



MY STORY. I start by introducing myself (JLW), written on 23 April 2026.

This is an item that has been prepared by SteamRanger Vice-President, Peter Michalak, that followed on from an interview with myself, in consideration of my long-standing membership of more than 40 years having been part of the South Australian Division of the Australian Railway Historical Society (ARHS). That Society is the parent organisation of the SteamRanger Heritage Railway which operates over the section between Mount Barker and Victor Harbor on South Australia's Fleurieu Peninsula. The interview with Peter had arisen from a formal request by the small group of the Railcar 43 restoration team at the Goolwa Depot. I particularly give credit to Peter, who had no prior knowledge of the situation of which he had been asked to write but he has made an outstanding effort to develop a sound background to my story. This interview has required me to expose my deepest emotions, which I have gladly done because I know that I am not alone. I see it as imperative that by imparting knowledge that we can expect society to respond to those of us in this situation with understanding and acceptance.

Peter has written:

It had been through the urging of those involved in the restoration of Railcar 43, that an invitation had been made for me to meet with Dr Wilson, for there had been a personal issue that had bearing on the doctor since early childhood of which it was felt that the membership and the wider rail fraternity needed to be aware. It was the search for understanding this invisible disability that had driven the decision by the doctor to study medicine. The situation that has tormented the doctor though life has been gender dysphoria, which I admit was something of which I had not previously known. It is not a term many of us grew up with. For there had been inner conflict that had arisen from being assigned male at birth, but with an overwhelming sense of being female, and thus is the origin of gender dysphoria. So far, I have completed the text of this narrative to this point without the use of pronouns. We can now use pronouns. Late in 2024 the doctor had endured enough and could see that a decision was needed. She could now face the world and say "I have a new birth certificate and a new name, Jo-jo-anna, and you can call me Jo Jo."

*I describe gender dysphoria as a 'situation'. It is not an illness, or disease, and arguably not a diagnosis but, in fact is a state of distress that is the product of an intolerant society that cannot cope with those who are different.

PHOTOGRAPH. On 2 June 1968 there occurred one of the most spectacular and historic train workings in the history of the South Australian Railways. It was an occasion promoted as *Sayona Mikado*. Locomotives 700 and 718 were the last survivors of a once grand fleet of 2-8-2 locomotives - the Mikados. But their time had come. 700 worked a train to the Barossa, which was to be its last. And the next day 718 set out for Victor Harbor on its last run. But there were a number of things that didn't go to plan that day and 700 was sent to Victor Harbor and in the failing light 700 and 718 were coupled up to the front of a very long train for a never-before and a never-again assault of the 1 in 45 grades through the Bugle Ranges. I had a tripod and was able to get a good photograph. James Andonopoulos has applied digital colour, which has given the photo an aura befitting the occasion.

Gender dysphoria has been acknowledged in the medical literature only in recent time with an incidence of about 0.5%. When you ask around amongst family and friends you find that most know someone who knows someone who has gender dysphoria, even if it has not been spoken. She admits that for most of her existence she was running away from this but in the end realised that there was a woman within who was a big part of her and she turned around and embraced her. There has been the support of the family making the decision which was to be the immediate lifting of a great burden that had long weighed heavily on her shoulders. With a sparkle in her eyes she holds up her new birth certificate and pointing to the part that show her new name and with a big smile points to the best part on that certificate that declares that gender is female.

She has said that it is predictable that in the years and decades ahead there will be thousands of families in Australia who will have to come to terms with transgender making its appearance in one of their loved ones – although they don't yet know it. Out of it they will have to discover a certain strength and resilience that they have never imagined....What is needed is for society to respond with love, understanding and acceptance.”

She reflects that “as a teenager I was troubled by those gender thoughts but I discovered trains, and filling my head with trains left little room for those intrusive images.” It was a similar story with the vineyard that was established with wife, Patricia, in the Clare Valley. By keeping mind and body active, she had been able to keep the lid on those gender thoughts. On that property is a structure, called the ‘circlinium’, a remarkable turreted sentinel that Jo Jo tells us that she built, with every stone, personally smashed, shaped and placed.

Professionally, Jo Jo still has connections to her previous work in the medical specialty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, and is already booked to present at a national conference in October. For many years, she provided rail safety medicals to the various South Australian heritage groups free of charge.

Jo Jo's connection to the ARHS runs extraordinarily deep. Records suggest she is possibly the longest continuous current member, with membership from 1964. She held office of Vice-President in the early 1970s.

Jo Jo carries vivid memories of some of the Society's formative excursions. Among the most treasured is the final run behind Fred Shea's Mikado class locomotives 700 and 718 to Victor Harbor, and the spectacular climb through Bugle Ranges in the dark on the return run. She also recalls time spent on the northern narrow-gauge division, with 400 class Garratts and T classes aplenty. These memories helped shape a lifelong love of railways, and they remain important reminders of why these stories deserve to be preserved.

Alongside her ARHS involvement, many will know that Jo Jo is a prolific writer. She has also been recognised by the National Railway Museum with Honorary Life Membership. She is proud of her contribution to the Pichi Richi Railway Preservation Society in researching and publishing the facts about the origin of the naming of *'The Ghan'*.

Locomotive 700 on an ARHS tour crossing the Onkaparinga at Noarlunga.



Under the banner of Sarlines Railway Books, she has published a significant body of work documenting South Australia's railway history. These titles include *The Train to Oodna Woop-Woop*, *The Overland: A Social History*, and *Bob's Railway: Turbulent Political Times in South Australia*. Perhaps her most influential and widely respected publication is *The Break of Gauge - A Social History*, considered by many to be her finest and most comprehensive work. Through these books, Jo Jo has made a lasting contribution to preserving railway stories for future generations. SteamRanger has been an important and stabilising part of Jo Jo's life.

Her generosity toward SteamRanger has also been remarkable. The donation of Railcar 43 was an extraordinary act that earned her the affectionate title 'Benefactor in Chief' amongst the Brill team at Goolwa Depot. Jo Jo has spoken warmly of the support she has received and expressed gratitude to all for their understanding, kindness and encouragement.

SteamRanger has always endeavoured to be a place where all people, regardless of background, culture or personal journey, can find friendship, purpose and community.

Jo Jo's experience reflects that long standing tradition.

Jo Jo is also involved in new creative pursuits, including a new book that reflects her hope that one day Bob the Railway Dog may become a television series..You do not need to fully understand Gender Dys phoria to appreciate Jo-Jo's courage or to welcome her as the valued member she has always been. She is the same person many of us have known for decades: the same skills, the same dedication and the same humour, now able to live more comfortably and openly.

SteamRanger is proud to have Jo-Jo as part of our community.

Thank you, Peter

I have written a book that tells my story and it is to be given to friends and family and there will be some that are for organisations that have an interest in the topic. This book is *A Ticket to Elysium*. Elysium was sacred to the ancient Greeks as a condition of complete happiness. One of the aspects that is dealt with in depth is the causation of gender dysphoria which in my case has very strong evidence that my situation was a consequence of an environmental toxin of the generic title of an 'endocrine disruptor' that had been a hitch-hiker on my father's spermatozoa. That had been a consequence of his role in malaria control at the end of the war, by his exposure to the insecticide DDT. I was conceived two weeks after he was repatriated from New Guinea. It is a sad reflection that society has not been kind to those of us who are transgender but I respectfully appeal to those who would mock us that mine is a consequence of my father doing his duty for King and Country. I believe that there are others in whom there is significant causation from endocrine disruptors and there is need for the matter of causation being taken up by research, in the interests of science and the fact that the public needs to know. **I close the book with the following:**

We have now left hate and conflict behind and have arrived at Elysium where we have found only peace, love and understanding. Please rejoice and reflect on the journey. it has not been an easy path to travel but we have learnt a lot about ourselves on the way.

I give special thanks to my family, for without their love and support it could not have happened.

And to all who have read my story,I give my love.

Jo jo
(Jo-jo-anna L'elle Wilson)





land with a big smile points to the best part on

