



**REMEMBERING**

**JANNE**

**Francis J. Gavin**

**Editor's note:** This special issue of the Texas National Security Review is dedicated to the memory and legacy of Janne Nolan (1951–2019). Janne was a founding member of our editorial board and had a profound impact on the fields of nuclear security and arms control. She was also a mentor and inspiration to generations of scholars, especially women in the male-dominated world of security studies. The scholarly articles in this issue were both winners of the Janne Nolan Prize, which was sponsored by the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies as part of the Future Strategy Forum. The judges for the prize were James Steinberg, Kori Schake, Keren Yarhi-Milo, Kathleen Hicks, and TNSR Editorial Board Chair Frank Gavin. The pieces were also workshopped by experts selected by the authors, and we are grateful to Amy Zegart and Daniel Bessner for their contributions.

Both scholarly articles deal with topics close to Janne's research: arms control and the ethics of nuclear security. Similarly, the strategist articles honor both her work and her character, looking at nuclear strategy, the impact of technology on the nuclear balance, and the role of principle in public service. In addition to being an extraordinary scholar and dedicated public servant, as Frank Gavin makes clear in this appreciation (first printed in our sister publication, *War on the Rocks*, a few days after her untimely passing), Janne Nolan was also an extraordinary person and a cherished friend to those who knew her. We are proud to be able to honor her memory by publishing this special issue.

The news of Janne Nolan's sudden passing was utterly devastating to the many who knew and loved her. Dr. Nolan was a giant in the national security world, writing pathbreaking works on nuclear strategy and diagnosing the power of bureaucracy and consensus to shape American policy.<sup>1</sup> She was an amazing mentor to scores of

scholars and analysts over decades. To women in the field, she was a brave trailblazer. She excelled in elite university programs, top think tanks,<sup>2</sup> and policy positions, and few were better at "bridging the gap." Janne's Nuclear Security Working Group did extraordinary work to convene experts and policymakers from both parties to deal with the vexing questions surrounding the bomb.<sup>3</sup> No

1 Janne E. Nolan, *Guardians of the Arsenal: The Politics of Nuclear Strategy* (New York: New Republic Books, 1989); Janne E. Nolan, *An Elusive Consensus: Nuclear Weapons and American Security After the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999); and Janne E. Nolan, *Tyranny of Consensus: Discourse and Dissent in American National Security Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press).

2 Tamara Cofman Wittes and Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Brookings Experts Reflect on the Life and Legacy of Janne Nolan," Brookings Institution, June 28, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/06/28/brookings-experts-reflect-on-the-life-and-legacy-of-janne-nolan/>.

3 "Home Page," Nuclear Security Working Group, accessed Oct. 14, 2021, <https://nuclearsecurityworkinggroup.org/>.



one was better at bringing people of different backgrounds together, facilitating long-lasting friendships and community. Her deep knowledge, wisdom, and guidance will be deeply missed.

But none of these are the main reason I will miss my friend so much. What I will miss the most is that Dr. Janne Nolan was the most fabulous, wickedly hilarious, fun, and generous human being I've ever met.

Let's face it: The nation's capital can be a drab town, transactional, full of ambitious strivers, with people looking over your shoulder to see if there is someone more interesting to talk to. For all the smart, accomplished people in it, the city can be strangely conservative and downright boring, each event seeming the same as the next, everyone trying to sound smart, avoiding both making mistakes and having fun. Not, however, when the magnificent Janne was in the house. She was technicolor splendor in an otherwise gray picture. And she made everyone with whom she came into contact feel special.

I struggled to find a way to capture her extraordinary, magnetic charisma and genius. Instead, I've decided to share some of her own words, from texts and emails we shared over the years.

Though I had admired her from afar for a long time, we first engaged after she wrote a wonderfully generous review of my book. After I wrote, "It is particularly humbling coming from someone who really is a giant in our field," she responded with typical self-deprecating flair: "Yes I have a huge field at my remote house in the PA countryside tho I confess I rarely feel like a giant in it among the tall spruces and vast open sky." Thus began years of drinks, conference misbehavior, and late-night texting and emailing like giddy teenagers. "We were separated at birth, I am almost certain."

For some time, I was convinced that someone so brilliant, so glamorous, with such presence, could only have been the product of a one-night stand between Grace Kelly and Albert Einstein. Yet Janne's true origins were in fact more interesting. While I could never fully grasp the details, from what I could tell, she spent her childhood in the glorious Georges V in Paris in a continental version of *Eloise*,<sup>4</sup> save for with an adored sister. Her mother appeared to consort with Ottoman princelings, third-world tycoons, and A-list Hollywood actors — she was good friends with Carey Grant. "She once told me a really, really, long story about getting hit on by a very drunk Montgomery 'Monty' Clift. Yes, I know — wouldn't think she was his type." Her father for a time worked for Howard Hughes. In

his photos, he looks like a dashing movie star. But, like Janne, he combined glamour with a common touch. She knew of my love for the Philadelphia Eagles and shared my joy at their Super Bowl victory:

Think I might have told you that my Dad would have readily sold all three of his children for an Eagles ticket — even though he moved and lived all over the world, the Eagles (and Phillies) remained uppermost in his mind. He actually married 2 very mainline Philadelphia debutantes — though one just for a few months after eloping with her from her engagement (to someone else) party. They travelled around exotic places hopping on and off freighters until he got bored and she got homesick.

It would be hard to outshine a lineage as fabulous as that, but of course Janne did.

Despite her dazzling background and many successes, she was the warmest, most welcoming person I've ever met. We developed a strong mutual admiration society. "I want to live forever and ever inside a fun cocoon of your absolutely adorable flattery and well wishes. Thank you!" She also had me dead to rights: "You're such a charming BS artist — love it and you to pieces." When I complimented a terrific article she had written, she responded, "Really? I bet you say that to all the nuke strategy chicks." She started calling me her Cousin Vinny. We concocted schemes to set up our friends. "Frank & Janne — not Wedding Crashers but Wedding Planners. Though NB We just conceptualize — hire others to implement!" Once, when I said I missed both her and Ryan Evans at an event, she responded, "Am often mistaken for Ryan — it's the décolletage!"

Of course, those who know Janne well also knew that the woman could dish like nobody's business. She told me many stories about very senior people in our field that were as hilarious as they were hair-raising and unprintable. About a certain professor: "He once wore a jacket to a faculty meeting with all the tags on it — I thought maybe shoplifted. Faculty meetings were like the bar scene in *Star Wars*. They elected me VP so I'd have to attend — terrifying." I would often send her clips from "The Simpsons," and her favorite was one with Grandpa Simpson as a strikebreaker, nattering on nonsensically about tying an onion on his belt. She so loved this clip that it became her code whenever she was trapped in an event filled with boring old men. "I'm dying here, a tsunami of warmed-over mangled glimpses into the most banal delivered by a group

4 Kay Thompson, *Eloise at the Plaza* (New York: Little Simon, 2015).

of screeching onion on belts (OOBs).”

As hard as she could be on the old-timers, she was beyond generous with the young, such as her beloved research assistant Mary. “Mary is most wonderful. She is almost deceptively lovely and adorable: at heart she also is the most endearingly brilliant nerd – eg loves paleontology and is expert, gets excited about new discoveries and grew up going on digs. She’s also very Southern polite and impeccably brought up – told me recently her mother ‘would have my tail in a knot’ if she ever failed to call someone ma’am or sir.” Janne was always looking to support, encourage, and connect new people, especially those new to Washington.

Janne loved to show me a faded picture of herself as an early member of the Aspen Strategy Group from sometime in the 1980s — the only woman surrounded by two dozen big-ego men. One can only imagine the challenges such settings presented. She recounted her nuanced view of these dynamics to a young researcher:

She asked what it was like being the only female in countless meetings and I said it was much like being dressed in a gorilla costume, surrounded by a sea of grey polyester suits. But, I explained, sometimes this could work to one’s advantage, a phenomenon we called “The Gorilla Playing Mozart” – e.g. after you made a simple remark (assuming you were halfway articulate), you could see jaws suddenly dropping open and all the geezers turning starry eyed and over dazzled: “That gorilla! Isn’t she something?!” It might not be the absolute best Mozart they’d ever heard but hey, it was played by a *gorilla!*”

As our friendship deepened, we realized we could never sit next to each other, or across from each other, as we worked overtime to make the other lose it with laughter with funny faces and inappropriate texts. The sophisticated microphones at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments once picked up us cracking wildly inappropriate jokes that the whole audience heard. She loved making fun of academic pomposity. “There are so many complex names & chairs here – I’m holding out for a named Chaise Lounge.” She wasn’t above laughing at herself, persuading her dentist to put a signed photograph of her dressed as the Easter Bunny on his wall of celebrity clients — right next to Donald Rumsfeld. We discussed the dilemmas of modern social media; even there, she discovered

the perfect Janne solution: “I tweet half-heartedly with no skill. Prefer to send coded messages to my kid via dog pics. I’m chief backup dog mom to an LA diva dog who has over 5000 followers on Instagram.” This highlighted another shared passion we discussed constantly, our adored daughters. You will never find a prouder, more devoted mother than Janne.

Years ago, Professor Jane Vaynman and I formed an interdisciplinary nuclear studies group. It consisted of mostly younger scholars, but over time, Janne became our spiritual leader and traveled everywhere with us. In addition to intellectual guidance, she worried about the participants’ love lives. “Curious: How do ‘the kids’ meet and develop happy, healthy relationships? Not Tinder and not Church – and not ‘happy hours’? What else? Can’t they just take bicycle rides?” She delighted in the milestones of her young friends. When a good friend had his first child, she was overjoyed: “So, if were to be attacked by the DPRK and perish in the night, it would almost be okay with me after getting to see that absolutely perfect pic of him holding his newborn and exuding such unadulterated love. So wonderful.” It was easy to forget that Janne was good friends with at least two secretaries of state, amongst other notables, because her real ambition was to bring together and support young people, and make them feel smart and loved.

We once combined forces to organize a nuclear workshop at the Greenbrier in West Virginia. The event was zany from the start, and she worried what the funder might think. “He’s totally wonderful but may be a bit amazed by the kitschy opulence we’ve acquired with his and Andrew Carnegie’s largesse. Need to make sure that what happens in White Sulphur Springs etc etc.” It began with a slow, six-hour drunken train ride in a mystery train car (not her first!),<sup>5</sup> with Janne offering instructions “to tell Amtrak that we are Federal prisoners under guard and cannot be separated at any time.” She was elated when she learned that Venus Williams and Pete Sampras were also at the Greenbrier playing in a tennis tournament, and we spent much of our time stalking them. The papers, which were very good, were far less important than the alcohol-fueled evening activities. “Do you think you, Vipinterest, Nick etc will want to go to casino? The mind boggles – I have more likely image of you all driving golf carts into the swimming pool at 3 AM or ordering guns from room service – but if so they all need to bring coat and tie.” Any conference hosted by or including Janne would always be one of the best you

5 Carol Ross Joynt, “Delayed Passengers Treated to an Impromptu Wine-Tasting on Broken-Down Amtrak,” *Washingtonian*, April 23, 2013, <https://www.washingtonian.com/2013/04/23/delayed-passengers-treated-to-an-impromptu-wine-tasting-on-broken-down-amtrak-train/>.



ever attended, with the perfect combination of intellect, friendship, and outright laughter.

Recently, we had been pondering why all the people who studied nuclear weapons in D.C. seemed to be named either Barry or Frank, and decided each group should form a Nuke Wonk rock band and fight it out. Around the same time, I asked if she would be willing to write an endorsement for my new book. Which led to the following response that was vintage Janne:

I'd be totally thrilled to offer a blurb for your book - seriously? Shouldn't we ask one of those famous important people? (eg we try to get Cher, I'll help you. Not wild about her music (guess I prefer the Dirty Franks or The Bombastic Barrys) but she's awesome as a character - dances in public in her skimpy black underwear at 77. That might help sell books!). Think Cher made better life choices, RIGHT? maybe Sonny aside.

A few weeks later she told me, "Had a good Frankfest last evening & told the assembled Franks of your comment about Frank-density, hope you don't mind. It was remarkably Frank-rich environment -.... Great economy of flattery however, as people just say 'As Frank said...'"

I knew something was amiss when she missed a conference neither of us was looking forward to. When I begged her not to abandon me, she responded: "I was literally going into Brainiac ER OR with some bizarre metal contraption on my head when I saw the email saying 'your panel starts in 8 minutes.' That's going to be on our tombstones, no?" Even in medical difficulty, she was hilarious. "I'm doing way better thanks. Only concern: I thought GW. ER was the 1st class Acela Lounge @ Penn Station -the exact same interior decorator. Hope all well with you?"

We often say someone was unique, will be missed, made an impact, but then we move on. It is different with Janne. She truly was one of a kind, and she will leave a deep hole that is unfillable. In my disbelief and confusion, I actually found myself reaching for my phone to text her so we could gossip about what everyone was saying about her passing. I keep trying to come up with ways we should remember her, mark her life — testimonials, lectures, fellowships, awards — and all I keep coming up with is a contest where we try to make a cocktail that captures her wit, genius, and magnetism. And then we all drink too many of those cocktails and tell wonderful, wildly inappropriate stories late into the night.

The amazing thing about Janne is that there are

literally scores of people who could have written the same kind of deeply personal remembrance; she made everyone who knew her feel like they were her closest friend. And she connected all those people and created a rare sense of community in a city that often lacks it. The most important thing we can all do to honor her is to try to be more like she was: bold, generous, kind, hilarious, devilish, brilliant, fabulous, occasionally inappropriate, and larger than life. And, like Janne, to bring people together, to encourage friendship and community. And to stop taking ourselves so damn seriously.

I want to be like Janne when I grow up, except part of her great charm was that in all the most important ways, she never did grow up. She had the pure heart of a child. That someone so accomplished, so impressive, so brilliant, so glamorous, could combine those remarkable traits with a joy, pleasure, and yes, mischievousness too often lost as we become adults. Being around the ageless Janne made you feel like you could be both a serious thinker and a child forever. That may have been her most important gift to all who were lucky enough to know her. ❧

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