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Donald Laub

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Pioneer Transsexual Christine Jorgensen Dies

Orange (Calif.) County Register

Christine Jorgensen, who underwent the world's first sex-change operation in 1952, died Wednesday in a San Clemente, Calif., hospital following a two-year battle with cancer. She was 62.

Jorgensen was a 26-year-old ex-soldier named George Jorgensen Jr. when she underwent pioneering surgery in Denmark, emerging as glamorous, blond Christine.

She parlayed her new status into a comfortable living, achieving financial success as an entertainer and lecturer.

Jorgensen died at 3:59 p.m., hospital nursing supervisor Jo Zarnegar said. She had been hospitalized since Monday.

Doctors diagnosed bladder cancer more than two years ago. Cancer later was discovered in her lungs and within the past month doctors found three tumors in her brain.

After her sex change, Jorgensen performed regularly at the nation's top nightclubs, often doing impersonations of movie stars she had met, such as Tallulah Bankhead and Mae West. Her theme song was "I Enjoy Being a Girl."

She also lectured about sex changes and wrote a book on her transformation. She was at work on a second book when she died.

She met royalty and celebrities and ended up with enough money, jewels and furs to live a comfortable life.

In recent years she had settled into a comfortable, sedate lifestyle in south Orange County, entertaining with dinner parties for a broad circle



Photos by AP

Christine Jorgensen, the former GI who underwent the first sex change operation in 1952 to be transformed to a woman, is shown, from the left, in an undated photo as George W. Jorgensen; in 1953 after undergoing the sex change operation, and in 1977, 25 years after the operation.

of friends. "I've had the mink coats, the diamonds, the notoriety," she said in a 1985 interview. "I don't have the sort of ego that makes me have to have more. I don't need it."

Her battle against cancer forced her to give up a 3,000-square-foot house in Laguna Niguel, and she moved into an apartment in San Clemente.

She was introduced to Orange County in 1969 when she visited a friend in San Juan Capistrano while making a film about her life, "The Christine Jorgensen Story.;;

In an interview several years ago she said when she returned from Denmark after the surgery she was

met at the airport by about 300 reporters and photographers. "I could never understand why I was receiving so much attention," she said. "Now, looking back, I realize it was the beginning of the sexual revolution."

Dr. Donald Laub, a surgeon who headed the Stanford University sex-change team and still performs the operations, said Jorgensen "was very courageous in seeking a solution she knew was correct — through the approbation of the world, the medical profession and the lay public. She persisted in her conviction of what was correct.

"She helped make the concept more acceptable," Laub said. "She had a real conviction, and she sacrificed her personal privacy for others."

Jorgensen is survived by a sister and two nieces. A private memorial was planned, and arrangements for a public service are pending, said Chris Costello, a friend, publicist and daughter of the late Lou Costello.

"Christine had wished that in lieu of flowers donations be made to the Motion Picture Country Home in Woodland Hills, as she so loved the arts," Costello said.

At her home Wednesday night Christmas lights were blazing. Jorgensen especially loved Christmas, said her roommate and companion, Dame Brenda Smith, 56, who formerly served the Danish government as its foreign counsel at Bermuda.

"She wanted every day to be a holiday," said Smith. "She died with all the dignity with which she lived her life. She wanted no one to cry or to be sad."

Smith said she and family members were at Jorgensen's bedside when she died.