The Groovy Christians of Rye, N.Y.
The very happy life of Mrs. Joe Hamilton
alias Carol Burnett
The Day Washington Did Not Shut Down
Crowds of young demonstrators vow to bring the capital to a halt by blocking streets and bridges, but the police keep control. With Police Chief Jerry Wilson, by John Neary

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Carol Burnett and her producer husband Joe Hamilton have a remarkably happy life together. Photographed by Henry Grossman. Her idea of grandeur is a home with a backyard. By Joan Downs

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Inside Cruiser One
Mass demonstrations, by their very nature, are among the most important stories of our day. As Washington Bureau Chief, Jack Newcombe has seen quite a few of them and is well aware of the much-ignored fact that in any large protest many of those involved are not demonstrators. There are also the people they are demonstrating against, the people for whom they are demonstrating, the people hanging around on the sidelines watching. This week’s lead story on the recent mass demonstrations in the nation’s capital seeks to further illuminate the whole phenomenon of protest by concentrating on those who try to keep the demonstrators in line: the police.

For some time Newcombe had been interested in Police Chief Jerry Wilson and his reputation as a crowd controller of skill and humanity. “I knew if we could cover a demonstration at his side, we would see all the action and gain a better understanding of how and why the police do what they do,” said Newcombe, Wilson agreed.

When the May Day protests began shaping up, writer John Neary was assigned to follow the top cop around. As a police reporter with the Washington Evening Star in the late 50s, before he joined LIFE, Neary was well acquainted with the exoteric art of dealing diplomatically with men in blue. After a few days of riding around with Wilson in Cruiser One, his staff car, Neary moved into the hotel where the chief and his staff were living for the duration of the protests.

Late one night, Newcombe received a midnight phone call from Neary. “John told me to get some photographers and hustle down to West Potomac Park where most of the demonstrators were camping. He said be there by 4 a.m., and stay out of sight. I asked if the police were planning to move everybody out, but he just wouldn’t tell me any more. So we went down there and stood around in the cress and the shadows. Some of the kids offered us swigs of wine, but the concert was dying out, and nothing else was going on. At 6 a.m., a huge line of white helmets came through the mist. It was an eerie scene. One kid in a sleeping bag said, ‘Sweet Jesus, I’ve never seen so much fuzz in my life.’ ”

The mass evacuation that followed and the subsequent arrests were a model of police efficiency and timing, as Neary reports in his piece. Not forehand,” said Neary. “I thought it had a good chance of turning into another bloodbath, like Chicago in ’68.”
YOUNGSTERS GO ON A RELIGION TRIP AND LEAVE MANY PARENTS BAFFLED

The Groovy Christians of Rye, N.Y.
A good many parents in Rye, N.Y. are bewildered. The sociology professor is bewildered, and the businessman, and the Sunday school teacher, and the banker, and the editor, and the travel agency lady, and a number of others. They are bewildered because their children have become Christians.

The Christianity that obsesses these hundred or so kids in and near Rye, and many thousands elsewhere, has little to do with nativity pageants, bake sales or other sidelines of religion familiar to their parents. Jesus, to these kids, is not the stained-glass embodiment of remote virtue, nor do they regard the Bible as a majestic collection of myths. They feel Christ as an immediate presence, and see the Bible as the irrefutably accurate word of God, containing no contradictions and solving all their problems from the cosmic to the trivial. “For them,” as one father observes, “it’s the ultimate how-to book, like the very ambitious manual of an automobile mechanic.”

Kris Skedgell, a converted ninth-grader, used to hang around stables a lot. “But I’m not so much into riding anymore,” she says. “Psalm 33:17 blew my mind. It showed me that horses won’t get me eternal life. I’ll only get eternal life from the Lord.”

Another girl used to be afraid to hitchhike to school, “but the Word gives us authority over all sickness, all evil, all danger. As long as Dad’s looking after me, I will fear no evil.” By Dad she did not mean her earthly father.

“It’s so neat!” the kids say of their new Christianity. “It’s out of sight! It’s a gas! It frees you from fear! It’s super-edifying!”

Their kind of Christianity may look and sound at times like the lapel-grabbing fundamentalism one thinks of in terms of old-time southern evangelists, but there’s much more to it than that. It fuses the threats and promises of the Bible Belt with the subtle, non-verbal vibrations of the subculture of drugs and rock music. It transforms its converts, attacks the premises by which they were raised, and unsettles every household it touches. Parents aren’t sure whether they should be enchanted or appalled.

“If you’d told me a year ago,” says the businessman, “that I’d have a son who’d carry a Bible wherever he went, who’d drop out of college to become a Christian missionary, who’d argue on the wrong side of the Scopes trial issue, I’d never have believed you. And neither would he.”

CONTINUED
TRIP AND LEAVE MANY PARENTS BAFFLED

Christians of Rye, N.Y.
'Drugs I can understand, but this is creepy'

"But I guess we should have known this might happen," says his wife. "These kids had already bugged us with every kind of classic adolescent rebellion. We'd been through long hair, peace marches, macrobiotic diets, meditation... Drugs, too, of course."

"Sometimes I almost wish they would go back to something simple like smoking a little grass," says Mrs. Lynn Seiffer, a travel agent who is getting her master's in library science. "Drugs I can try to understand, but this? This is creepy."

Rye, a Westchester County town of 16,000, is set on the Long Island Sound only 45 minutes by car from Manhattan. Rye has big, spacious houses with cozy two-digit addresses on well-kept streets under big old trees. Rye has six churches, four country clubs and stores where you can buy brook trout fresh from Idaho and Brie cheese fresh from France. Rye has orthodontists, psychiatrists, sensitivity trainers, advocates of women's liberation and a high school that sends 80% of its graduates to college. Rye citizens have well-stocked wine cellars and libraries, and consciences that impel them to do a lot of volunteer work.

My sweet Lord, I really want to know you, I really want to be with you.

George Harrison My Sweet Lord

At 7:45 on weekday mornings the new Christians of the town assemble in a circle for prayer meetings outside the Rye high school, which many of them attend. Inside, later, they pass each other notes that read "SMILE! GOD LOVES YOU!" and do their best to convert nonbelieving classmates and teachers. After school they do odd jobs, race through their homework and beamingly help their mothers make supper. Their fathers, returning home by commuter train, are greeted with joyous hugs.

"Radiant" is the word everybody keeps using to describe these kids, with reason. Their hair and clothes look like those of any privileged Aquarian adolescents, but the nonstop smiles on their faces are singular. No squad of cheerleaders was ever more unbeattable. Ask any of the Rye kids, any time, how he feels and he'll answer "Terrific!" or "Perfect!" and mean it. Remark that a slush storm seems a bit unseasonal, and he'll say, "But it's always a beautiful day when you're walking with the Lord!" and mean that, too.

Many of these kids say detailed graces before all meals. The talk at dinner, heavily laced with references to Ephesians and Leviticus, never strays far from biblical matters.

"But how about your grandmother?" Mrs. Joseph Lagey, the librarian wife of a sociology professor, asked her daughter Barbara over sukiyaki one recent evening. "Why, if God is so gracious, did He let her suffer so long? Wasn't she a good woman?"

"Sure," Barbara explained patiently. "But if she'd believed in the Word, she wouldn't have had to die painfully."

"What about all the Buddhists and Shintos and Hindus? Will they all burn in hell because they didn't accept Christ?"

"The Father," answered Barbara, "is merciful." And then, leaving the kitchen spotless, she rushed off—as her brother Christopher already had—to spend the evening "witnessing and fellowshiping" at a Dunkin' Donuts in a neighboring town.

Some rather good paintings young Christopher did last year hang in the Lageys' living room. He doesn't paint anymore, though. None of the new Christians of Rye has much time anymore for painting, or skiing, or mountain-climbing, or any of the old "Satanic" things. This troubles their parents.

Many things trouble them. For all its radiance, the new faith can seem humorless, condescending and vastly oversimplified. When parents suggest that the Koran might also merit study, or that crusades for peace, clean air and birth control might better the world, kids argue that nothing matters but saving individual souls.

"When I was their age," Mrs. John Ranyak says, "I stopped being Catholic a long time ago, but we had the kids baptized—you know, just in case,"—and then sent them to Unitarian Sunday school, where the first hymn they learned was Shos...
We took them to see the mosque in Washington and made sure they learned about all religions. Maybe we overdid it, giving them such a rational, eclectic upbringing. I guess the only way they could rebel, from that, was to deep fundamentalism.

Her children, and their friends, disagree. They don't see their new faith in terms of rebellion, or of fundamentalism, but as the dazzlingly simple cure for a hunger for absolute truth—a famine, to hear them talk of it, more desperate than that of Biafra, a famine as acute in Westchester County as anywhere else. In Westchester, as in most other places, people have seemed more inclined of late to look backward, or inward, than ahead. In Rye, and in surrounding towns, the growing band of new Christians have been looking intently backward, all the way to the first century A.D., and are clearly transfixed by what they find.

Sunday is the big night for the new Christians of Rye. They crowd together in a borrowed church room for a special prayer-and-fellowship meeting. They flip through their dog-eared Bibles like graduate seminary students, underlining with yellow Magic Markers passages that hadn't struck them before. Their leader at these meetings is Steve Heefner, a 33-year-old former disc jockey for CBS who was "reborn in Christ" four and a half years ago.

"We're on a conveyor belt called Sin going toward a place called Death," Heefner tells the kids, "unless we're safe in the comforting arms of the Word of God." His scriptural teaching lasts well over an hour, only visitors squirm. There are hymns; a couple of original ones composed and led, on guitars, by Tim Bishop and Chuck Remington, and maybe a few choruses of the old favorite Amazing Grace, lately exalted to national popularity by the recordings of Judy Collins and Arlo Guthrie. There are announcements: believers reported recently on their "witnessing" at nearby towns and Cornell University, and told of "heavy, tight fellowship" they found at "advances" (not retreats) in North Carolina and California.

"Praise the Lord!" said Heefner. "Far out!" said the kids.

Speaking in tongues—an ancient practice technically called "glossolalia" and recently voguish in many new Christian circles—is always a feature of the Sunday night meetings. At Heefner's bidding a worshiper will rise to utter a divinely inspired message that sounds, to an unsaved ear, like: "Alokar shamash hrolandik asapolikaj shantih .... " The prompt translation, by the same speaker, is usually along the lines of "Be bold, my children, in spreading the Word. Thus saith the Lord."
"Wow, Lord, it's really out of sight"

All eyes are closed during prayers. "Wow, Lord," one boy recently began, "it's really out of sight the way you've brought us together here tonight, and we just want to thank you, Father, for letting us be worthy to be the stewards of your Word, through Jesus Christ our big brother. Old Satan won't know what hit him when we get going. We might have to hassle with him some, but we won't have to worry about anything ever, Father, so long as we're walking on your rightly-divided Word."

These children feel invincible. "So long as we keep our shield of believing up," as they say, "their cars won't crash, they won't get cancer, and if they're drafted and sent to Vietnam "we won't be killed or even scratched." But why get uptight about the draft? "Jesus," as they say, "might be back before breakfast!"

Poverty, spiritual or otherwise, will never vex these believers, because "if you believe, you'll receive abundantly, and not just spiritual abundance. The Father wants his people to be prosperous. That's why He tells us to tithe; we give Him a tenth of our money, or more, as love offerings, and it's mind-blowing the way it comes back, just like it says in Malachi. Poverty, see, is just Satanic stuff. Poor people are poor because they don't know how to pray."

The vast underground Christian revival of which this Rye group is one small outpost strikes different places in different styles. Many factions have already arisen. "New Testament Prayer Groups" in Texas and Minnesota attract members with street-witnessing and youth rallies. Christian communes serve as crash pads or relatively permanent lodging for new believers in San Francisco and Toronto. On the Sunset Strip of Los Angeles, free-lance evangelists have had spectacular success in persuading spaced-out acid heads that a "higher high" is available through Christ, and in holding mass baptisms in the Pacific.

To Rye, thus far afflicted less with a hard-drug problem than with ennui, the salvation message has come in the plainer, tougher form of a $45 class called "Power for Abundant Living." The class consists of 36 hours of tape-recorded lessons "guaranteed to answer 95% of your questions about the Bible and about everything else."

The tapes, along with films and much printed matter, are sent out by a rural Ohio organization called The Way Biblical Research Center. The Rye kids, who have converted many of their peers and several adults elsewhere in Westchester and on Long Island, call themselves The Way East.

The Way, they make clear, is not a church or a denomination. "Denominations," Steve Heefner tells them, "have failed. They tried too hard. Peter, John, James and those dudes had the right idea."

Christ you know I love you—
did you see I waved?

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR

For "Jesus Freaks," as these new Christians are used to being called, the message of glory is best passed not from ordained grown-ups in pulpits but between kids, by word of mouth, or from radio rock stations or phonograph headsets. One striking gauge of this movement's growth potential is the success of the hit album Jesus Christ Superstar and any number of other popular songs alluding to the Lord. This music, the kids say, also can help them lure people away from drugs and toward the New Testament. "If you've ever been stoned," one new convert says, "you know how you can become the music you're listening to..."
"My vision," Way founder Dr. Victor Paul Wierwille likes to say, "is for the world! We're growing faster than we know how to handle." He made his first triumphal trip to Rye, from Ohio, on a motorcycle.

CONTINUED —and when the songs have to do with Jesus, you're ready for a heavy Christian trip.”

It was Tina Ranyak, now 18, who brought The Way to Rye last August, when she came home from the Midwest. She had gone off to art school in Kansas City and been converted to Christianity there by a classmate who had discovered The Way. "I'd never given any thought to religion before," says Tina. "I'd hardly been inside a church in all my life. But what I heard about Christ seemed to make so much sense. I decided I'd accept Him as my personal Lord and Savior, the way it says in Romans 10:9. It wasn't all that melodramatic; I mean I didn't get any big rushes or anything. I just said the words one night and knew right away they were true."

After she quit art school, Tina went to live in a Way communal house in Wichita where, a Way leader says, "We've saved souls by the barrelful." By the time she came home to Rye last summer, with a Way friend as her houseguest, her faith was clearly contagious and her old friends and classmates were ripe for infection.

Tina's friends—"ex-flesh freaks," they now call themselves —were hip and bright and avant-garde, and had been showered all their lives with all the material "advantages" their parents could afford. "But," says Tina's father, John Ranyak, whose two sons have also joined The Way, "they were thoroughly starved for faith and something they could build a life around." That, perhaps, was why they had made an art form of sulking and moping.

"Some of us," says one 20-year-old boy, "had been through incredible garbage." What kinds of garbage? "What does it matter? There's no difference between seeing how fast you can run a mile or how much acid you can take."

"None of that stuff ever worked," says another believer, "I tried it all and I quit each thing whenever I heard of something else that might be a little more groovy, but it never was."

"I'd just graduated from Yale and come back from hitchhiking around Europe, doing what I'd supposedly always wanted to do, but not feeling particularly happy about it," says Brian Heaney, the one college graduate in the Rye group.

"I was getting ready to go to California," says Tim Bishop, "to see what kind of a flesh trip I could get into."

But the disaffected kids didn't go to California, or get into flesh trips. Premarital sex, like drug use, is discouraged by The Way. So is indolence; the kids are urged to work. So is reading newspapers..."
'Every so often I wonder if it's all a charade'

"because, shoot, newspapers lead to negative thoughts, which poison the mind. We just feed our minds by including the great truth of the Word, so we can be positively positive." Nor is it the women's liberation movement in good favor. "My daughter," one mother remembers, "suddenly accused me of bringing her up too leniently, instead of teaching her to be an efficient housekeeper."

The Way Word spread fast after Tina came home. So many recruits turned up that Heefner, for several years a part-time Way disciple, felt called to quit his CBS job and move to Rye with his wife and son to set up a full-time ministry.

Parents of one convert, returning from a long vacation away from their children, expected anything but what they found at home. "I knew the house would be turned into some sort of commune," the father says. "I wouldn't have been surprised to find a marijuana patch in the backyard, or a spate of sudden marriages. The one thing I never thought I'd see was 45 Bibles in the living room, and the maxims of J. Christ taped to all the mirrors."

By last fall The Way had burgeoned enough to merit a visit to Rye by its 53-year-old founder and president, Dr. Victor Paul Wierwille. He came in glory, all the way from New Knoxville, Ohio, on a raspberry-and-white Harley Davidson 74 motorcycle. He called Rye "a very dark town in a very dark county," but held forth hope. "As long as I'm here," he assured his audience, "nothing bad can happen to you folks, because I'm not believing for it to happen. Oh, people, isn't it a beauty-full trip to live and just ooz good-ness wherever you go? Isn't it tremendous to be able to say I know that I know that I know?"

And then, for about three hours, he explained The Way to the youth and such of their parents as could be persuaded to attend. A dashing dresser, with Holy Spirit doves on his cuffslinks, tie clasp, lapel pin and ring, Dr. Wierwille urged the parents to sign up for the course. He told them how he had devoted 30 years to developing "the first pure and correct interpretation of the Word since the first century A.D.," and how "Jesus Christ, the favorite cuss-word of the United States of America, is the same King of Kings and Lord of Lords who walked on water and fellowshiped with believers. He's alive today as He was in the Book of Acts, and anybody who doesn't accept Him as personal Lord and Savior is absolutely stupid."

As the Beatles and their followers once trooped to the Maharishi's ashram in India, several Rye kids have already made joyous pilgrimages to The Way headquarters, on Dr. Wierwille's 150-acre ancestral Ohio farm. Many plan to spend much of this summer there, living in trailers or dormitories and enrolling in such courses as: "How to Deal with Satan," "Speaking in Tongues, Interpretation and Prophecy," "Christian Family Life and Sex," "Christian Etiquette" and "Biblical Aramaic."

In New Knoxville, a 19th-century town of 800 people who say "shucks" a lot, where men call their wives "Mother" and other women "Ma'am" or "Girl," the kids from Rye will hear how The Way is growing in Samoa, California, Sweden and Alaska, and through special courses for inmates of at least two prisons. They may observe, too, the proven success of Dr. Wierwille's policy on tithing. In his remodeled farmhouse are such amenities as a sunken mosaic bathtub, and plans are afoot for a $3.5 million building program, to keep up with the expansion of The Way.

Won't you look down upon me, Jesus—
You've got to help me make a stand.
James Taylor FIRE AND RAIN

In Rye, meanwhile, parents are learning to live with The Way, with varying degrees of grace. They're getting used to the fact that when birthdays approach the gift kids request is Young's Concordance to the Bible.

A few share their children's delight in The Way. "I wept for joy," the Reverend Joseph Bishop recalls, "when Tim told me he'd found the Lord Jesus Christ." Reverend Bishop's Presbyterian church, unlike most in Rye or anywhere, has given the new movement hospitality and support.

But many parents remain dubious. "We treat our son," one mother says, "as if he were recovering from a dangerous illness." "It's embarrassing and awkward," says a father, "to have my own children greet me by saying, 'God bless you.'" "Especially," puts in an irreverent mother, "if you didn't even sneeze."

"I feel like saying to my daughter," says Mrs. Ralph Skedgell, a publishing house editor, "'Wait till you have children.' But I don't mean it the way my mother meant it when she said it to me." John Seiffer, who astounded his mother by spending an entire evening sewing a Bible-sized pocket inside his coat, has decided there isn't much point in talking to her about The Way. That's all right with her. "Arguing with them," Mrs. Seiffer says, "is like arguing with the Communists in the 1950s. They have all the answers. Besides, who can object to their knowing so much about the Bible?"

"In my generation," says Mrs. Skedgell, "we wore our skepticism and cynicism as a badge of honor. We were reacting to our rigid, old-fashioned, unprogressive grandparents. Now these kids are reacting to our habit of saying 'Well, let's see now, there's another whole side of the question.'"

"Every so often," says Joseph Lagey, "I wonder 'Is this all a charade? When will reality smash down?' But I guess it's no wonder this has happened in Rye. Brought up in homogenized suburbs sealed off from death, disease, morons, the ugly, the crippled and the poor, these kids can see how deficient are the pseudo-communities around them. They want symbols that define them more honestly.

"I've committed myself," Lagey goes on, "to the hope that rationalism will save humanity, but for all my doubts about The Way, I secretly hope it won't wither away like the flower children and the peace movement and the hippie movement did."

"Their scholarship seems smug and oddly intellectual," one mother says. "But they do claim that they've found eternal life and happiness, and I guess that can't hurt them."

She sounded, among other things, a little envious.

John Richeson

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