Christine Jorgensen
1926-1989

Christine Jorgenson was a nightclub performer and activist, and the first woman to introduce the American public to gender affirmation surgery. She served a year in the army toward the end of WWII, and after being discharged, tried to find careers as a photographer and then a medical assistant. During her time serving for the United States Army in Germany and Denmark, she learned about the option of gender affirmation surgery. Her parents were from Denmark, so she was able to hide the trip under the guise of a "family meeting." In Denmark, she obtained permission for the gender affirmation surgery which included a series of surgeries throughout 1952.

Christine was catapulted into the national spotlight in 1952, while she was still in Copenhagen recovering from two successful operations. The New York Daily News ran the headline "Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Bombshell."

She became a household name overnight and was distraught to learn she would be returning to New York as a celebrity. But she took her unwanted fame in stride, meeting the press with unshakeable poise and candor, and eventually turning her name recognition to her advantage. She used her platform to advocate on behalf of transgender people across the country, giving public lectures on the reality of being a trans person.

Her autobiography published in 1967, Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography, sold over 450,000 copies giving the public a very personal perspective on the trans experience. Christine moved to Los Angeles the same year and began acting and had a popular nightclub act as a singer and impersonator. She also gave frequent talks and lectures in support of transgender rights, educating a confused public over and over on the difference between "transexual," "homosexual," and "transvestite"—always with the same poise and open candor.

Christine died in 1989 at 62 years old, and until her death helped bring to light gender identity and shaped a new culture of more inclusive ideas about transgender people.