

**San Jose State University**

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**From the Selected Works of Gil J. Villagran**

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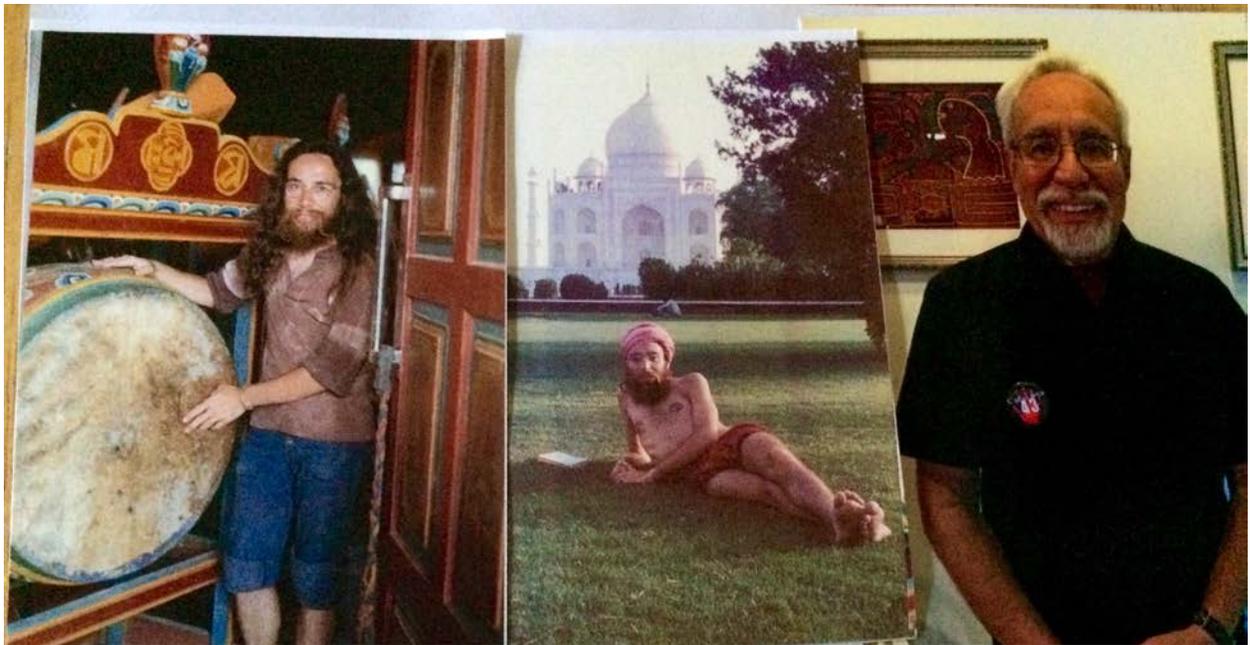
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# Biography of Gil Villagran

Gil J. Villagran



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### **Bio of Gil Villagrán**

After graduation, I went to San Jose State College, turning down acceptance to Santa Clara University because there was no protest activity to the war in Vietnam—I did not want to miss out on what seemed to be a student led revolution of our nation. My declared majored was physics—as my passion was to understand the nature of matter, but as I passed trucks loaded with Napalm bombs on Bayshore Hwy 101, I realized science was being perverted to create evermore-grotesque weapons of war. I had an existential crisis--I couldn't continue my courses in physics and chemistry.

1966 to 69 were pivotal years for me, as the war and protests increased, along with the body counts, and in 1969, filled with anger and bitterness; I attended the funeral of fellow Panther, Bob Rizzo, (kia at age 19!), with whom I and Bob Ornellas had tripped until, without student deferments, they both got drafted. Realizing how short life can be, I stopped attending classes, flunked out, and lost my deferment. Anti-war marches; demonstrations in D.C., S.F., and Berkeley, backpacking, Big Sur, and hitchhiking cross-country felt right for the “times that were “a-changing.”

I got expelled for demonstrating against the draft, Dow Chemical (producer of Napalm), and the CIA. I had previously applied for Conscientious Objector status with the Selective Service System, (aka America's SS). Eventually I returned to college, on probation, changed my major to Philosophy—I became an Existentialist--seeking to understand the purpose of life, and what is reality? Instead of going insane, I went to India, where for millennia, seekers contemplated such questions roving in my head. Trekking in Nepal to the base of Mt. Everest, (at 18,000 ft.) called “Mystic Mother” by Tibetans; one night, after smoking a chillum of hashish with a Sadhu (holy man), I had an epiphany: “Fear not, be not bitter, all is illusion, now and has always been...”

Coming down from “the roof of the world,” back to 20<sup>th</sup> century civilization, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan in summer at 120+ degrees, I had a second epiphany:

without sewage treatment, it stinks! Without water sanitation, everyone is sick all the time! Therefore, modern infrastructure is critical, especially electricity, modern travel, medical care, education, and democracy—instead of kleptocracy--to enable a good life for everyone. Also, it is very challenging to do yoga/meditation as mosquitos bite you! My girlfriend, now my wife of 39 years, sarcastically asked upon my return, “You had to go to India and almost die to realize this?”

Returning to my cherished, clean, safe Santa Clara—I dedicated myself to a BA in Philosophy, minor in Sociology, later a masters in Social Work. I got a job with Santa Clara County Social Services Agency—where incredibly to me, I worked for the next 30 years. It was a job I hated and loved, hated for the exploitation by landlords and employers, corrupt officials; the brutality of domestic violence, child abuse that people perpetrate against each other. But it was my job to make situations better in whatever way I could. I was given quite free reign to do whatever might work, as long as I did not cause too many complaints to county supervisors.

Realizing that their inherent humanity, consistent parent education and family counseling can repair most families who love each other—so with state funding, I co-developed four Family Resource Centers where free, culturally competent services repaired families torn by substance, sexual abuse, and violence. I saw the pattern of abused, neglected kids, living in poverty, kicked out of school, put into foster care often re-create their missing family—in youth gangs. These hurt and angry teens join, or more often, create their own gang—to live in abandoned houses, under freeways, anywhere. They live by their wits—shoplift what they need or want, deal drugs, fight each other for territory and a sense of family—declaring: “My gang is MY family!” So with City of San Jose funding, I designed a youth gang prevention program, at each of our resource centers, graduating 120 youth per semester for six years.

I loved my job, eagerly going to work at six and coming home about 6 pm for dinner with my family of three daughters: One is now a nurse with 7 yr. old twins, another daughter is a web designer with a 5 yr. old, my third daughter is a history teacher at Berkeley High. Along with my wife, Lynn, my daughters and grand daughters are the greatest joy in my life.

I held many roles through the 30 years: social worker, conference coordinator, supervisor, program developer (for Chilean refugees of torture & S.J. Mayor’s Gang Task Force), manager, trainer, public information officer, and youth program director, Ombudsman. No mater the title, my job was always to fix social problems that impede people to live their lives in harmony with their families, neighbors, and community.

So after 30 years at county government, I now teach Social Work at San Jose State University—where I just completed twenty years as a senior lecturer—teaching human rights, & social policy & justice. To satisfy my community activism, I write guest editorials on critical social issues. Some have been published in the San Jose Mercury News, El Observador, Indybay.org, and other on-line publications. You may read a selection of my essays at: [https://works.bepress.com/gil\\_villagran](https://works.bepress.com/gil_villagran)

I wish us all, Panthers from Santa Clara, more reunions, health, love and happiness!