MEN DREAM BIG IN BURUNDI. Roger is a coffee farmer whose greatest dreams are for his children to finish school, and just maybe, if we’re talking wildest dreams, to own a motorbike. These aspirations may seem trivial to some, but in Roger’s world, they are everything. The fulfillment of his ambition relies on the successful harvest and sale of his coffee, some of which ends up at Three Story Coffee in Jefferson City. Here, owner Tony Anderson makes it his mission to educate coffee drinkers about who grew their brew.

And so, coffee comes second on the list of priorities at Three Story Coffee—the story comes first. “We learned really early on that part of what we’re supposed to do here is tell the farmers’ stories,” Anderson says. “For a lot of people, coffee is just coffee. They don’t think about where it comes from.” But once you enter the Three Story Coffee shop, it’s hard not to contemplate the origin of the coffee in large burlap sacks stacked around the shop. Portraits of farmers line the shelves and a large banner, inscribed with the quote, “We all have a story—share yours, invest in theirs,” hangs as a constant reminder of the value of a coffee purchase, and the farmers who benefit from it. Customers can even pick up a postcard along with their coffee to read about the farmers who grew it.

They can also hear stories first-hand from Anderson and his staff, who operate a slow bar at the flagship location, hand brewing and serving each drink to order. The shop opened its doors in 2012, and their second location, which opened in 2015, offers a quicker service for those on-the-go. Anderson can narrate these stories well because he travels every year to work with coffee producers in person. Since Three Story Coffee’s inception in 2012, he’s visited...
farmers in El Salvador, Guatemala, Burundi, Kenya and more. The origin numbers are kept low—around 6-8 at a time—so that the quality of relationships with the farmers stays high. “We could have way more origins if we were just buying coffee,” Anderson says. “But we want these to be long-term relationships.” Just as the beans from each origin vary, so do the farmers, their stories, and Three Story’s role in the relationship.

“Every one of our farmers, they are all very different,” Anderson says. “And the things that we can help with are all different. With these relationships I think, ‘what is the purpose other than coffee?’” Sometimes, the answer is simple. “It’s interesting; with a lot of them I’ve realized that one of the best things you can do is just support them,” he says. That support begins with a strong relationship.

Roger and Anderson first began their coffee conjunction in Burundi in September 2016, during a coffee origin trip to Roger’s farm. It was hot and Roger was wearing a heavy sweater—as most Burundians were, Anderson notes—while Anderson was drenched in sweat and on the brink of heat exhaustion in a t-shirt. But Roger stood comfortably, unfazed by the heat, as they spoke about coffee and also the problems Burundi has faced; violence, lack of education and economic turbulence have plagued the country in recent years. It’s enough to make any man cringe, but just as he was unfazed by the weather, Roger was also unwilling to let his hardships handicap his dreams. Roger’s wisdom echoes his appearance, Anderson says. He is young, but his face is wrinkled and worn, like his dried coffee beans, from years spent harvesting coffee cherries in the hot sun. He recognizes the many problems his country is facing and wants a better Burundi for his children and theirs.

It’s these interactions that make Anderson so badly want to expose the problems of the coffee industry and change them for the better. “Everybody here [in America] loves coffee,” Anderson says. “It’s just really warm and fuzzy; even people that don’t drink coffee still relate to coffee. The problem is that it’s not always so warm and fuzzy there.” It’s difficult to point out the dark side of coffee, Anderson says, because though so many people connect with the beverage, they don’t know it’s whole story—and some don’t want to. “I tell people, the only reason you can get coffee at Walmart for 5 bucks a pound is because those people are living on dirt floors, with no water and no electricity,” he says. “And the only reason for it to stay there (at that price) is for you to be okay with them staying there, in that situation.”

In its four years of existence, Three Story Coffee has already been able to make a positive impact on the lives of several small coffee farmers around the world through the direct trade market, where they are able to set the price based on quality. “We want to partner with farmers to improve the quality and pay them really well for that coffee, and so because of that, we’re usually paying double what the commodity price is,” he says. Anderson bases price on the coffee’s cupping score, gauged by the Specialty Coffee Association of America’s scale. Coffee is roasted, brewed, then tasted and scored based on several factors including aroma, flavor, acidity, balance, body and aftertaste.

One of the first farmers Anderson worked with in Guatemala, named Ovidia Martinez, was able to exponentially improve her coffee quality in just one year. After working on cherry selection, which is the timely harvesting of ripe coffee cherries, the quality of Martinez’s coffee increased by almost 30 percent, Anderson says.

“To see a jump like that in one year is incredible.” By the time he reached Martinez’s farm that year, her coffee was completely bought out. “I was bummed that I didn’t get it, but I was really excited that we kind of influenced making sure that she got paid well,” he says. “When you create a system where farmers understand the value of their coffee and they’re able to build relationships with roasters, that’s great,” he says.

The lasting ties, both with farmers and other facets of the coffee industry, have been a fundamental part of Three Story Coffee’s success. But Anderson didn’t go seeking most of them out—it’s all happened through fate, chance or divine intervention, whichever one you choose to believe, he says. “It’s been a fascinating thing for me, how we’ve met people, the variety of relationships we’ve built, and just some of the great things that we get to be a part of,” Anderson says.

Fostering relationships has always been Three Story Coffee’s goal, but opening a coffee shop wasn’t always a dream of Anderson’s. “It’s funny, I usually tell people I kind of backed into it,” he says. With his degree in agriculture and plant science from the University of Missouri, Anderson was managing the horticulture division of a large real estate developer in Texas in the early 2000s. The church he and his family attended in Dallas had drawn up plans to open their own coffee shop as a mission project. Anderson had been a part of the plan development and met with the missions pastor regularly to discuss plans and other topics over coffee or lunch. “I was telling him

“When you create a system where farmers understand the value of their coffee and they’re able to build relationships with roasters, that’s great.”

-TONY ANDERSON
MEET THE FARMERS

The coffee that makes its way to Three Story Coffee represents several countries and farmers, all with unique stories. Meet a few of them here.

MAMA CARMEN, GUATEMALA
Mama Carmen, as Three Story Coffee customers fondly refer to her, has lived through enough troubles for three lifetimes. But those troubles were never enough to break her—not even when her son was kidnapped by the drug cartel. Mama Carmen used every resource and every idea she could come up with to find her son, including getting a job as a maid for a member of the drug cartel. This plan fell through when her intentions were discovered, and she did not get away easily. But she prayed to God and told him if he could just bring her son back, she would never turn a child away from her home. God heard her, and she eventually found her son. Mama Carmen opened up two orphanages, and as she promised, has never turned away a child. Her coffee farm supports these orphanages.

EDITH & JEPSON KARAU, KENYA
The Karau family recently started a coffee farm on ancestral land on the eastern slopes of Mt. Kenya. Their reason for building the farm is just one of the many things that make this coffee special. The Karau family also care for 24 orphans in two large family-style orphanages. The coffee farm was started as a way to develop and support future wage-earning opportunities for the children as they grow older. In addition, they are also helping 50 other smaller, neighboring farmers with their coffee harvests.

ROGER, BURUNDI
Roger’s greatest dreams are for his children to finish school, and just maybe, if we’re talking wildest dreams, to own a motorbike. Roger’s dreams rely on the successful harvest and sale of the coffee from his 2500 trees. Roger’s wisdom echoes his appearance, Anderson says. He is young, but his face is wrinkled and worn, like his dried coffee beans, from years spent harvesting coffee cherries in the hot sun. He recognizes the many problems his country is facing and wants a better Burundi for his children and theirs. Through a fair coffee industry, his dreams will be achievable.
about my frustrations at work one day and he just said, ‘you should look at coffee. It makes a lot of sense for you. Your background in agriculture your interest in missions, your passion for working on justice issues; it’s just a great fit for you.’” Shortly after this conversation, Anderson was laid off from his real estate job and made the move back to Jefferson City, where he took a job at the Missouri Department of Agriculture. “At the time I drank coffee, but barely,” he says. “Coffee was certainly not a passion of mine or even a thought. But that conversation just kind of planted a seed.”

A couple months after he was back in Missouri, Anderson found out that the church in Texas had decided against the coffee shop. The missions pastor offered the plans to Anderson. “So he emailed them to me, and when I would have time I would just pull them up and pore through them a little bit,” he says. “After a couple years it was like, I need to do this.” Anderson finally had the vision and the drive to carry out the church’s mission, but it seemed the universe wasn’t on board with his plan. “I took plans for a coffee shop, tried to start it, and it was like the more I tried, the less it would come along,” he says. “It became obvious after awhile that this wasn’t happening.”

Anderson had a list of projects to complete, but opening the shop was the key to getting them started, or so he thought. “We could develop our own label, we could start roasting, we could build relationships with farmers, do projects in coffee communities,” he says. “And then it was just like a snap. I mean I stopped dead in my tracks and thought, that’s what I’m supposed to be doing. I’ve been trying to get this coffee shop open so I could do other things and it was like, why don’t I just do all these other things first?” So that’s what Anderson did.

“At that point we started putting pieces together, and I was going to just start with developing the brand and a website and it was going to be all online,” he says. “I wasn’t going to roast; I was going to find someone to roast for me and it was going to be a side project. I was going to keep my full-time job. That only lasted for a couple months.”

Anderson and his wife left for a mission trip to Sierra Leone a few weeks after Tony had made the decision to move ahead with the project without a storefront. An impromptu conversation there changed Three Story Coffee from a side business to Anderson’s full-time focus. Coffee was not supposed to be the center point of this trip but, “From the moment I stepped on the ground, one thing after another kept pointing to coffee,” Anderson says. The Anderson’s and other missionaries were headed to lunch one day when they were notified that a special guest, the U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone, would be joining them. “So I sat next to him for about 45 minutes and grilled him on any kind of coffee project he knew about in West Africa,” Anderson said. To Anderson’s surprise, the ambassador was able to offer lots of information about programs, funding and projects related to coffee in Sierra Leone. “It was just one of those things that was like, okay, you can’t make that stuff up.”

After that meeting, Anderson knew that Three Story Coffee would be his new full-time calling. “We were on the plane and I turned and looked at my wife and said, ‘I don’t think God’s working on a hobby.’ And she looked at me and said, ‘I know.’”

Since that day, Anderson has immersed himself in his mission to make a difference in the coffee industry. And now he’s found a way for you to get directly involved, too. Read about Three Story Coffee’s newest venture, the #oneninetyinitiative, on the next page.
In another chance encounter on a subway train in Boston, Anderson met Ben Carlson, who runs Long Miles Coffee Project with his wife in Burundi, Africa. The Carlsons’ are a small American family who have planted their roots, along with many coffee trees, in the hills of Burundi in order to improve the lives of the coffee growing communities there. Their mission and mindset almost completely mirrored the Anderson’s—just on a different continent. Today, this strong business partnership has become the central focus of Three Story Coffee’s storytelling mission: the #oneninetyinitiative.

Anderson’s latest origin trip to Burundi inspired the new project, #theoneninetyinitiative, a campaign started on Three Story Coffee’s social media pages, which seeks to find 190 churches to partner with 190 Burundian farmers. The initiative seeks out churches because of their call to mission work, and would allow more churches to get involved without having to factor in the aspect of traveling, Anderson says. “Instead of putting a team together to go down and build a house for somebody in Guatemala, how about you buy coffee from someone, support the farmer in a way that maybe allows him to build his own house,” Anderson says.

In every day functions, churches already have a close kinship with countries they have a mission to help, without even realizing it, Anderson says. “Most churches’ single greatest tie and connection to developing countries on a weekly basis is probably their coffee,” he says. “But for most churches, coffee is just a budget item, and they don’t stop and think about where it comes from, and how it gets there.” Through the #oneninetyinitiative, coffee can be transformed into more than an item to cross off the checklist. By entering into this partnership, churches (and other interested entities) will commit to purchasing coffee from one farmer for a year. For every 60-pound (5 lbs. per month at $10/lb) commitment, the church will receive the name of a specific farmer. The churches will also be asked to write a letter and send photos of the church and congregation that Three Story Coffee will then send to the farmer.

“We have always desired for coffee drinkers to know where their coffee comes from,” Anderson says. “We have also learned the value in being able to share with the farmers where their coffee is going. We want to show them people who not only love their coffee, but also have a love for them.” Though the first focus in the initiative is on churches, it is open to anyone who wishes to partner with individual farmers, including businesses, families, individuals or other organizations.

Anderson decided to start this initiative in Burundi because of the picture the country paints of the coffee industry as a whole, he says. “Burundi is kind of the poster child for the disconnect in coffee and how the system is just totally broken,” he says. Coffee is the second most consumed beverage in the world behind water, and the second largest commodity behind oil. In Burundi, it’s even higher on the list. “Coffee is it for Burundi. I mean literally, the entire country revolves around coffee,” he says. “So, it depends on whose list you look at, but if you take the average, coffee is 80 percent of their total export revenue. It’s a country that economically lives and dies by coffee.”

But according to Global Finance Magazine’s 2015 rankings, Burundi is the fifth poorest country in the world, suffering financial blows due to war and government turbulence. “I don’t think coffee is the sole problem, and it’s also probably not the sole solution, but if nothing else, if coffee was at least fair, they should at least be doing okay,” he says. “They shouldn’t be one of the poorest in the world. Coffee should at least be enough, should at least work well enough to mitigate some of the other problems.”

Through the #oneninetyinitiative, every day sales and stories shared, Three Story Coffee is working to make coffee’s journey from farm to mug well contemplated. “I tell my farmers that my job is to make them famous,” Anderson says. And if Anderson has his way, cup by cup, fame, financial security, and a little more of the “warm and fuzzy” side of coffee will be found by his farmers.

To become part of the #oneninetyinitiative, contact Tony at Three Story Coffee.

tony@threestorycoffee.com or (573) 418-2081
THE COFFEE EXCHANGE
From farm to cup: three models of coffee trade

COMMODITY TRADE

Commodity coffee describes coffees that are not traded on quality, but are considered simply to be “coffee,” a commodity. Origin, harvest date nor processing method is generally not taken into account. Value is based on the C-price, the price of coffee being traded on the New York Stock Exchange. The C-price is fluid and does not reflect the cost of production; some producers may lose money growing coffee through commodity trading.

FAIR TRADE

Fair trade guarantees to pay a base price that it considers sustainable, or a $0.05/lb premium above the C-price if the market rises above Fair Trade’s base price. The model is designed to work with cooperatives of coffee growers, not single estates or farmers. This model aims to help producers receive a fair price and create transparency, but there generally are not any quality standards in Fair Trade, just a set price that is higher than the commodity trading model.

DIRECT TRADE

A trade model that has been steadily climbing to the top for specialty roasters, direct trade conveys that the roasters have purchased coffee directly from the producer, which allows them to set their own price. To make this a viable model, the buyer must purchase coffee in large quantities. This model is highly focused on quality, and is flexible in that it allows buyers to work directly with producers on projects to improve the quality of the coffee, which creates higher value.

*Trade information sourced from The World Atlas of Coffee by James Hoffmann