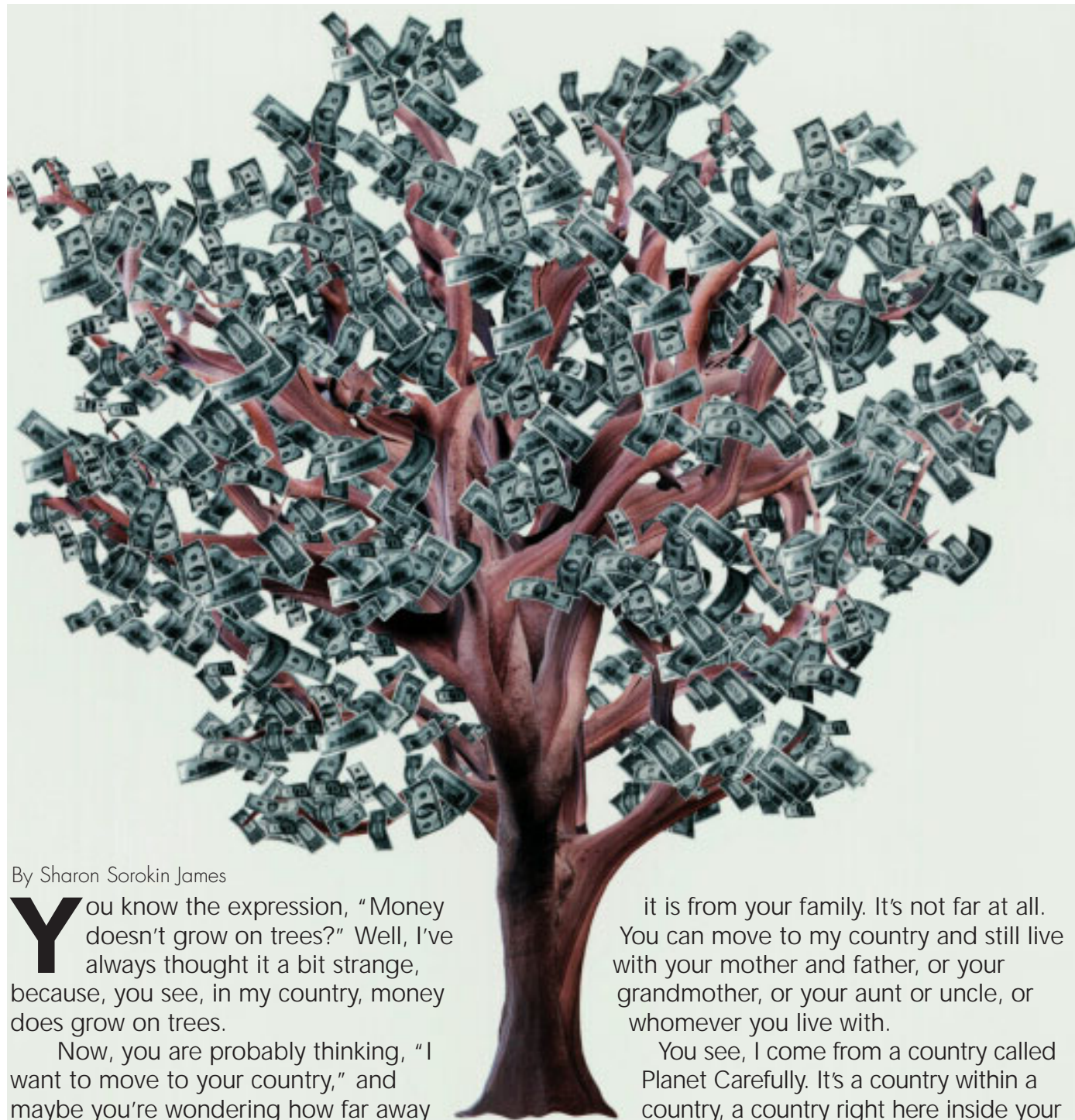


WHERE MONEY GROWS ON TREES

On Planet Carefully, You Need a Green Thumb to Be Able to Pay Your Bills



By Sharon Sorokin James

You know the expression, “Money doesn’t grow on trees?” Well, I’ve always thought it a bit strange, because, you see, in my country, money does grow on trees.

Now, you are probably thinking, “I want to move to your country,” and maybe you’re wondering how far away

it is from your family. It’s not far at all. You can move to my country and still live with your mother and father, or your grandmother, or your aunt or uncle, or whomever you live with.

You see, I come from a country called Planet Carefully. It’s a country within a country, a country right here inside your

Photo by Don Farrall/Photodisc/PictureQuest.

heart and behind your eyes, back there where your brain is and all that planning stuff goes on. On Planet Carefully, every person has her own money tree. Mine is a lilac bush, and it smells so beautiful in the spring that I never want to cut its flowers.

Every day, I water my lilac bush, I pull up the weeds from the area around its roots, I feed it, and I watch it grow. Sometimes the sun doesn’t shine, and then my lilac bush starts to look droopy, and the flowers drop off. But I know that if I work really hard and take good care of it, it will eventually blossom again. It always does. Just as the sun rises and falls each day, the blossoms on my lilac bush open and close and grow more numerous.

With one leaf, I can buy an ice-cream cone at the end of an icky, sticky summer day. I paid a twig and three flowers for my favorite doll. And I thought a long, long time before I picked five flowers to buy my purple sneakers.

“Well, that’s just a lilac bush, not a money tree,” you’re probably saying to yourself. But I have to tell you that when I need something, my lilac bush is there for me. Lilacs aren’t the same as dollar bills, or pesetas, or euros. But on Planet Carefully, their flowers are as good as gold, and the branches and leaves are like copper and silver. They are just as precious. Say I want a new drawing pad and some smellalicious, sparkly markers. If I really, really want them, then I have to snip some lilac blossoms from my lilac bush and hand them to the storekeeper. That’s the way it works here.

With one leaf, I can buy an ice-cream cone at the end of an icky, sticky, hot summer day. I paid a twig and three flowers for my favorite Barbie doll. And I thought a long, long time before I picked five flowers to buy my purple sneakers with the gold laces. But right now, I’m not picking anything from my lilac bush. I have to save up all my flowers because it won’t bloom in the winter, and my mother’s birthday is in

Photo by Image Source/PictureQuest.



December, and I want to buy her a new scarf, because she’s always cold. I saw one in the store, a blue one, decorated with pink roses. It would be perfect for her.

It would be perfect for her because, believe it or not, when my mom pays the rent, she pays it in roses. Her money tree is the coolest one yet, because it has roses in lots of different colors—pink, yellow, red, white, peach, and sometimes even a pale green!

Of course, it’s not all a bed of roses, so to speak, on Planet Carefully. Sometimes we have storms that tear up our flowers and trees, and then we have to work very, very hard to get our gardens back in order. And sometimes other things happen, too. Like the time I got a puppy.

This puppy was very special. He was a big silver poodle, and his name was Biggs. I →



THE PAYOFF

Ask your children to draw a picture of their money tree, after you read them this story. Then ask them why they think it's important not to pick too many flowers or branches or leaves from their tree, and use this story as a way to begin a discussion about family finances, the importance of planning for what you want, and saving money for a rainy day.

loved him a lot. The only problem was, Mr. Biggs, as I call him, was a wild and crazy puppy. He was always running around and chewing my shoes and ripping up paper. Basically, he was a big, bouncing bundle of useless energy.

One day, Bigginton (you see, he has a lot of nicknames) got into the garden, just when my lilac bush was starting to bloom. All the beautiful little buds on the branches were beginning to turn from a silvery green to purple, and the wonderful aroma of lilac was just starting to fill the spring air. I was very happy,

When you go to sleep tonight I hope you will dream about flowers, and branches and leaves and puppy dogs. Maybe you will even dream about your money tree. What does it look like?

until, that is, Biggs did what he did.

You see, Biggy Boo—another name I call him—just wanted to have fun, the way puppies do. He ran wildly around the garden, digging holes and yanking flowers and branches and leaves off of my lilac bush and all the other bushes and trees in the garden, frolicking and gamboling about all the while he was doing it. I never saw a happier dog. Or a more unhappy garden.

And I was unhappy, too, because I knew I had to fix it or I wouldn't be able to buy anymore ice cream, or candy, or toys, or even any special liver biscuits for Biggy Boo.

I had to be very careful and work very hard for a very long time to make my money tree bloom again. And I had to train my careless dog, too. But I did it! And that made me very proud. Now Mister Bigg Spender (that's what my mom calls him) plays very carefully in my garden. He still gambols and frolics and digs holes, but not near the flowers and trees. And he never, ever pulls the flowers or branches off the trees. My lilac bush is more beautiful than ever. It grew back stronger and prettier, because of the extra-special care I gave it.

So when you go to sleep tonight, I hope you will dream about flowers and branches and leaves and puppy dogs. Maybe you will even dream about your money tree. What does it look like? You may not know it yet, but it's growing inside you—right inside your heart and behind your eyes, back there where your brain is and all that planning stuff goes on.

If you plan very carefully and don't let any careless puppies near it and don't pick too many of its flowers or branches or leaves, your money tree will help you pay for everything you need. And most of what you want. Because, you see, money does grow on trees—if you take good care of them.

My mother says that's the real reason green thumbs are the color of money. But that's another story for another night. □

Sharon Sorokin James writes children's literature and novels. She is also a lawyer and a contributing editor to *MAKING BREAD*.

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