a baby, really. He wished Fern were here to take him in her arms and comfort him.

When he looked up, he saw Mr. Zuckerman standing quite close to him holding a pail of warm slops. He felt relieved. He lifted his nose and sniffed - the smell was delicious. Warm milk, potato skins, wheat middlings, toasted corn flakes, and a popover left from the Zuckerman's breakfast!

"Come pig," said Mr. Zuckerman tapping the pale. "Come pig." Wilbur took a step toward the pale.

"No, no, no," said the Goose. "It's the old pale trick! Don't fall for it, don't fall for it! He's trying to lure you back into captivity-ivity! He's appealing to your stomach!" But Wilbur didn't care, the food smelled appetizing. He took another step toward the pail.

"Pig, pig" said Mr. Zuckerman in a kind voice and began slowly walking toward the barnyard, looking all about him innocently as if he didn't know that a little white pig was following along behind him.

"You'll be sorry, sorry, sorry," said the Goose. Wilbur didn't care. He kept walking toward the pale of slops. "You'll miss your freedom," honked the goose. "An hour of freedom is worth a barrel of slops."

Wilbur didn't care. When Mr. Zuckerman reached the pigpen, he climbed over the fence and poured the slops into the trough. Then he pulled the loose board away from the fence so that there was a wide hole for Wilbur to walk through.

"Reconsider, reconsider!" cried the goose.

Wilbur paid no attention. He stepped through the fence into his yard. He walked to the trough and took a long drink of slops, sucking in the milk hungrily and chewing the pop over. It was good to be home again.

While Wilbur ate, Lurvy fetched a hammer and some eight-penny nails, and nailed the boards in place. Then he and Mr. Zuckerman leaned lazily on the fence, and Mr. Zuckerman scratched Wilbur's back with a stick.

"He's quite a pig," said Lurvy.

"Yes, he'll make a good pig," said Mr. Zuckerman. Wilbur heard the words of Praise. He felt the warm milk inside the stomach. He felt the pleasant rubbing of the stick along his itchy back. He felt peaceful and happy and sleepy. This has been a tiring afternoon. It was still only about 4:00, but Wilbur was ready for bed.

"I'm really too young to go out into the world alone," he thought and he laid down. The end.



The story of Wilbur escaping is actually a short section of the book *Charlotte's web* by E.B. White. I happen to think it's a fun story, but the funny episode is a great example of ourselves in real life.

Wilbur gets convinced by the goose to escape from his nice safe pigpen. He'd never been out in the world before, and when he escapes he find it to be absolute chaos. Now, we all know this isn't real freedom, but he has absolutely no other experience to compare it to, and he's just a baby. So, Wilbur learns through this experience that he needs to grow up a little bit before he goes out into the world on his own.

No matter how ready we feel we are for some things, how we feel is not always a good indication for what we're ready for. This is why it's important to listen to other people in our lives for guidance, especially people with more experience than us, like our parents. It can be frustrating and annoying to hear their thoughts on our life, but I promise you that the people who love you will give you advice that they think is good for you based on their experience.

Of course, the goose was experienced and gave Wilbur advice that was more advanced than he was able to handle. But, geese aren't really known for their wisdom. So, consider where the advice came from and make your own decision. You are the only person to blame for bad decisions that you make. Peer pressure doesn't matter, bad advice doesn't matter, you are the one making the decision, so you need to be OK with whatever outcome happens as a result of your decision. So try your hardest to make good decisions, and if bad things happen then we can always deal with them as they come. But, if you're trying to make good decisions then that's really all you can do, and that's OK no matter what the outcome is.

I hope you liked the story, please drop me a review and email feedback to: [hello@storytimewithdad.com](mailto:hello@storytimewithdad.com). Or tweet me @DadStorytime

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