Finding Aid to the Justin Smith Papers, 1932-1985 Coll2015-011

Kyle Morgan
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Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, USC Libraries, University of Southern California
Title: Justin Smith papers
Identifier/Call Number: Coll2015-011
Physical Description: 1.2 Linear Feet1 flat archive box
Date (inclusive): 1932-1985

Abstract: Photographs and a scrapbook documenting the personal life and career of Justin Smith, 1932-1985. Smith was an actor, acting coach, and prominent figure in the gay rights movement in Los Angeles in the late 1970s.

Biographical / Historical
Justin Smith was born on June 15, 1921, in Syracuse, New York. Affected by anti-Semitism growing up, Smith worked to bring Jewish and Christian groups together at the University of Pennsylvania, where he graduated with a bachelor of science in economics. In 1943, he joined the Navy's officer training program and the following year became the youngest commanding officer in the Pacific Fleet. In 1948, he got a part in a theater production in New York and gave up a career in economics for one in acting. In Los Angeles, Smith appeared in television and movies, then opened his own acting studio, Justin Smith Studio, in West Hollywood in 1967.

The Mark IV Slave Auction bust by the Los Angeles police in 1976 infuriated Smith and ultimately induced him to publicly come out as gay and become active in the community. Smith was a founding member of the ACLU Gay Rights Chapter, a founding board member of the New Alliance for Gay Equality (NEW AGE), and a founding member of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Police Advisory Task Force. He served on the Building Committee of the Gay Community Services Center, was the entertainment director for the Stonewall Democratic Club, and acted as a team leader for the Advocate Experience. Smith worked on the No on 6 Committee to defeat the Briggs Initiative, served on the advisory council of the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA), was a member of both Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and the Gay Academic Union (GAU). Smith continued on as an acting coach and conducted workshops to help people improve their communications skills. In 1982, the California Arts Council awarded him its first artist-in-residency grant. He also received sponsorship for his work from the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center. He wrote a column in Frontiers from 1984-1985 titled “Growing Older in Gay America.” Justin Smith died in February 1986.

Scope and Contents
Photographs and a scrapbook documenting the personal life and career of Justin Smith, 1932-1985. The scrapbook includes clippings, fliers, correspondence, pamphlets, and an arrest report by Los Angeles police in 1966.

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Preferred Citation
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Processing Information
Collection processed by Kyle Morgan, 2015.

Immediate Source of Acquisition
Date and method of acquisition unknown.

Box 1, Folder 1 Scrapbook 1932-1985
Box 1, Folder 2 Photographs circa 1950-1985

Physical Description: [8 color and 22 black-and-white photographs]