

Finding Aid to Gilbert Block/Sadie, Sadie The Rabbi Lady Papers 2002-05

Repository: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society

Collection Title: Gilbert Block/Sadie, Sadie The Rabbi Lady papers

Collection Number: 2002-05

Physical Description: 10.5 Linear feet (5 cartons, 2 oversize boxes, and 1 oversize file)

Creator:

Block, Gilbert

Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence

Date (inclusive): 1971-2001

Language of Material: English

Abstract: Gilbert (Gil) Block (1944-2010), also known as Sadie, Sadie the Rabbi Lady, was a formative member of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. The collection includes correspondence, organizational records, publications, audiovisual recordings, photographs, and artifacts.

Preferred Citation:

Gilbert Block/Sadie, Sadie the Rabbi Lady papers (2002-05), The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

Conditions Governing Access: Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights:

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Acquisition Information:

The collection was donated to the GLBT Historical Society in 2002 by Gilbert Block.

Processing Information:

Finding aid created by Rachel Greiner in 2019.

Biographical / Organizational Information:

Gilbert (Gil) Block (1944-2010), also known as Sadie, Sadie the Rabbi Lady, was a formative member of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (SPI) is an order of queer nuns who engage in guerrilla theatre, activism, and perform rituals from Pagan, Christian and Jewish traditions while satirizing the Church. Sadie was a Jewish Sister, who performed exorcisms, held parties, and ran for a city council position in Concord, CA.

Block was born in the United States but spent formative years of his childhood in Canada before moving to San Francisco. Block joined the Sisters and became Sadie, Sadie the Rabbi Lady around 1982. Sadie was inspired by a number of famous actresses and “everyone’s favorite Jewish Grandma from Miami.” Gil Block’s other persona was Grodia Grebble. As a part of the Sisters, in particular with Sister Chanel 2001 (Gilbert Baker) and Scarlot Harlot, Sadie, Sadie engaged in a number of public demonstrations and street-theatre styled events. Some notable events include attending the 1984 Oscars in full drag to raise money for “Eddie Murphy’s Disease: Homophobia.” They also attended the 1984 Democratic National Convention to perform an exorcism of Jerry Falwell’s homophobia. Sadie, Sadie and Sister Chanel hosted the Official San Francisco 1987 Papal Welcoming Committee and were arrested on the Golden Gate Bridge while engaging in political theatre. The Sisters engaged in a plethora of charity and educational work, including creating an important pamphlet on safe sex at the beginning of the AIDS crisis called “Play Fair!” Sadie, Sadie the Rabbi Lady’s Safe Sex Seminars—described as a combination of a lecture and burlesque show—were presentations using “slides, songs and silliness” to translate information presented by doctors about how to have safe sex. The Sisters and Sadie eventually had a falling out, called The Schism by press reporting on the issue.

Sadie, Sadie the Rabbi Lady was also involved in many other organizations, notably as a longtime member of ACT-UP and Queer Nation, and also COYOTE and REAL Traditional Values, for which Sadie sent detailed mailers regarding issues such as Prop 7, a measure to create a public San Francisco power company that would be more affordable, and would not drain Hetch Hetchy, a reservoir in Yosemite National Park. In 1991, Block ran for Concord City Council. Campaigning alternatively in a formal black suit as “Reverend Block” and in a cheerleader costume as Sadie, the candidate raised a stir in the conservative town, although she did not win. Following the election Sadie was invited to debate Lloyd Mashore on the Phil Donahue show. Block wrote a book about his experiences in 2000 titled *Confessions of a Jewish Nun*. On May 22, 2010, Gilbert Block died by suicide.

Scope and Content:

The collection reflects the activism, educational work, drag and guerrilla theatre of Gilbert Block/Sadie, Sadie the Rabbi Lady, primarily during her time as a member of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. Other topics include ACT-UP, Queer Nation, The New Stonewall Liberation Day, and organizing around Prop 7. The collection includes audiovisual material, artifacts, clippings, pamphlets, photographs, mailers, and other documents relating to Sadie, Sadie, circa 1971-2001.

The collection includes records of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence including fliers, legal documents, administrative records, handmade event posters and newspaper clippings. Notable events and documents include fliers advertising the Red Party, the Sisters’ safe-sex pamphlet “Play Fair!” and promotional materials for Bad Habits. There are also fundraising materials such as a series of cards created by the sisters. There is material on the “Schism,” or the legal battle instigated when the newly incorporated Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Inc. sued Sadie, Sadie the Rabbi Lady and Sister Chanel 2001 to determine copyright ownership of the name Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. There is also extensive documentation of the Papal Visit of 1987. The

collection also includes a copy of Sadie's book *Confessions of a Jewish Nun*, a number of photographs of Sadie, Sadie in drag and at events, and audiovisual material and artifacts.

Arrangement: Collection arrived with loose original order seemingly based generally on topic and date. Collection is now arranged generally based on material type and topic, respecting original order as much as possible.

Indexing Terms

Female impersonators
Gay activists
Gay communities
Gay men
Gay men—religious life
Jewish gay men

Container Listing

Carton 1, Folders 1-15	Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence materials, 1981-1990 and undated
Carton 1, Folders 15-19	Official San Francisco 1987 Papal Welcoming Committee material, 1987-1991

Scope and Content: The Official San Francisco Papal Welcoming Committee was founded by Sadie, Sadie the Rabbi Lady and Sister Chanel 2001 for Pope John Paul II's visit to San Francisco. The collections hold satirical promotional materials, event posters, reflections on the event, arrest records, clippings and more.

Carton 1, Folders 20-22	Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Schism material, 1987
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Scope and Content: The Schism occurred when the members of the Papal Welcoming Committee used the Sisters name, and were then sued by other Sisters. This section includes Schism-related clippings, legal documents and more.

Carton 1, Folder 23	ACT UP clippings, fliers and organizational material, 1989-1990, undated
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Carton 1, Folder 24	San Francisco Lesbian/Gay Freedom Day Parade and Celebration Committee documents and clippings, 1972-1998, undated Original Title: Gay Parade
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Carton 1, Folders 25-28	New Stonewall Liberation Day pamphlets, legal documents, clippings, photographs and more, 1987-1992, undated
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Carton 2, Folder 1, 5-6	Queer Nation and Jerry Falwell mailers, Anarchy Playbill 1988-1990, undated Original Title: Bigots
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Carton 2, Folders 2-3	PG+E mailers, clippings and more, 1988-1990
Carton 2, Folder 4	Coalition for R.E.A.L. Traditional Values clippings pamphlets and mailers, 1991, undated
Carton 2, Folders 7-15	Concord City Council Election clippings, mailers, election materials, 1990-1991
Carton 3, Folder 1-14	Sadie, Sadie Photographs and ephemera, 1982-1991 undated
Carton 3, Folder 15-27	Sadie, Sadie clippings and correspondence, 1982-1998 undated
Carton 3, Folder 28-30	<i>Confessions of a Jewish Nun</i> drafts, floppy disk, 1984-1999
Carton 3, Folder 31	Gil Block "Sadie Image" floppy disk, undated
Carton 3, Folder 32	"Feather One" floppy disk, undated
Carton 3, Folder 33	Cleve Jones clippings, 1990-1992, undated
Carton 3, Folder 34	Scarlot Harlot pamphlets, clippings and more, 1984-1990, undated
Carton 3, Folder 35	Crusader Rabbit printouts, 1998
Carton 3, Folder 36	Alan Cantwell AIDS research and correspondence, 1980-1989, undated
Carton 4	Newspaper clippings, 1987-1990

Scope and Content: clippings and larger issues of newspapers saved by Sadie, Sadie on topics including: The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Schism, Harvey Milk's murderer, Papal welcome, homophobia from public officials and in public schools, Gay/Lesbian Freedom Day Parade, a dog who won a drag contest, Concord City Council election and more. Newspapers are from the following publications: Bay Times: Gay/Lesbian Newspaper and Calendar of Events for the Bay Area, SF Examiner including 1987 Pope Souvenir Edition, SF Sentinel: California's Gay Newsweekly and Classified Ads Section, SF Chronicle, Guardian, Bay Area Reporter, Coming Up!: The Gay/Lesbian Newspaper and Calendar of Events for The Bay Area, Territorial enterprise, Marin Independent Journal, Contra Costa Times

Carton 4	Die Now, Pay Later print by Opal, 1976
Carton 5	Audiovisual recordings and artifacts

Scope and Content: Contains artifacts and audiovisual material, all undated unless noted otherwise. Artifacts include: Queer Nation and Let Gil Block Shirts, undated, Confessions of a Jewish Nun book,s 1999, a tie-dye rainbow bag and a red hat, undated.

Tapes include titles such as: “Sadie Interviews Krishna Kosher,” “Gorgyo,” “Tom Ammiano and Sadie, 2/9/88” “Parade Clip ’85,” New Testament and Margot’s Message and Starship Gil Block” “The AIDS Whistle-Blowers Two- Part May Special on Tony Brown’s Journal: Alan Cantwell MD, Peter Duesburg PhD,” “OCT 6/81 ACT-Up Sadie,” “ Hetch-Hetchy—Express PG + E; Concord,” “Love Thy Neighbor: 7/2/98,” “Streker Memorandum”“ Gil Bock Phil Donahue,” “Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence at Orange County Courthouse 3-28-89,” and there are a number of untitled tapes as well. Some material has been digitized.

Oversized Box 1Synagogo Hat, undated

Oversized Box 2	Costumes, undated
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