

Another Version of the Truth

by Sarah Stodola

As children, when we wanted something—a toy, or a shirt, or a pony—most of us, at one time or another, saw Mom or Dad look at us incredulously and ask, “What?! Do you think money grows on trees?”

From a child’s perspective, it may as well have. Most of us had no idea where our parents’ money came from. If there was a lot of it, that simply reflected the tree you had been dealt in life—a towering oak, perhaps. If there was little money, you just knew that you had a Charlie-Brown-Christmas sort of tree. We all grew up, of course, and now we know better. We understand the financial benefits of education, and that the class you are born into has a direct effect on the financial opportunities afforded you. Most importantly, we all understand that money most certainly does not grow on

trees.

But in some parts of the world, entire populations never have the opportunity to understand any of this. To them, America is a mythical land, and the stories one knows of this place called America, while probably based in truth, don’t convey the reality of the way we Americans live. I learned this first-hand when I traveled with my father to Tanzania at the age of twenty-one. As a young man, my father had worked for the Peace Corps in a town called Morogoro, a smallish city of almost 120,000 located a little over 100 miles east of the capital city of Dar Es Salaam.* He speaks fluent Swahili, which served both to make the trip easier for me and to exclude me from much communication with the locals. However, since English, along with Swahili, is still the official language of the country, I met enough people in the cities and larger towns with whom I could personally communicate to gain a working knowledge of how they per-

* The official capital has been moved from Dar Es Salaam to Dodoma. However, Dar Es Salaam retains its status as the commercial capital. In addition, much government activity remains in Dar Es Salaam.

