Jean Rouverol Butler Papers

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Writers Guild Foundation Archive
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2018
Descriptive Summary
Title: Jean Rouverol Butler Papers
Dates: 1937-1998
Collection Number: WGF-MS-085
Creator/Collector: Rouverol, Jean
Extent: 6.25 linear feet
Repository: Writers Guild Foundation Archive
Los Angeles, California 90048
Abstract: The Jean Rouverol Butler Papers consist mainly of screenplays and correspondence related to projects that she worked on alone and with her husband Hugo. Notably, the collection includes Rouverol's FBI file from the 1950s when she lived in exile in Mexico with her family.
Language of Material: English
Access
Available by appointment only. Material unprocessed but available for use.
Publication Rights
The responsibility to secure copyright and publication permission rests with the researcher.
Preferred Citation
Jean Rouverol Butler Papers. Writers Guild Foundation Archive
Acquisition Information
Donated by Butler's family on 3/19/2018
Biography/Administrative History
Born in St. Louis on July 8, 1916, Rouverol was the daughter of Joseph Rouerol and Aurania Ellerbeck Rouerol, who was an actress turned writer. Aurania created the Andy Hardy character for the stage and went on to write plays and the 1931 Joan Crawford film "Dance, Fools, Dance." Jean grew up in Palo Alto, CA and got into acting at a young age. In 1940 she married husband Hugo Butler and they began a family, and Rouverol focused on her writing. While Butler served in World War II, Rouverol wrote her first novella and sold it to McCall's magazine in 1945. By 1950, her first screenplay had been made into a movie, "So Young, So Bad," but her screenwriting career was halted after it was discovered that in 1943, she and Butler had joined the American Communist Party. In 1951, the House Un-American Activities Committee attempted to subpoena the couple. Rouverol and Butler chose to self-exile with their four children in Mexico rather than face a possible prison sentence as endured by some of their friends who were part of the so-called Hollywood Ten. Rouverol and Butler were labeled as "subversives and dangerous revolutionaries" by the government and didn't return permanently to the U.S. until 1964. Acclaimed screenwriter Dalton Trumbo came to live with the couple in Mexico after he was released from an 11-month sentence in a federal penitentiary for contempt of Congress when he refused to give information to the committee. While in exile, Rouverol had two more children and continued to write screenplays, short stories and magazine articles to earn money. Three screenplays she co-wrote with Butler were accepted for filming by Hollywood studios only because they used fronts and kept their identities secret. The couple settled in California upon their return from Mexico. The two continued to collaborate on scripts, and Rouverol wrote the book "Harriet Beecher Stowe: Woman Crusader" in 1968. Butler died in 1968 and Rouerol returned to writing. She was co-head writer for the soap opera "Guiding Light" during the 1970s and earned two Daytime Emmy nominations and a Writers Guild award. Rouerol left the show in 1976. In 1984, she penned "Writing for the Soaps" and taught at USC and UCLA Extension. She served four terms on the WGA's Board of Directors and in 1987, she received the Writers Guild's Morgan Cox Award for service to the union. In 2000, at age 84, she published "Refugees From Hollywood: A Journal of the Blacklist Years" about her family's life in exile, in which she spoke about the blacklisted artists' refusal to plead the 5th Amendment against self-incrimination. Rouerol moved to Pawling, NY in 2005, where she lived with her partner Clifford Carpenter, another former blacklisted artist. He died in 2014. Rouerol died on March 24, 2017 and is survived by her son Michael Butler; five daughters, Susan Butler, Becky Butler, Mary Butler, Emily McCoy and Deborah Spiegelman; eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. [Adapted from LA Times obituary]
Scope and Content of Collection
The Jean Rouerol Butler Papers span Jean's professional life as a writer and author, from college through the 1990s. The collection encompasses screenplays, correspondence and outlines for a variety of film projects, short stories and novels. It also includes material generated during her teaching career and her work with the WGA to correct Blacklist-era film credits.
Indexing Terms
Blacklisting of entertainers--United States.
Blacklisting of authors--United States.
Blacklisting of entertainers--United States.
Blacklisting of authors--United States.
Rouverol, Aurania, 1886-1955
Butler, Hugo, 1914-1968
Screenplays
Screenwriters