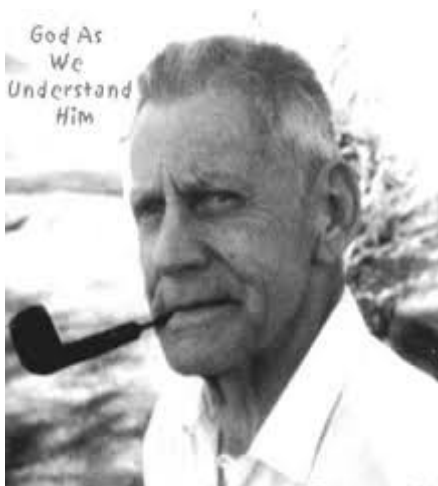




THE STORY OF ED

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the passing of a man who has been described as having made a contribution to Alcoholics Anonymous second only to that of AA's two co-founders, Bill W. and Dr. Bob. He is the man whose story Bill tells in Tradition Three; the man Bill calls "Ed". Bill relates how "Ed" came to get sober in New York, disagreed vociferously with all the other members about "the God bit", slipped while on a sales trip, had a religious experience and returned to the fold (Bill implies) converted. Bill wrote Ed's story in the format of an early twentieth-century evangelical Protestant conversion story of the sort Bill was probably familiar with from his youth. But in explaining in his own terms why no one should be turned away from A.A., Bill lost the original story which explained not how an atheist found God, but how an atheist found his own path to sobriety.



The man Bill called "Ed" was actually a fellow named Jimmy B. Jimmy is credited with the adoption of A.A.'s Third Tradition - "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking" (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions pp. 143-145). In addition, Jim and Hank P. convinced Bill to change the Twelve Steps to be more inclusive for those who weren't Christian or who did not believe in a god by using phrases like "God as we understand Him" and "Power greater than ourselves". Jim came to A.A. in January of 1938, was dry for about four months, got drunk, then sobered up for good June 15th of that year. His involvement in the writing of the Big Book and the Steps came after he had returned from the slip Bill describes. In A.A. Comes of Age, Bill recalls that contentious period. Bill wrote that in New York the AA's split into three factions, which Bill labeled "conservative", "liberal" and "radical." The conservative faction felt "the book ought to be Christian in the doctrinal sense of the word and that it should say so." This faction was led by Fitz M., the third man to recover at Town's hospital after Hank P. and Bill himself. The second faction, the liberals, had no real objection to using the word "God" in the book. They only wanted the book's Christian religious content to be toned down. The radical faction, the agnostics and atheists, led

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I Am Responsible...

*When anyone, anywhere,
reaches out for help,*

I want the hand of A.A.

always to be there.

And for that:

I am responsible.



ViewPoints: Spiritual not Religious

A Struggle With Belief

Brian C., Lake Grove

When I came to AA in 1983, I was told that I would have to find a Higher Power if I hoped to remain sober. I was told to “hit my knees” morning and night. I was told that my Higher Power would take care of me, if I would turn my will and my life over to His care. I was told to “fake it ‘til I make it”, an odd suggestion, I thought, in a program of rigorous honesty, but I tried to do all that was suggested to me. I wanted desperately to stay sober and tried to emulate the faith of those I saw around me. It was suggested that I was still hanging on to my will. I tried harder and kept on trying...

Eventually, I looked around me and saw people of all faiths all getting and staying sober. I didn't know of any atheists. Try as I might, though, I found that a person cannot will themselves to believe in anything in which they simply do not believe. By this time, I had been sober for several years. I was active in my group and in service work. My life had turned completely around. I had gone back to college and changed careers. I was by any standard an AA success story, but I still struggled with belief. Finally, I came to understand that, despite all my trying, I had never truly

I was by any standard an AA success story, but I still struggled with belief.

believed, and AA had worked for me anyway.

AA had taught me to accept life on life's terms. Was it possible for me to accept my own unbelief? This was a scary thought, but I could not go on being dishonest. I stopped trying to force belief on myself and accepted myself for who I am. I didn't drink. I became more open about my atheism with my friends in AA. I still didn't drink. I became comfortable with the idea that the combined wisdom of all those who had found sobriety before me had always been my Higher Power. I still didn't drink. I learned that there were atheist and agnostic newcomers who needed to hear that you can be an atheist in AA, so I began to share that part of my story openly. And in 30 years, I still haven't needed to take a drink.

In recent years, there seem to be more openly atheist and agnostic folks in AA. At one time, the chairperson, alternate chairperson

(Continued on page 3)

A Spiritual Journey

Mike I., Sunrise Reflection

I came to AA just over eight years ago because at the time my life was becoming unmanageable. I was drinking every day and despite having a great career, a loving wife, and two beautiful children I felt depressed. I began having difficulties at home and at work, so I consulted a therapist and she recommended AA. Much as I did not want to admit it, I knew she was right. I had a drinking problem and I needed AA.

The next day I attended my first meeting. I embraced the program fully and took all the suggestions: I went to ninety meetings in ninety days; I got a home group and took a commitment; I got a sponsor who I called every day, and I worked the Steps with him. My life soon began to change for the better!

It was easy enough, at first, to overlook the fact that I did not



I felt pressure to conform. This caused me to pull back from AA for a while...



share a belief in the kind of God that many members described in

the meetings. I was told to have faith in a Higher Power of my understanding, and that whatever that was, was okay. I did not give it too much thought at first. I was comfortable with the general idea of a Great Power of the Universe and I left it at that. After all, I was sober and I felt pretty good!

Over time, though, I heard a lot of talk about God in the meetings. People told me it was important that I find Him. Some even warned that I might drink again unless I developed a relationship with Him. There was a lot of talk about the importance of prayer. I heard people say that AA is “a spiritual program, not a religious one”, yet many members referenced Bible teachings or their church when they spoke. And it is well known that the AA program traces its roots to the Oxford Group, a clearly religious organization. Eventually I began to feel uncomfortable with all the God-talk. I felt pressure to conform. This caused me to pull back from AA for a while, and to withdraw from my home group. However, I soon learned that I really needed my AA friends. I did not want to give up on the program that had helped me so much. I also knew that I had many friends in the program that likewise depended on me to help them stay sober. That is how it works. So what could I do?

(Continued on page 8)



Group History of the Month

Bay Shore Freethinkers

A Freethinker is “a person who forms opinions on the basis of reason, independent of authority or tradition, especially a person whose religious opinions differ from established belief.” This meeting tries to follow that standard.

Brian, who provided much of the information on the meeting, stated that after about six years sobriety he struggled with the “God slant” and hoped for a less traditional Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. That thought led to the creation of Freethinkers four years later in August 2008. He was to start this with the assistance of Jim. For some time it was only the two of them who showed up. They would avail themselves of the piano in the meeting room, which they would play and sing along to while waiting on others to materialize. Once its listing appeared the sing-a-longs ended and the meeting took off.

The format is round robin going around the room after the leader shares on a topic from one of the books used. Those books are *As Bill Sees It* and *Living Sober*. Most nights the group meets in a circle but sometimes they meet around a table. One night in October 2009 there were seven in attendance including a newcomer. Most were regulars with respectable amounts of sober time. It would seem to be gratifying to a visitor that the Freethinkers practice what they preach— when one person sharing made frequent references to the word “God” there was no recriminations or attempts at censorship made by the others. In other words there seemed an excellent level of tolerance.

The Freethinkers use the Agnostic Twelve Steps which replace the word “God” as in this example of the Third Step: “Made a decision to entrust our will and our lives to the care of the collective wisdom and resources of those who have searched before us”. This version of the Steps originated in California where this style meeting has been an acceptable alternative for many years. A quick check of the New York City meeting list showed seven meetings following this Humanist philosophy in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx. All of these meetings are listed on the New York City Intergroup website. Freethinkers may be the trailblazer in Suffolk County. The Archives Committee could not find anything comparable past or present. In keeping with its approach the meeting does not end with the Lord’s Prayer.

Sober For Thirty Years

J.B., San Diego, California

A.A. Grapevine, November 1999

As noted in my story, “The Vicious Cycle,” in the Big Book, I came into the Fellowship in New York in January 1938. At that time A.A. was just leaving the Oxford Group. There was one closed discussion meeting a week, at Bill’s home in Brooklyn, - attendance six or eight men, with only three members who had been sober more than one year: Bill, Hank, and Fitz. This is about all that had been accomplished in the four years with the New York Oxford Group. During those early meetings at Bill’s, they were flying blind, with no creed or procedure to guide them, though they did use quite a few of the Oxford sayings and the Oxford Absolutes. Since both Bill and Dr. Bob had had almost-overnight experiences, it was taken for granted that all who followed would have the same sort of experience. So the early meetings were quite religious, in both New York and Akron. There was always a Bible on hand, and the concept of God was all biblical.

Into this fairly peaceful picture came I, their first self-proclaimed atheist, completely against all religions and conventions. I was the captain of my own ship. (The only trouble was, my ship was completely disabled and rudderless.) So naturally

(Continued on page 4)

Struggle with Belief *(Continued from page 2)*

and two of the committee members of our local Intergroup were atheists or agnostics. I know since I was one of them. Occasionally, people who knew of my lack of belief in the supernatural would tell me that some of the most spiritual, service oriented and generally helpful people they knew in AA were atheists, and asked how that could be. How can the non-believer have a spiritual awakening? What can non-supernatural spirituality mean?

I discovered my answer to these questions in readings on philosophy, in the word “numinous”. There are activities, ideas, experiences and emotions that inspire in each of us the growth of what might be called our better nature. These things are described as numinous: inspiring to awe, mystery, beauty, gratitude and the like. In working the Steps, and in practicing their principles in my daily affairs, I can pursue those things that bring me closer to the Numinous. That my efforts may be all too human and faltering reminds me to temper my expectations with humility. I share with my believing fellows the character defect that, left to myself, I start to think that the universe owes it to me to meet my standards. I have to remember, whether there is a god or there isn’t, my believing friends and I can agree on one thing: I’m not Him.



Sober Thirty Years (Continued from page 3)

I started fighting nearly all the things Bill and the others stood for, especially religion, the "God bit." But I did want to stay sober, and I did love the understanding Fellowship. So I became quite a problem to that early group, with my constant haranguing against all spiritual angles.

All of a sudden, the group became really worried. Here I had stayed sober five whole months while fighting everything the others stood for. I was now number four in "seniority." I found out later they had a prayer meeting on "what to do with Jim." The consensus seemed to have been that they hoped I would either leave town or get drunk.

That prayer must have been right on target, for I was suddenly taken drunk on a sales trip. This became the shock and the bottom I needed. At this time I was selling auto polish to jobbers for a company that Bill and Hank were sponsoring, and I was doing pretty well, too. But despite this, I was tired and completely isolated there in Boston. My fellow alcoholics really put the pressure on as I sobered up after four days of no relief, and for the first time I admitted I couldn't stay sober alone. My closed mind opened a bit. Those folks back in New York, the folks who believed, had stayed sober. And I hadn't. Since this episode I don't think I have ever argued with anyone else's beliefs. Who am I to say?

I finally crawled back to New York and was soon back into the fold. About this time, Bill and Hank were just beginning to write the A.A. Big Book. I do feel sure my experience was not in vain, for "God" was broadened to cover all types and creeds: "God as we understood Him."

I feel my spiritual growth over these past thirty years has been very gradual and steady. I have no desire to "graduate" from A.A.. I try to keep my memories green by staying active in A.A. - a couple of meetings weekly.

For the new agnostic or atheist just coming in, I will try to give very briefly my milestones in recovery.

1. The first power I found greater than myself was John Barleycorn.
2. The A.A. Fellowship became my Higher Power for the first two years.
3. Gradually, I came to believe that God and Good were synonymous and were found in all of us.
4. And I found that by meditating and trying to tune in on my better self for guidance and answers, I became more comfortable and steady.

The Third Step

- Margaret P., South Shore Serenity

On first reading Step Three, the words "care of God" gave me a sense of hope. I needed and wanted care and was willing to admit that I needed help with my alcoholism. The members of the groups I attended gave me hope. I saw people coping with life and acting with a purpose. I committed myself to A.A. quickly; here was a place that I felt cared for. A decision was made.

When I heard others speak about a God, their God or a Higher Power, I tried to understand and wanted their beliefs. I felt that I did not have what they had and this caused me conflict. After much reading and searching, I realized it was not about their beliefs, it was about mine --- a spirituality to be caring about myself and others. This understanding became simple for me and comfortable.

My dependence on A.A., the fellowship and my recovery must always come first. Yes, I pray and meditate and try to keep an open mind --- acceptance. I first came into A.A. seeking "peace of mind" because I knew I was insane and definitely had deep emotional problems. I had been a dry drunk for seven years. I had been doing it my way.

My decision is not to pick up that first drink and to use everything that A.A. has to offer. My first sponsor told me that A.A. was not a "stop drinking program", but a "recovery program". This meant I had to stop saying, "I know. I know.", and start listening. Was I willing to do what was asked of me? I had no other choice: A.A. is my last chance.

Interacting with others and not isolating gave me an inner strength. I ask today for the strength to carry me through life one day at a time. I see and hear this strength in the members of A.A., though each person may have a different belief that is keeping them sober. When I add the Twelve Steps, a commitment and attendance at meetings, I have a good chance of not picking up that day.

Many times I re-read this step to see if I still have the faith and hope that I first found in the A.A. Fellowship. I have not been disappointed and I am not now alone in my recovery journey. I am being cared for.

We're on the Web!

www.Suffolkny-aa.org



The Story of Ed

(Continued from page 1)

by Jim B. and Hank P. wanted "God" removed from the book.

The New York members eventually reached a compromise resulting in four extremely important changes to the 12 Steps:

1. Substituting the phrase "a Power greater than ourselves" for "God" in Step Two
2. Changing the word "God" to the phrase "God as we understood Him" in Steps Three and Eleven
3. Eliminating the expression "on our knees" from Step Seven
4. Introducing the Steps with the sentence "Here are the steps we took which are suggested as a Program of Recovery" so that they became *only suggestions*.

Bill later acknowledged the contribution of Jim, Hank and the other agnostics / atheists in the group:

"Such were the final concessions to those of little or no faith; this was the great contribution of our atheists and agnostics. They had widened our gateway so that all who suffer might pass through, regardless of their belief or lack of belief." (Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, p. 167)

If Jim didn't have the conversion experience Bill describes, what sort of experience did he have that enabled him to stay sober and make the contributions that he did? On his thirtieth anniversary, Jim wrote an article for the Grapevine ("Sober for Thirty Years", reprinted in this issue of *The Bulletin*) in which he explains what happened to him:

"I admitted I couldn't stay sober alone. My closed mind opened a bit. Those folks back in New York, the folks who believed, had stayed sober. And I hadn't. Since this episode I don't think I have ever argued with anyone else's beliefs. Who am I to say?"

From the beginning, there was a lot of controversy over the idea that belief in God was essential to sobriety. Some, such as Bill and Dr. Bob, truly thought belief in God was essential. Others, such as Jim and Hank, did not think that belief was essential to sobriety. Jim and Hank argued that the alcoholic should be able to "take God or leave Him alone as he wished." For Jim, as he says in his article, it was the group that kept him sober, he could not stay sober alone. He admitted that he needed the group. He had to stop insisting he was right and others wrong.

According to Clarence S. (an early AA member from Cleveland): "Jimmy remained steadfast, throughout his life and 'preached' his particular [non-God] brand of AA wherever he went."

SIA Hotline

"I spend a great deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly. I do it for the following four reasons:

1. *Sense of duty*
2. *It is a pleasure.*
3. *Because in doing so I am paying my debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me.*
4. *Because every time I do it I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip."*

Alcoholics Anonymous, "Dr. Bob's Nightmare"

As I become more involved in the Hotline, I am discovering that many of the phone numbers that we are using for our 12 Step Volunteer list are non-working numbers. This makes it more difficult for the Hotline volunteer to find an AA to speak to the caller. At the present time our books have about 700 names. We have sent each group new 2014 sign-up sheets with the monthly SIA mailing. District Captains will also be bringing them to groups when they visit the groups with schedules for the groups' Hotline commitment.

Last year a few groups either didn't mail the sheets back in time or at all, so were not included in the 12 Step book. Consequently, many willing people were denied the opportunity to do service. Our primary purpose is to carry the message. Join us in this life-saving service. Mail, fax or bring your 2014 sign-up sheets to the SIA Office no later than April 1st 2014.

Thanks to February's Hotline volunteers:

District 30:	Big Commack John K., Phone Captain
District 90:	Blue Point Tradition Bohemia Way of Life Dave, Phone Captain
District 250:	Quogue, Bays Rich W., Phone Captain
District 110:	REBOS, Lake Group Paul S., Phone captain

See page 6 for upcoming commitments!

Dolores K., Hotline Chair



The Bulletin

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Please note:

Inclusion of articles and announcements in The Bulletin does not constitute endorsement by Alcoholics Anonymous or Suffolk Intergroup Association. Rather, members of Alcoholics Anonymous have been encouraged to share their experience, strength and hope through this publication. Opinions expressed are those of the writer unless otherwise noted. Suffolk Intergroup makes these articles and announcements available solely as a service to the reader.

Brian C., Editor

Next Up on the HotLine: March Commitments

March 2 - 8: District 230
Into Action Group
Jeff A., District Phone Captain

March 9 - 15: District 220
Group Needed
Bob P., District Phone Captain

March 16 - 22: District 40
High Noon Group
Bob L., District Phone Captain

March 23 - 29: District 50
Babylon Off Main St., Mid-Island Groups
Ron A., District Phone Captain

Intergroup Officers

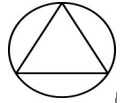
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April Meetings

Archives Committee: 4/2/2014 8:00 PM SIA Office
Institutions Committee: 4/16/2014 7:00 PM SIA Office
Public Information Committee: 4/15/2014 7:00 PM SIA Office
SIA Monthly Business Meeting:
4/8/2014 Cleary School
6:30 PM New Group Rep Orientation
6:30 PM Share-a-Thon
7:00 PM Hot-Line Captains
7:30 PM Intergroup Meeting
SIA Officers & Chairpersons: 4/1/2014 7:00 PM SIA Office
Suffolk General Service: 4/18/2014 8:00 PM
Trinity Lutheran Church,
Rocky Point



ANNOUNCEMENTS



The Archives Committee is looking for a few good men and women to help preserve the history of Alcoholics Anonymous in Suffolk County. Why not join us for our next Committee meeting. We always meet the first Wednesday of the month at 8:00pm. Leave word at the Intergroup Office (631) 654-1150. In the meanwhile why not check out the website SuffolkAAArchives.Com and get involved in some fun service work.

Do You Belong in an Institution?

There's plenty of people in institutions who could use your help. The next meeting of the Institutions Committee will be on March 19th at 7:00 PM in the Intergroup office on the corner of Bay Avenue and Terrell Avenue in Patchogue. Come down and help us spread the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. If you are already chairing an institutional meeting, pick up some literature to distribute at your meeting.

Meeting Changes

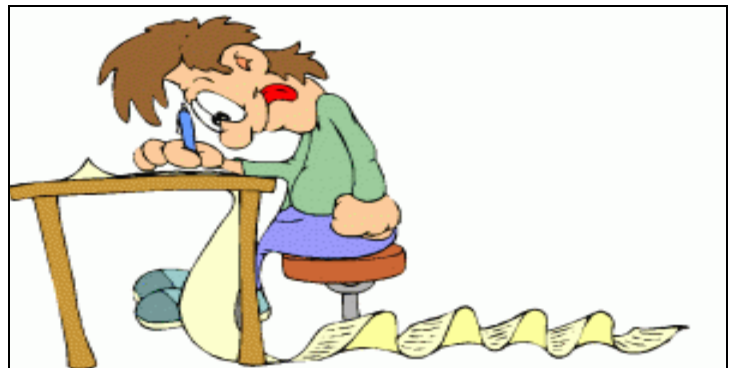
Fire has destroyed the Yaphank Presbyterian Church. The A.A. meeting is being held in the community building behind the church, Monday/Friday at 7:30 PM. Use driveway on west side of home for parking. (We'll leave the light on for you.)

The Still Suffering Need Your Help!

The SIA Public Information Committee brings information about what AA is and what we do and don't do to members of the public who might deal with the still sick and suffering alcoholic at work or in social or religious contexts. We need your help. Any AA member can join us. The PI Committee meets at the SIA office in Patchogue on March 18th at 7:00 PM. The best Public Information tool we have is the living example of a sober member of A.A. We need you to help show that it works.

The Share-a-thon is Coming!

The committee for the 2014 Share-a-Thon will soon be forming. If your group would like to be involved in this year's Share-a-Thon, you should send a representative to the Share-a-thon meeting preceding the regular SIA monthly business meeting. The committee meets one hour before the SIA business meeting in the same location as the business meeting: either the Cleary School for the Deaf in Ronkonkoma or the Corning Cooperative Extension building in Riverhead, depending on the month.



We'd Like to Hear From You...

Write us and tell us what you think of, well, pretty much anything A.A. related. We'd like to make the Bulletin the voice of the members of A.A. in Suffolk County. This means YOU! Tell us what we're doing right; tell us what we're doing wrong; share your experience with others.



A Spiritual Journey (Continued from page 2)

I understood that the Steps of AA encouraged me to turn my will and my life over to the care of the God *of my understanding*, but I realized I had never developed any meaningful understanding of the God concept! The truth is, I was not sure *what* I believed when it came to God. I decided I needed to uncover my real feelings and beliefs regarding a Higher Power, and so my "spiritual journey" began. I read historical accounts and philosophical arguments about gods and belief; I read ancient and modern texts having to do with the Nature of the Universe; I talked things over with friends in and out of AA, and I spent a great deal of time reflecting on these Big Questions.

How surprised I was when I discovered that I was, in fact, an atheist! Furthermore, I always have been, though I did not know it. As a scientist I had always been filled with awe and wonder when my eyes turned to the heavens. I have always seen and appreciated the complexity of life and the goodness in people. I value good deeds. I believe in love of family and of my fellow Man. But I do not believe the things that most people mean when they speak of God.

Armed with a deeper sense of self, I returned to my home group and shared my experience with them. They accepted me with open arms. They pointed out that AA's scope is broad and inclusive, not exclusive. We recalled that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking, and that our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics achieve sobriety.

Today I do not make an issue of my lack of belief in a god. Nor do I hide it. I use the collective wisdom and experience of my fellow AA members as my Higher Power ("a Power greater than myself") and that concept has served me well. I know I belong in AA. It has helped me live a better, richer, and fuller life than I had before. My AA friends love me and accept me, as I love and accept them, in spite of and because of our varied views of life. We have lots to learn from each other, and many experiences, much strength, and much hope to share.

There are many, many alcoholics who need help and who do not necessarily believe in a God. The hand of AA can and should reach out to them, regardless of their beliefs or lack of belief. Some of these suffering alcoholics may eventually come to find a loving God of their understanding. Others like myself will forever embrace a totally secular world view. AA is big enough for all of us. We should be mindful not to scare away the newcomer by presenting the AA program as religious, or by over-emphasizing the God concept. Today I make a special effort to help make every alcoholic, especially the newcomer, feel welcome regardless of his or her beliefs regarding God.



From the Meeting List Committee:

George D., Port Jefferson Group

The March Meeting List has gone to print and will be available at the March SIA Meeting and at the SIA Office thereafter. We can all be of service to AA and the newcomer by being familiar with meeting changes in our area and by keeping the meeting list (print and online) as accurate as possible. Feel free to email me at Meetings@suffolkny-aa.org with corrections or suggestions. Following is a mention of groups added to, or removed from the list since November:

ADDED

164 GROUP, Commack
 AQUEBOGUE THURSDAY NIGHT GROUP
 AQUEBOGUE FREEDOM GROUP
 SECOND CHANCES, Baiting Hollow
 SMITHTOWN HIGHER GROUND
 THE CLUBHOUSE, Shoreham
 BRIDGEHAMPTON HAYGROUND GROUP

REMOVED

COMMACK HOW IT WORKS
 COMMACK 12 STEPS TO FREEDOM
 NORTHPORT FORT SALONGA NEW
 LEASE ON LIFE
 MILLS POND GROUP, Saint James
 RONKONKOMA SUNDAY NIGHT
 WOMANS GROUP
 RIVERHEAD GRANGE GROUP
 RIVERHEAD FREEDOM GROUP