

Collection title: Judy Custer Collection

Collection ID: CUST

Size: 9.68 linear feet

Date: 1946-2008

Abstract:

Judy Custer (1947-2008) was a physical therapist in Cañon City, living in Guffey, Colorado where there was a growing lesbian community. The bulk of the collection is letters Judy received from friends and family. Other materials in the collection are personal photographs, buttons and patches from Judy's time in the Girl Scouts, and clippings featuring Judy.

Accession information:

This collection was donated by Honor Heart at an unknown date after Judy's death in 2008. Honor requested that Judy's photo be present on the front of boxes containing her material so she could forever be looking out at the world.

Provenance:

Materials were collected from Judy's life as a lesbian, a physical therapist, an outdoors-woman, and a Girl Scout troop leader.

Restrictions:

There are no restrictions on the collection. The collection is open for research.

Copyright:

Property rights to the physical objects belong to the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives. All other rights, including copyright, are retained by the creators and their heirs. It is the responsibility of the researcher to determine who holds the copyright and pursue the copyright owner or heir for permission to publish where the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives do not hold the copyright.

Biographical sketch:

Judith A. Custer was born October 9, 1947 in Bellflower, California. She often went by shortened versions of her name, Judy, Jud, and the nickname Weed— given to her by her Girl Scout troops. Her father, John K. Custer was a Lieutenant Colonel in the US Air Force, causing their family to move frequently, living across the United States and internationally. She started high school at Wheelus Air Base in Libya, then moved to Waco, Texas attending Richfield High School. Her mother was Virginia Custer, and she had four siblings, Ginny, Libby, Jay, and Jack. From a young age she was involved with the Girl Scouts even while in Libya, and for a short period in Taiwan.

Judy attended California State College, Long Beach and received a BA in physical therapy in 1971. In College she continued participating in the Girl Scouts, acting as Senior troop leader and spending summers as unit leader and assistant camp director.¹ In the 1970s, Judy became a member of the Greater Long Beach Girl Scout Council.

Between 1983 and 1985 Judy built a house in Guffey, Colorado where Judy would live the rest of her life. She wanted to escape the traffic of Long Beach, return to nature, and own land.² She bought 80 acres of land from Vernon and Maxine Zellers who she stayed in regular contact with through the late 1990s. To build her home, she hired an all lesbian crew of women, her friends—who did the majority of the building work—and one man, a licensed contractor, to oversee the project. The house was an earth-beamed, passive solar home true to her values as an environmentalist.³ The woman who helped Judy build her house was named Cher Nelson, who went on to become a contractor with an all-woman crew, and helped other lesbians who moved to the area.⁴ Judy worked as a physical therapist in the nearby Cañon City at Sangre de Cristo Hospice.

Guffey, Colorado was a growing lesbian community from the mid-1980s to 2012. Judy had a community of lesbian women getting together for potlucks, movie nights, dinners. This network of relationships is visible in the letters and notes Judy got from neighbors checking in, reporting on their travels with postcards, or just saying hello. Judy's partner Honor detailed, "the population of our community got larger and larger as word of mouth spread and many lesbians moved there from, largely, California. It was all word of mouth and the publication, *Lesbian Connection*, probably had something to do with it."⁵

From 1993 to her death she lived in Guffey, in the mountains, with her life partner Honor Heart. In Honor's own words:

"Jud was integral to the lesbian community and the larger community as well in Guffey. She was a very active volunteer with the volunteer emergency medical outfit that operated in the rural area around Guffey. She volunteered with them as an emergency medical staff EMS for over 20 years. They all loved and appreciated her immensely. She was a good advocate for the lesbian community just by being who she was."

She maintained ownership of a house in Bellflower, CA which she rented out and had managed by her ex-girlfriend and friend Paula Fisher until approximately the late 1990s or early 2000s.

In 2007 Judy was diagnosed with cancer, and passed away on August 23, 2008.

Scope and content:

¹ Bellflower photo album, n.d., box 19, folder 2. Judy Custer Collection, June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, CA.

² Honor Heart, email response to questions about Judy Custer's life. Received in November 2023.

³ Honor Heart, 2023.

⁴ Honor Heart, 2023.

⁵ Honor Heart, 2023.

This collection is divided into five series of items: (1) personal papers, (2) letters, (3) Girl Scout materials, (4) photographs, and (5) clippings and ephemera. There was no original order to be preserved, except for the case of photographs which were grouped by envelope or in photo albums.

Judy's personal papers include her journals, ID cards and name tags from her professional work, school work from when she was in grade school and secondary school, and materials from college. These materials were arranged chronologically when possible. Her journals include musings about hiking and working through certain feelings.

Her letters are divided by personal letters received from friends and family, professional letters from her workplace, letters received concerning her Girl Scout troop or position, and sympathy letters addressed to Honor Heart after Judy's death. The personal letters are organized alphabetically by the last name of the sender, except for birthday cards, well wishes, and holiday cards which are organized by these respective topics. There is also a group of miscellaneous letters that have non-specific correspondents (first name only), unknown correspondents, or too few letters from a specific person to warrant their own folder. This decision to have miscellaneous letters was done to conserve supplies, and to maintain a high-level description of materials that is demanded within the scope of the CA State Grant.

The Girl Scout materials include patches and pins, as well as some documents related to workshops and council meetings. The documents are organized chronologically.

Photographs consisted of loose photographs in no particular order, photographs that were still contained in the envelopes holding them after being developed, and photos arranged in albums. When possible, photos were arranged chronologically and marked if there was writing on the back. Photos in their development sleeves were kept together. There were three photo albums that were preserved, two of which are in their original albums, one which was moved into an archival album and archival photo sleeves due to degradation of the original housing.

The clippings and ephemera contain news articles that mention Judy, mostly in regard to Girl Scout achievements or her work at Sangre de Cristo Hospice. These were not organized in any order. The ephemera mostly are printed memorabilia from events during high school. These are organized by event or origin, and then chronologically.

Processing notes:

This collection was processed by Laura Dintzis in August 2023 under a California State Grant.

As the collection was close to being finished, new materials were found. When integrating these new materials, due to time constraints there was a loss of detail in descriptions. More letters were placed in the miscellaneous folders, or for existing correspondents added to the end of a sequence of folders ordered chronologically. For example, Custer, John K. folders 1 to 6 span from 1966 to 1995, and the new letters from Custer, John K. integrated created folders 7 to 13 spanning from 1967 to 1998, and overlapping with the dates represented in the first 6 folders.

Arrangement:

Series I: Personal Papers

Series II: Letters

Subseries I: Personal

Subseries II: Professional

Subseries III: Girl Scouts

Subseries IV: Sympathy letters addressed to Honor Heart

Series III: Girl Scout Materials

Series IV: Photographs

Series V: Clippings and Ephemera

Box level contents list:

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Box 1

Series I: Personal Papers

Scope and content: This includes her physical therapy license, college diploma, ID tags, journals, achievement certificates, and notes from high school.

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Box 1, Folder 1	Framed Certificate of Accomplishment for Junior Elementary Nursing
Box 1, Folder 2	School Work (1 of 3)
Box 1, Folder 3	School Work (2 of 3)
Box 1, Folder 4	School Work (3 of 3)
Box 1, Folder 5	Drivers licenses and Emergency services ID
Box 1, Folder 6	Diploma for BA in Physical Therapy, CA State College, Long Beach
Box 1, Folder 7	Certificate of Graduation, CA State College, Long Beach
Box 1, Folder 8	Physical Therapy License
Box 1, Folder 9	Journals (2)
Box 1, Folder 10	Journals (1)

Box 1, Folder 11 Softball team achievement
Box 1, Folder 12 Certificate of Achievement for Completing the Colorado Trail
Box 1, Folder 13 DVD - Judy Custer: A Life Full of Love
Box 1, Folder 14 Professional name tags
Box 1, Folder 15 Address book
Box 1, Folder 16 Travel Diary

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Box 2

Series I: Personal Papers

Scope and content: School projects from elementary school.

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Box 2, Folders 1-8 Elementary School Work

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Box 3

Series I: Letters

 Subseries I: Personal

Scope and content: Letters Judy has received from her family and friends. Last names B-Cu.

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Box 3, Folder 1 Betty and Sher
Box 3, Folder 2 Bonanomi, Edie
Box 3, Folder 3 Boss, Margo
Box 3, Folder 4 Bruce, Buck
Box 3, Folder 5 Butler, Bill
Box 3, Folder 6 California State College, Long Beach

Box 3, Folder 7	Carter, Sue
Box 3, Folder 8	Claire, Patricia
Box 3, Folder 9	Clayton, Barb
Box 3, Folder 10	Connally, Joannell
Box 3, Folder 11	Curry, Linda
Box 3, Folder 12	Custer, Alex
Box 3, Folder 13	Custer, Betty
Box 3, Folder 14	Custer, Ginny (Ginny Kirkwood) (1 of 4)
Box 3, Folder 15	Custer, Ginny (Ginny Kirkwood) (2 of 4)
Box 3, Folder 16	Custer, Ginny (Ginny Kirkwood) (3 of 4)
Box 3, Folder 17	Custer, Ginny (Ginny Kirkwood) (4 of 4)

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Box 4

Series I: Letters

Subseries I: Personal

Scope and content: Letters Judy has received from her family and friends. Last name Custer, Ja to Custer, Jo.

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Box 4, Folder 1	Custer, Jack (1 of 2)
Box 4, Folder 2	Custer, Jack (2 of 2)
Box 4, Folder 3	Custer, Jack and Karen
Box 4, Folder 4	Custer, Jack and Nancy
Box 4, Folder 5	Custer, Jay
Box 4, Folder 6	Custer, John K. (Lt. Col.) (1 of 11)
Box 4, Folder 7	Custer, John K. (Lt. Col.) (2 of 11)
Box 4, Folder 8	Custer, John K. (Lt. Col.) (3 of 11)

Box 4, Folder 9	Custer, John K. (Lt. Col.) (4 of 11)
Box 4, Folder 10	Custer, John K. (Lt. Col.) (5 of 11)
Box 4, Folder 11	Custer, John K. (Lt. Col.) (6 of 11)
Box 4, Folder 12	Custer, John K. (Lt. Col.) (7 of 11)
Box 4, Folder 13	Custer, John K. (Lt. Col.) (8 of 11)

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Box 5

Series I: Letters

Subseries I: Personal

Scope and content: Letters Judy has received from her family and friends. Last name Custer, Jo to Custer, V.

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Box 5, Folder 1	Custer, John K. (Lt. Col.) (9 of 11)
Box 5, Folder 2	Custer, John K. (Lt. Col.) (10 of 11)
Box 5, Folder 3	Custer, John K. (Lt. Col.) (11 of 11)
Box 5, Folder 4	Custer, John K. and Virginia
Box 5, Folder 5	Custer, Libby (Libby Mahone) (1 of 2)
Box 5, Folder 6	Custer, Libby (Libby Mahone) (2 of 2)
Box 5, Folder 7	Custer, Matthew
Box 5, Folder 8	Custer, Ruth
Box 5, Folder 9	Custer, Stroud and Arlene
Box 5, Folder 10	Custer, Virginia (1 of 13)
Box 5, Folder 11	Custer, Virginia (2 of 13)
Box 5, Folder 12	Custer, Virginia (3 of 13)
Box 5, Folder 13	Custer, Virginia (4 of 13)

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Box 6

Series I: Letters

Subseries I: Personal

Scope and content: Letters Judy has received from her family and friends. Last name Custer.

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- Box 6, Folder 1 Custer, Virginia (1 of 13)
- Box 6, Folder 2 Custer, Virginia (2 of 13)
- Box 6, Folder 3 Custer, Virginia (3 of 13)
- Box 6, Folder 4 Custer, Virginia (4 of 13)
- Box 6, Folder 5 Custer, Virginia (5 of 13)
- Box 6, Folder 6 Custer, Virginia (6 of 13)
- Box 6, Folder 7 Custer, Virginia (7 of 13)
- Box 6, Folder 8 Custer, Virginia (8 of 13)
- Box 6, Folder 9 Custer, Virginia (9 of 13)
- Box 6, Folder 10 Custer, Virginia (10 of 13)
- Box 6, Folder 11 Custer, Virginia (11 of 13)
- Box 6, Folder 12 Custer, Virginia (12 of 13)
- Box 6, Folder 13 Custer, Virginia (13 of 13)

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Box 7

Series I: Letters

Subseries I: Personal

Scope and content: Letters Judy has received from her family and friends with last names F through L.

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Box 7, Folder 1	Fanning, Linda
Box 7, Folder 2	Fisher, Paula (1 of 6)
Box 7, Folder 3	Fisher, Paula (2 of 6)
Box 7, Folder 4	Fisher, Paula (3 of 6)
Box 7, Folder 5	Fisher, Paula (4 of 6)
Box 7, Folder 6	Fisher, Paula (5 of 6)
Box 7, Folder 7	Fisher, Paula (6 of 6)
Box 7, Folder 8	Fisher, Ruby
Box 7, Folder 9	Foster, Sandy
Box 7, Folder 10	Hartman, Pam
Box 7, Folder 11	Hayashi, Keiko
Box 7, Folder 12	Henthorn, Mary
Box 7, Folder 13	Hopkins, Patricia
Box 7, Folder 14	Johnson, Karen
Box 7, Folder 15	King, Patti Jean
Box 7, Folder 16	Larcom (1 of 2)
Box 7, Folder 17	Larcom (2 of 2)

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Box 8

Series I: Letters

Subseries I: Personal

Scope and content: Letters Judy has received from her family and friends last names M to Z.

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Box 8, Folder 1	Maloof, Teddy
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Box 8, Folder 2	McMillan, Jan
Box 8, Folder 3	Mechtenberg, Andree S.
Box 8, Folder 4	Mullinox, Benny Lynn
Box 8, Folder 5	Remington, Holly
Box 8, Folder 6	Shulze, W. E.
Box 8, Folder 7	State Department of Highways, Colorado
Box 8, Folder 8	Taipei American School
Box 8, Folder 9	Ted
Box 8, Folder 10	Terra-Raye
Box 8, Folder 11	Urias, Carmen
Box 8, Folder 12	Vines, Susan
Box 8, Folder 13	Wall, Ann
Box 8, Folder 14	Walz, Lael
Box 8, Folder 15	West, Opal "Opie"
Box 8, Folder 16	Westman, Roy
Box 8, Folder 17	Young, Cathy
Box 8, Folder 18	Zellers, Maxine and Vernon
Box 8, Folder 19	Zellers, Vernon

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Box 9

Series II: Letters

Subseries I: Personal

Scope and Content: Miscellaneous letters, meaning letters from unknown or vague correspondents. This also includes letters from people that didn't warrant their own folder. They usually sent Judy only one or two letters. It is recommended that these folders be checked if a correspondent is not found by name.

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Box 9, Folder 1-6 Miscellaneous letters

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Box 10

Series II: Letters

 Subseries I: Personal

Scope and Content: Letters Judy has received from her family and friends for her birthday, and cards of well-wishes mostly received after she was diagnosed with cancer.

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Box 10, Folder 1-6 Birthday Cards and Well Wishes

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Box 11

Series II: Letters

 Subseries I: Personal

Scope and Content: Letters Judy has received from her family and friends for her birthday, cards of well-wishes mostly received after she was diagnosed with cancer, and holidays cards.

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Box 11, Folder 1 Birthday Cards and Well Wishes

Box 11, Folder 2 Birthday Cards and Well Wishes

Box 11, Folder 3 Holiday Cards

Box 11, Folder 4 Holiday Cards

Box 11, Folder 5 Holiday Cards

Box 11, Folder 6 Holiday Cards

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Box 12

Series II: Letters

Subseries I: Personal

Subseries II: Professional

Subseries III: Girl Scouts

Subseries IV: Sympathy letters addressed to Honor Heart

Scope and Content: Letters Judy has received from her family and friends for the holidays. Letters received from work as a physical therapist. Letters received from work with Girl Scouts. Sympathy letters addressed to Honor Heart after Judy's death.

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Box 12, Folder 1	Holiday Cards
Box 12, Folder 2	Holiday Cards
Box 12, Folder 3	Holiday Cards
Box 12, Folder 4	Hospice and Physical Therapy Letters
Box 12, Folder 5	Girl Scout Letters
Box 12, Folder 6	Sympathy Letters to Honor Heart
Box 12, Folder 7	Sympathy Letters to Honor Heart

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Box 13

Series III: Girl Scout Material

Series V: Clippings and Ephemera

Scope and Content: Contains materials from Girl Scout Council workshops and meetings. Ephemera includes notes, name tags, pamphlets from highschool events.

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Box 13, Folder 1	Girl Scout Camp, Taiwan
Box 13, Folder 2	National Convention G.S.U.S.A.

Box 13, Folder 3 Pluralism Handbook

Box 13, Folder 4 Greater Long Beach Girl Scout Council Cultural Awareness Workshop

Box 13, Folder 5 Greater Long Beach Girl Scout Council

Box 13, Folder 6 Girl Scouts adult education program

Box 13, Folder 7 Troop 14 court of awards

Box 13, Folder 8 Rustic Camp

Box 13, Folder 9 Girl Scout Ephemera

Box 13, Folder 10 Plaque - Trefoil Club, Greater Long beach Girl Scout Council

Box 13, Folder 11 Ephemera - Pan American Student Forum of Texas

Box 13, Folder 12 Ephemera - Taipei American School

Box 13, Folder 13 Ephemera - High School

Box 13, Folder 14 Ephemera - Events

Box 13, Folder 15 Ephemera - School Safety Patrol

Box 13, Folder 16 Ephemera - West Coast Women's Music Festival

Box 13, Folder 17 Miscellaneous Notes

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Box 14

Series III: Girl Scout Material

Scope and Content: Patches, pins, girl scout bandana

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Box 14, Folder 1 Patches, pins, girl scout bandana

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Box 15

Series IV: Photography

Scope and Content: Photos of Judy, her friends, and family.

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Box 15, Folder 1-11 Photos, [bulk 1970-1984]

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Box 16

Series IV: Photography

Scope and Content: Photos of Judy, her friends, and family.

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Box 16, Folder 1-10 Photos [bulk 1986-1993]

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Box 17

Series IV: Photography

Scope and Content: Photos of Judy, her friends and family.

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Box 17, Folder 1-10 Photos

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Box 18

Series IV: Photography

Scope and Content: Photos, photo negatives, and 35mm photo slides of Judy, her friends, and family.

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Box 18, Folder 1 Photos (1 of 5)

Box 18, Folder 2 Photos (2 of 5)

Box 18, Folder 3 Photos (3 of 5)

Box 18, Folder 4 Photos (4 of 5)
Box 18, Folder 5 Photos (6 of 5)
Box 18, Folder 6 Photo negatives
Box 18, Folder 7 Photo negatives
Box 18, Folder 8-13 35mm slides

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Box 19

Series IV: Photography

Scope and Content: Two photo albums.

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Box 19, Folder 1 Photo Album - Peru
Box 19, Folder 2 Photo Album - Bellflower, CA

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Box 20

Series IV: Photography

Scope and Content: A photo album that includes Judy and friends building her house in Guffey, CO, and undated photos that look like they are from a Girl Scout camp.

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Box 20, Folder 1 Album - All women Built Home in Colorado
 Album - undated photos [GS camp]

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Box 21

Series V: Clippings and Ephemera

Scope and Content: Newspaper clippings mentioning Judy Custer.

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Box 21, Folder 1-4 Clippings