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LG MS 042 AM Chofshi Archives

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**AM CHOFSHI ARCHIVES
LG MS 42**

**Total Boxes: 3
Linear Feet: 4.25**

**By
Anthony Marvullo**

**Portland, Maine
August 2017**

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Administrative Information

Provenance:

The Am Chofshi Archives were donated by Gail Kass and Susan Horowitz in 2004. Kass was Am Chofshi's treasurer and as such these archives contain financial documents and fundraising materials, some of which are restricted.

Cite as: Am Chofshi Archives, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ Collection, Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine, University of Southern Maine Libraries.

Restrictions on Access: Some materials are restricted until 2078 to protect privacy rights.

Historical Note

Am Chofshi was a social group, or *Chavurah* (sometimes *havurah* or *havra*), for LGBT Jews and their families and friends in southern Maine, active between 1990 and 1998.

Founded in 1989 after Faith Moritz placed an ad in *Our Paper*, a newspaper for the gay and lesbian community in Portland, Am Chofshi grew from just 11 people in its first meeting to dozens of members and their families throughout the 1990s.

In a 1990 article about New England havurahs in KFARI newsmagazine, Moritz said of Am Chofshi, "We wanted people who had alternative celebrations, people who wanted to explore the ritual, to have a smaller, more intimate community, a place where gay and lesbian people and couples could feel welcome and open and not have to worry about coming out, but not necessarily a gay-and-lesbian-only group. This group has been a place for families, not just a support group. It's important because there are not many places where gay and lesbian couples get seen as family."

"We seek to integrate our Jewishness and gayness in proud and joyful ways," said David Steinberg, one of Am Chofshi's founders, in another KFARI newsmagazine clipping.

Members of Am Chofshi donated their time and sometimes their homes to hosting and celebrating the Jewish holidays with each other. Am Chofshi's Passover Seder was the group's largest annual gathering. Other gatherings included Purim holiday potlucks, Chanukah parties, Torah studies, group brunches, sukkot buildings, and Shabbat dinners.

The Am Chofshi Archives are an archive of a group of gay and lesbian Jews who came together to build a havurah, a family. Susan Horowitz, by whom the bulk of these archives were donated, told KFARI newsmagazine in that same 1990 article that the first Am Chofshi meeting "was like coming home to family. I hadn't laughed and shared

and felt as comfortable with strangers, no less people I knew, in I don't know how long. We reached one another very deep very quickly."

In Am Chofshi's statement of purpose, Gail Kass wrote, "We are a social organization welcoming Gay, Lesbian and Bi-sexual Jews, their partners and families who live in and around Southern Maine.

"We meet regularly for programs including: community Seders, High Holiday retreats, Purim Shpeils and assorted Sunday brunches or Friday evening potlucks with topics of interest.

"We have also marched for our political rights and have spoken at an Hadassah event. We are a community of loving and caring women and men who join together for support and friendship. With humor and good food we find in each other the families we need, with the strength and compassion we deserve."

Description of the Archives

The Archives contain material related to events, correspondence, activities, and activism of Am Chofshi. The Archives span from 1990 to 2003, with the bulk of the material between 1992 and 1998.

The Archives have been divided into five series.

Series 1 contains materials related specifically to Am Chofshi, its logistics, events, finances, correspondence, and press. Folder one contains administrative materials, including a timeline of Am Chofshi's first events. Folders four through nine include materials relating to the group's events. The oversize box three contains a cloth matzah pocket, used during the Passover Seder. Copies of Passover Hagaddahs from 1990 until 1998 are in folders eight and nine. Included in this series but housed in oversize are two photo albums / scrapbooks featuring Am Chofshi members at various gatherings, and the large Am Chofshi banner used in parades and holiday events.

Series 2 contains materials from conferences in which Am Chofshi was involved. It is split into two subseries: 2.1 World Congress of Lesbian and Jewish Organizations; and 2.2 Other Conferences.

2.1 World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations (1997–2001)

The World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations began in San Francisco in 1980. It organizes conferences and connects LGBTQ Jewish organizations with each other from around the world. This subseries contains material from mailings and conference information from the World Congress sent to Am Chofshi and then Gail Kass and Susan Horowitz between 1997 and 2000.

The World Congress is now known as “The World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Jews: Keshet Ga’avah,” (*rainbow of pride*).

2.2 Other Conferences (1998–1999)

Subseries 2.2 contains information from other conferences in which Am Chofshi was involved, including the 1998 Eastern Regional Conference of Lesbian & Bisexual Jews; and DIALOGUE II, a one-day program for Jewish lesbians, their grandmothers, mothers, sisters, daughters, partners, and parents.

Series 3 contains materials related to publications and congregation newsletters ranging from 1990 to 2003 with the bulk of the material from 1995 to 1998. Folders 26 through 29 contain the congregation newsletters of Bet Ha’am of South Portland, ME; Chevrei Tikva of Cleveland, OH; Kol Simcha of Irvine, CA; and Or Chadash of Chicago, IL. Folders 30 and 31 contain publications such as the Jewish Resource Guide for AIDS Memorials; “Coming Out of Shame: Transforming Gay and Lesbian Lives” by Gershen Kaufman and Lev Raphael; A Guide to Lesbian & Gay New York Historical Landmarks; and a 1995 Rosh Hashana message from then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Series 4 contains oversized materials, including the two photo albums / scrapbooks and the Am Chofshi organization banner.

Series 5 contains restricted items.

Keywords

Am Chofshi, Free People, Judaism, World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations, Rheatha Forster, Gail Kass, David Steinberg, Susan Horowitz, Faith Moritz, Bob Gordon, Mark Griswold, Howard Solomon

Box	Folder	Description	Date(s)
Series 1: Am Chofshi (1990–2000, undated)			
1	1	Administrative Materials (Some materials are RESTRICTED)	undated
1	2	Correspondence and Mailings	1995–2000
1	3	Financial Information and Fundraising (Some materials are RESTRICTED)	1990–1998
1	4	Passover Seder Materials for Planning	1995
1	5	Holidays and Celebrations	1996–1998
1	6	Holidays and Celebrations	undated
1	7	Passover Seder Haggadahs	1990–1995
1	8	Passover Seder Haggadahs	1996–1997
1	9	Passover Seder Haggadahs	1998
1	10	Press and Clippings	1990–1998, undated
		Pink Photo Album / Scrapbook (See OVERSIZE)	1997–1998
1	11	Loose materials from Pink Photo Album / Scrapbook Blue Photo Album Scrapbook (See OVERSIZE)	1997–1998
1	12	Photos and negatives from Blue Photo Album / Scrapbook	1990–1996
1	13	Loose materials from Blue Photo Album / Scrapbook	1990–1996
1	14	Loose materials from Blue Photo Album / Scrapbook	1990–1996
3		Am Chofshi banner and Passover matza cloth pocket (See OVERSIZE)	1990, undated
Series 2: Conferences (1997–2001)			
2.1: World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations			
1	15	World Congress Administrative Materials	1997–1998
1	16	World Congress Administrative Materials	1998–1999
1	17	World Congress Administrative Materials	1998–1999
1	18	World Congress Administrative Materials	1999
1	19	World Congress Administrative Materials	1999
1	20	World Congress Administrative Materials	1999
2	21	World Congress Administrative Materials	2001
2	22	World Congress Administrative Materials	2001
2	23	World Congress Digests	1997–2001
2	24	World Congress Conferences Information	1998–2000
2.2: Other Conferences			
2	25	Other Conferences	1998–1999
Series 3: Newsletters and Publications (1990–2003, undated)			
2	26	Newsletters, A–C	1995–1998, 2003

Box	Folder	Description	Date(s)
Series 3: Newsletters and Publications (1990–2003, undated) (cont'd)			
2	27	Newsletters, I–J	1995, 1997–1998
2	28	Newsletters, K	1997–1998
2	29	Newsletters, N–T	1991, 1997–1999
2	30	Publications, A–Le	1993, 1996, 2003, undated
2	31	Publications, Lo–U	1995–1998, undated
Series 4: Oversize			
OS	Dr 23	Blue Photo Album / Scrapbook	1990–1996
OS	Dr 23	Pink Photo Album / Scrapbook	1997–1998
3		Am Chofshi banner and Passover matza cloth pocket	1990, undated
Series 5: Restricted			
FC22	Folder 32	Restricted folder containing items from Series 1	1990–1998, undated