Gilbert Block/Sadie, Sadie The Rabbi Lady papers

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Gilbert Block/Sadie, Sadie The Rabbi Lady papers
Dates: 1971-2001
Collection Number: 2002-05
Creator/Collector: Block, Gilbert Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence
Extent: 10.5 Linear feet (5 cartons, 2 oversize boxes, and 1 oversize file)
Repository: GLBT Historical Society
San Francisco, California 94103
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.
Language of Material: English
Access
Collection is open for research.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
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Acquisition Information
The collection was donated to the GLBT Historical Society in 2002 by Gilbert Block.
Biography/Administrative History
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 of Collection
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.

**Indexing Terms**

Gay men
Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence
Jewish people
Drag
Politics and elections

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