



Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans
History Month

Every February since 2005

Jan Morris, CBE, FRSL (born, 2 October 1926) is a Welsh historian, author and travel writer. She is known for the Pax Britannica Trilogy - a history of the British Empire, and for portraits of cities, notably Oxford, Venice and New York.

Jan Morris is one of the great British writers of the post-war era. Soldier, journalist, writer about places - not "travel writer" - elegist of the British Empire and novelist, with a prose style that is elegant, fastidious and gloriously gaudy. Aged 90, she has written books and countless essays, articles and reviews.

Jan's father died when James was 12, having been badly gassed in the First World War; his Welshness an important influence in Jan's life. Jan's mother was English, a gifted pianist. It was while James was sitting under his mother's piano, aged three or four, that he decided he was really a girl.

Jan published under her birth name James until 1972, when she travelled to Morocco for gender reassignment surgery, performed by surgeon Georges Burou. Doctors in Britain refused to allow the procedure unless James and Elizabeth divorced. Jan's 1974 memoir 'Conundrum' movingly describes how a dawning realisation hardened into a firm resolve to change gender, despite marriage and four children. Elizabeth Tuckniss, James' wife (and now Jan's civil partner), "always" knew of her husband's belief that he should have been born female. It's a touching story of constancy. Jan has said "I've lived with the same person for 58 years. I married her when I was young and then this sex-change thing - so-called - happened and so we naturally had to divorce, but we've always lived together anyway."

In 1953, James Morris was the most famous newspaper journalist in Britain. He was assigned by The Times to cover John Hunt's expedition to be the first to conquer Everest, a job requiring fitness and courage. Years later, Jan reminded the Queen that she "...was the person who brought the news back from Everest so that it got to you on time" on the day of her coronation.

In 1960, a cultural history of Venice established James as a major writer. It's never been out of print. Jan has since published 40 books, including, 'Pax Britannica'. Jan regards that as her best work. There was also a satirical novel, about an independent Wales after a Nazi invasion, and dozens of highly regarded and widely read travel books.

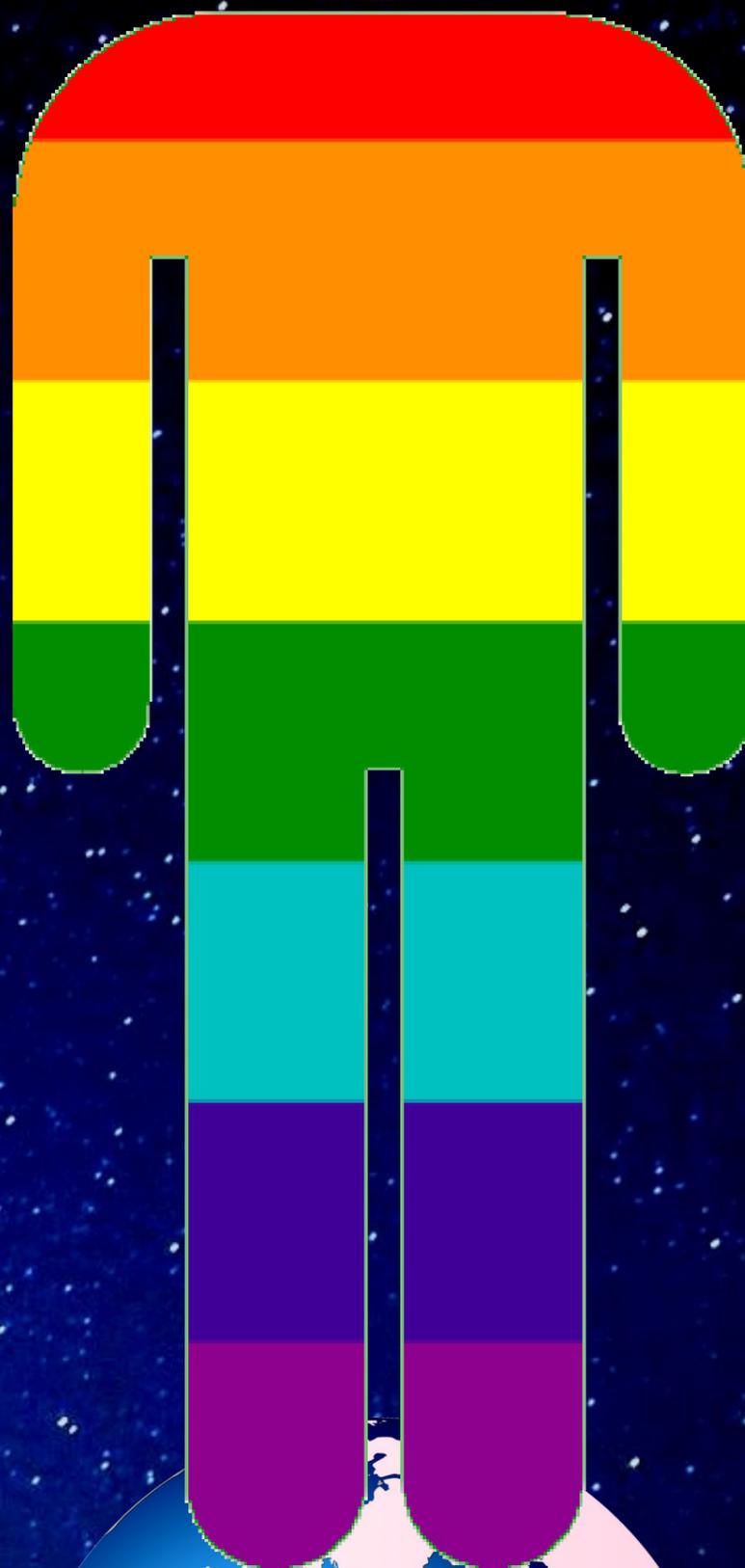
Recently Jan began a diary for the first time in her life. In it she writes "Years ago, early in a wandering life, I devised something called the Smile Test, by which to measure the character of a city and its people. It involved resolutely smiling at strangers I met in the street, and analysing their responses... Generalisations are dangerous and impermanent, I know, but there we are, it was my trade."

Jan and Elizabeth have specified that when they die, their headstone will say, in Welsh and English: "Here are two friends, at the end of one life".

mapping our world

2018

Geography



Jan Morris