

Gilda “Gil” Flores Johnstone

At a glance:

Birth: January 25, 1935, in Tucson, Arizona

Death: February 19, 2025, Lancaster, California

Maiden name: Gilda Flores

Race/nationality/ethnic background: Hispanic

Married: Alex Roy Johnstone, 1957, div. 1979

Children: Gary, Keri, Jerry, Teri, and Larry

Primary city and county of residence and work: Clark and Washoe counties, Nevada

Major fields of work: Advocate for the rights of vulnerable seniors in nursing homes, group homes and assisted living facilities as well as for seniors living throughout the community.

Other role identities: Elder Rights Ombudsman, Chief Ombudsman, Founder of Special Advocates for Elders, Director of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, president of St. Viator Church Women’s Guild, wife, mother



Gilda Johnstone
NWHP Photo Collection

Advocate for Nevada senior citizens was relentless in seeking quality care

Holding many government, private and volunteer positions during her long career, Gilda Johnstone crusaded for the protection of vulnerable senior citizens in their communities and in long-term care, nursing homes, group homes and assisted living facilities. She fiercely fought against elder abuse, neglect and exploitation of seniors.

Gilda “Gil” Flores was born in Tucson, Arizona, on January 25, 1935. Her parents were Sara Norzagaray and Conrad Hunter. Gil joined an older brother, Conrado, and later a sister, Cecilia Flores. After the failure of her parents’ marriage, Sara and her children moved to Los Angeles, California, and it was there Gil graduated from Theodore Roosevelt High School.

While attending high school, she was on the student council, the Girls Executive League Board and the “Rough Rider” high school newspaper staff. She graduated high school in 1953 and went on to attend East Los Angeles College.



Gilda's graduation from
Theodore Roosevelt
High School.
Photo from Ancestry.com

In January 1953, her mother was killed in an automobile accident leaving Gil and her younger sister, Cecelia, homeless. Gil petitioned for a legal guardian who subsequently gave her permission to enlist in the United States Air Force during the Korean War. While stationed at Sampson Air Force Base in Geneva, New York, she met and married Alex Roy Johnstone, a native of Bedfordshire, England, on Dec. 3, 1955.

By 1963, the Johnstones were living in Las Vegas, Nev., and beginning a family. By 1963, there were five little Johnstones: Gary, Keri, Jerry, Teri and Larry. Life was busy. Gil was a devout Roman Catholic and volunteered in all her church organizations, committees and causes. She was president of the St. Viator Church Women's Guild and was a fundraiser for the church. Gil became involved with the Boys and Girls Club of Southern Nevada and became a board member and fundraiser. She became a volunteer for Child Haven, an agency that

oversaw care for abused and neglected children placed there by the Clark County Court System.

In 1975, she was hired by Catholic Welfare as the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) Director. In that capacity she was responsible for recruiting, screening and training prior to the placement of 400 active seniors in volunteer positions throughout Clark County. It was there she met Mary Liveratti who was later to become Administrator of the State of Nevada Aging and Disability Services Division. Liveratti stated, "Gil introduced me to professional soccer when she and her husband were part owners of the Las Vegas Quicksilvers because she recruited me as a volunteer to work games in order to raise money for RSVP." She further stated, "I was fortunate to have known Gilda for 50 years and for her mentorship of me and my husband, John. I admired her lifelong advocacy for Nevada's children and older persons, her sense of humor when times were tough and for the artistic creations she often gifted to friends and family."

Gil worked for RSVP until 1982 when she joined the fledgling Division for Aging Services and her friend Mary Liveratti who was beginning her career at that agency. Gil was now Long-Term Care Ombudsman, and her job involved visiting care facilities throughout the greater Clark County area to ensure vulnerable older individuals were receiving appropriate care and to resolve issues that might develop between caregivers and their charges. According to a co-worker, Carol Hunter, Gil was "a fierce advocate who cared deeply and worked tirelessly for her 'people.'" She had no set hours, often visiting care facilities throughout Las Vegas 'checking in' at odd hours of the day or night. We were always certain that guardian angels protected her, especially during late night/early morning investigations in some very sketchy parts of Las Vegas."

By 1995, opportunities were expanding in northern Nevada and Gil applied for a transfer and moved to Reno to work in the ombudsman program. She eventually was promoted to the statewide position of Nevada State Ombudsman and Chief of Elder Protective

Services. In this capacity she oversaw the staff of licensed social workers who were responsible for improving the quality of care in nursing homes, group homes and assisted living facilities and additionally a staff of social workers who were charged with investigating elder abuse, neglect and exploitation in communities and rural areas.

Gilda was also one of the founding members of SAFE – Special Advocates for Elders – and was president for a number of years. Debbie Van Veldhuizen, also a founding member, noted that “SAFE was noted as first of the top 10 agencies by; the American Bar Association, for helping protect elders under guardianship.” She also stated, “Gil was one of those very special and rare people whose influence changes your life and life’s course just a little, and for the better to be sure.”

In 2014, Women of Diversity, a Las Vegas group with a mission to give visibility to women and create a woman-appreciative future, published a book, *Nevada Women’s Legacy – 150 Years of Excellence*. More than 200 women were interviewed representing the 17 counties in the state. The interviews documented how these women, diverse in years and time spent in Nevada, ethnicity, religion and lifestyle, had contributed to their communities. Gilda Johnstone was one of the women interviewed.



Gilda at work.
Photo courtesy of Laurie Olson

In her interview, Gil stated: “My great achievement has been my successful advocacy efforts for the elderly both in the community and in long-term care facilities. As a social worker and having worked in southern and northern Nevada, I had ample experience working with seniors in not only in a positive role but also helping vulnerable elder residents of care facilities in preserving their resident rights. And I also helped vulnerable elders living in the community who were often victims of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.”

During retirement, she joined the Nevada Women’s History Project. She wrote the biography of [Janet Hunter](#), her friend Carol Hunter’s mother, and during the last months of her life, she orchestrated the writing of a Legacy Tribute to [Suzanne Ernst](#), her former friend and division head. When she was no longer physically able to attend functions, she eagerly looked forward to reading the Project’s quarterly newsletter as a means of keeping up with “what was going on”.

Her friend, Carla Sloan, former director of the Howard Cannon Services Center, Administrator for the State of Nevada Division for Aging Services and founding Nevada state director for AARP, stated “Gilda was a fierce advocate fueled by deep compassion.

She never lost her composure when speaking for those who could not speak for themselves. I was proud to work with her and to call her 'friend'."

Gilda "Gil" Johnstone set high expectations in her personal, work and community activities. Her influence will be felt for years to come.

Gilda passed away on February 19, 2025, in Lancaster, California. She was sprinkled at sea.

Researched and written by Marcia Bernard Cuccaro

Sources of Information

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