

Finding Aid to Judy Freespirit papers

(#2008-48)

Repository: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society

Collection Title: Judy Freespirit papers

Collection Number: 2008-48

Physical Description: 9 linear feet (7 cartons, 1 oversized folder)

Creator: Freespirit, Judy

Date (inclusive): 1971-2009

Language of Material: English

Abstract: Judy Freespirit (Judith Louise Berkowitz Ackerman) was an activist, writer, and performer, focused on the subjects of women, lesbians, Jewish culture, fat acceptance, disability rights, and incest survival. Freespirit was of the earliest members of the fat acceptance movement, as coauthor (with Vivian Mayer) of the 1973 *Fat Liberation Manifesto*. The collection includes manuscripts and journals; subject files on various activist, therapeutic, and religious topics; and audiotapes, videotapes, and film of various performances, including Freespirit's own. There are also ephemera, such as t-shirts, buttons and photographs.

Preferred Citation:

[Identification of item], Judy Freespirit papers (#2008-48), The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

Conditions Governing Access:

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Acquisition Information:

The collection was donated to the GLBT Historical Society by Judy Freespirit in 2008.

Processing Information:

Finding Aid created by Cathy Cade in 2008 and substantially edited by Isaac Fellman in 2019 and 2021.

This finding aid uses terminology for LGBTQ people that was in current use at the time of its most recent update. Descriptive language for queer identities evolves quickly and some of these terms may now be dated or even offensive. Finding aids are themselves historical documents; they reflect the moment in which they were written and often reflect the terms that subjects used for themselves. Please contact the GLBT Historical Society Archivist with questions or comments.

Biographical/Organizational History Note: Judy Freespirit (Judith Louise Berkowitz Ackerman) was an activist, writer, and performer, focused on the subjects of women, lesbians, Jewish culture, fat acceptance, disability rights, and incest survival. Freespirit was of the earliest members of the fat acceptance movement, as coauthor (with Vivian Mayer) of the 1973 *Fat Liberation Manifesto*, and later a performer with Fat Chance and Fat Lip Reader's Theater. She is the author of four books: *Daddy's Girl*, *Keeping it in the Family*, *Whole Lotta Quakin' Goin' On*, and *A Slim Volume of Fat Poems*.

Freespirit was born in 1936 to a working-class Jewish family in Detroit, Michigan. From an early age, she was subject to incestuous sexual abuse by her father; from the age of five, she was also pressured by her mother to diet. Dance and theatre became her primary methods of survival. After an early marriage and the birth of a son, she finished college and became Director of Social Services at a psychiatric hospital. She later became involved in the women's liberation movement, and came out in the early 1970s as a lesbian. This led to further activism, including an extended period of work against the Briggs Initiative in Sonoma County. After her asthma and environmental allergies became increasingly disabling, she became part of the Berkeley disability movement and worked with the World Institute on Disabilities (WID) on issues of fat, health and disabilities. After many years of performing and activism, Freespirit died in 2010.

Scope and Content: The collection includes manuscripts and journals; subject files on various activist, therapeutic, and religious topics; and audiotapes, videotapes, and film of various performances, including Freespirit's own. Some of these have been digitized. There are also ephemera, such as t-shirts, buttons and photographs. This collection complements another collection of Freespirit's papers at the June Mazer Lesbian Archive in Los Angeles.

Indexing Terms:

Lesbians

People with disabilities

Fat-acceptance movement

Container Listing

Carton 1: Publications and personal journals.

Contains anthologies to which Freespirit contributed, a Cathy Cade photobook with a chapter on Freespirit, issues of the Jewish Home newsletter to which Freespirit contributed, a 1997 profile of Freespirit from the Lesbian News, a folder with photocopies of Freespirit's published work, three volumes of a diary, a journal of dreams and fantasies, a book of personal affirmations, and a small book of notes on the Marlene Corrigan child neglect trial.

Carton 2: Subject and personal files.

- 2:1 Early Los Angeles, 1974-1995, undated
- 2:2 Radical therapy, 1972, undated
- 2:3 Briggs Initiative, Sonoma County, 1978-1979, undated
- 2:4 Feminist Media Conference, 1979
- 2:5 Pyramid game, 1993
- 2:6 Jewish activism, 1982-2004
- 2:7 Re-evaluation counseling 1981-1992, undated
- 2:8 First Unitarian Church, Oakland, 1992-2004
- 2:9a Polly's Phat Follies, 2003
- 2:9b Polly's Phat Follies, 2003
- 2:10 Research on barriers to emergency care for fat and disabled people, 2000-2002, undated
- 2:11 Corrigan case, 1994-2004
- 2:12 Fat activism, 1978-1997
- 2:13a Fat activism newspapers, magazines, 1978-2001
- 2:13b Fat activism newspapers, magazines, 1997-2004
- 2:14 Employment, 1998-1999
- 2:15 Articles on fat women's health, 1999-2002
- 2:16 National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), 1982-2004

Carton 3: Manuscripts, self-published works, and oral histories.

- 3:1 Horoscope, circa 1970s
- 3:2 Some autobiographical writings, 1978-2000
- 3:3 "The Order of Things" manuscript, undated

- 3:4 Writings, 1975-1980
- 3:5 Writings, 1981-1982
- 3:6 Writings, 1983-1985
- 3:7 Writings, 1986-1990
- 3:8 Writings, 1991-1992
- 3:9 Birthday performance, 1992
- 3:10 Children's literature class, writings, 1987-1989
- 3:11 *Chain Link Fence*, 1981-1982
- 3:12 *Daddy's Girl*, 1982-1985
- 3:13 *Malka Windsinger*, circa 1981
- 3:14 *Keeping It In the Family*, 1989-1993, undated
- 3:15 *Freespirit In the Flesh*, 1985
- 3:16 *A Slim Volume of Fat Poems*, 1996
- 3:17 Miscellaneous poems, 1981-1995
- 3:18 Miscellaneous prose, undated
- 3:19 Handwritten (writing group?), undated
- 3:20 *Whole Lotta Quakin' Goin' On: A Memoir*, 1996
- 3:21 Interviews with Judy at Rheem with photos, 2005-2006
- 3:22 Interviews with Judy's friends, 2005
- 3:23 Applying to Jewish Home – Fighting to get in, 2006
- 3:24 Judy writes her life from her supposed deathbed, 2005-2006
- 3:25 Judy's writings, circa 2006
- 3:26 Piedmont writing groups, 2006

Carton 4: Photographs, papers, and ephemera.

- 4:1 Certificates, 1966-2004
- 4:2 Slides, photographs, Ardy & Judy leaflets, 1981-2007
- 4:3 Interview about, photos of Judy's visual art, 2008-2009
- 4:4 The red velvet photos, 2009
- 4:5 Some of Cathy Cade's photos of Judy, 1985-2007
- 4:6 Judy's young portraits, circa 1940s-1960s
- 4:7 Fat Chance, Fat Lip, 1979-1982
- 4:8 Judy's performances, 1982-1983
- 4:9 Judy and friends, circa 2000s
- 4:10 Judy at Jewish Home of San Francisco, 2000s

Poster advertising tapeworms for weight loss

Clock and wristwatch bearing slogan "Women of Substance, Women of Power"

Lesbian Avengers "Images of Our Flesh" 1983 calendar

Assorted buttons

T-shirt, "Fall Fat Women's Gathering, Seattle, 1993."
 T-shirt, "Women of Substance, Women of Power"
 T-shirt, "Free to be Fat: 10 Years of Fat Feminism, 1993"
 T-shirt, "Fall Fat Women's Gathering, San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area, September 30, October 2, 1994," with labeled plastic bag in which it was originally housed
 Two yarmulkes labeled as souvenirs of Amy Ackerman's bat mitzvah
 Judy Freespirit business cards
 Floppy disk copies of writing
 Mixtape, "Fat Positive Song"
 CD, *This Heavy Heart* by Cynthia McQuillin
 Two kazoos
 Candle depicting fat woman in bathing suit

Carton 5: Audiocassette tapes, including recordings of Freespirit's performances, her family and friends, fat activism performances, and Jewish and lesbian reading groups.

- 5:1 "Power, Privilege, Racism at founding of National Lesbian Feminist Organization," 1978
- 5:2 Family Interviews
 - Me [Freespirit], notes on family visit 5/22/1982
 - Father, Las Vegas, 5/23/1982
 - Mother, 5/22/1982
 - Aunt Pearl & Mother, Las Vegas 12/1985
 - Mother & Me [Freespirit], Oct. 1989
 - Mother, 1991
 - Amy (granddaughter), undated
- 5:3 Jewish Lesbian Writers Group
 - "Funny You Should Ask", Readings at Jewish Feminist Writers Group at Jewish Feminist Conference, at the Valencia Rose, August 1983 (3 sides)
 - Hanukkah Readings, 12/84 Mama Bears, Oakland
 - "Rough Drafts from the Book of Life, Jewish Lesbian Writers Group, 1985 (4 sides)
 - A Singing Seder, Kids' Passover sing-along, undated
- 5:4 Fat Activism I
 - Workshop: Anorexia and Compulsive Eating, New Haven, CT (Side 1);
 - The Fat Patrol singing its greatest hits (side 2), 1980.
 - Panel on Fat, A Woman's Place Bookstore, 1980.
 - Politics of Body Size, KPFA June 1980.
 - Margaret Mackenzie and Judy, September 1980.
 - Contra Costa Health Dept. presentation, January 1981.
 - Fear of Fat, KPFA, 54min. 1981.

- Fear of Fat, Oct. 15min. 1982
- Rich, Thin and Beautiful, Fat as a Feminist Issue, KPFA January 1983.
- Talk to Committee on Fat Children, 1984
- NAAFA Luncheon, undated
- Susan and Wayne Wooley, undated
- 5:5 Fat Activism II
 - Lesbian Separatists Fight for Fat by Gorgons, undated
 - Betty Brooks interview, undated
 - Fat Lip on KPFA (2 tapes), 1992
 - Off the Charts first board meeting, 2001
 - Women's Health and Healing Conference (2 tapes), undated
 - KPFA Pilot, undated
- 5:6 Judy's Birthday Performances
 - 46, 1983
 - 55, 1992
 - 60th at Mama Bears, 1997
- 5:7 Group Readings
 - Dyke Writers, 1981, 1982 (4 tapes)
 - JAMB at Mama Bears: Judy, Adrienne Lauby, Martha Courtot, Barbara Ruth, 1994
- 5:8 Judy, Judith Stein, Marge Reading
 - Daddy's Girl, L.A. 1982
 - Judith Stein & Judy 1984
 - Marge & Judy, from "Shadow...", 1983 (2 tapes)
- 5:9 Ardy, Tibby & Judy: 1987 (5 tapes, SF, Santa Cruz, Sacramento)
- 5:10 Judy Reading
 - "Keeping it in the Family" (3 tapes), undated
 - "Warning this Reading may be Dangerous" (six weeks at the motel), undated
 - "Attack of the Skunk Woman," undated.
 - "Gospel According to Freespirit, 1986
- 5:11 Judy in Conversation
 - Judy and Carol Graywing talk about their lives (3 tapes)
 - Letter to Theresa
 - Letter from Theresa
- 5:12 Getting Help
 - Horoscope
 - Psychic reading by Kay Sato, Tucson friend, 1983, 1984 (3 tapes)
 - Psychic Reading for Judy by Kata Orndorft, 2000.
 - Judy & co-counselor, undated
 - "Dead Baby Session," 1991 [Judy speaks to a tape when unable to reach her therapist. A version appears as a chapter in *Whole Lot of Quakin'*.]

Carton 6: Film, video, and DVD.

Film

Unedited work print of “Fat Chance” film (reel to reel 16 mm), undated

Video

“Fat Chance I,” Martha Courtot, Judy Freespirit, LynEllen Marcus, Leah Kushner, Hannah (Banahn) Martin, 1979

“Fat Chance II: Martha Courtot, undated

Fat Feminist Gathering (NAAFA): Friday Night, Saturday Night Fashion Show, 1995

Fat Underground Panel (2 reels, different cameras) at Fat Gathering, 1995

Fat Underground, 1979

“Nothing to Lose,” Fat Lip Reader’s Theater, Wolf Video, 1989

Judy on Donahue Show and Nova “Fat Chance in a Thin World”

Judy on CNN regarding Corrigan trial, 2004

Fat Conversation: Leah Kushner & Judy, undated

Freespirit in the Flesh, interview set up by Judy in her home, 1981

Happy Birthday NAAFA—25th Anniversary, 1994

Television documentary regarding fatness (not by or with Judy), undated

DVD

To The Jewish Home: Please Let Me In, 2005

Jewish Food (a poem), 2005

Carton 7: Materials related to Freespirit’s last years, which were spent at the San Francisco Jewish Home.

7:1 Judy’s activism at the Jewish Home, 2008-2010, undated

7:2 Cathy Cade photographs, 2009

7:3 Judy’s memorial service, November 2010

Album of art with interviews by Cathy Cade, 2008-2009

Audio cassette tapes of personal history videos with Judy Freespirit and friends, 2005. See box 3 for transcriptions.

Four cassette tapes of Freespirit speaking about her art, 2009-2010

Two cassette tapes of final telephone conversations between Judy Freespirit and Cathy Cade, 2011

Two cassette tapes of Judy Freespirit’s memorial service, November 6, 2010

DVDs of Judy Freespirit’s memorial service, November 6, 2010

Consent forms for the filming of the memorial service, November 6, 2010

Scrapbook of various fat activists, 1991