



KNOWING

JANNE NOLAN

Condoleezza Rice

In this essay, Condoleezza Rice reflects on her friendship with Janne Nolan, which began in the early 1980s, and on Janne's profound impact on how we think about nuclear issues.

Janne Nolan was an original. I had never met anyone quite like her — and never have since. Tall and elegant, Janne could command a room just by walking into it. She spoke quietly — you had to lean forward to hear her. It made her all the more enchanting and unusual — particularly in the bombastic world of national security and defense.

I will never forget our first encounter. Stanford's Arms Control and Disarmament Program had granted four graduate fellowships that year — 1981. We were from Harvard, Columbia, Tufts, and the University of Denver. And we were all female.

Janne was, in many ways, already the most accomplished among us. She had served in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency at the State Department and been a key staff person in the Carter administration's prodigious work on nuclear arms control. Our offices were in Galvez House — a dumpy but cozy one-story building that had once been Stanford's dormitory for laborers. Janne's office was across the hall from mine. I worked from seven in the morning until six at night. Janne showed up around one — halfway through my day — and worked into the wee hours of the morning. Sometimes we would go to dinner as my day ended and hers had barely begun. Our conversations wandered through her extraordinary upbringing — including in Paris — and mine in Birmingham. We, together with Cindy Roberts and Gloria Duffy, were the “fellowettes” whom our dear leader, John Lewis, often confused, despite our significantly different physical appearances.

I looked up to Janne as someone with real-world experience who was now returning to academic work. She liked my single-minded focus on scholarship and writing. We made each other better, going through those uncertain times early in a career. We became great friends over the years and my admiration for her and what she would accomplish only grew deeper.

Thinking back, it would have been easy to see, even then, why her impact on the way we think about nuclear issues will long outlive her. She believed — deep down — that the world would have been better off without nuclear weapons. She was personally furious that we were in this position.

But she understood that the utopian dream of total disarmament was a distraction. She dedicated her life to trying to make us safer. The books that Janne wrote all carried this theme: We have made a Hobson's choice in our security to rely on the world's most destructive weapons to make us safe. She dedicated her life's work to easing that contradiction.

As such, Janne was passionate about the reform of nuclear weapons policy — from support for “no first use” to safeguards on accidental use to a smaller, less vulnerable force posture. I remember well listening to Janne describe the nightmare that could confront an American president. “Mr. President, you have 20 minutes to decide whether to destroy the world,” she would intone. It got your attention.

Janne found in her work with then Colorado senator and later presidential candidate Gary Hart a political vehicle to put these ideas into action. Hart took up the cause of “reversing” the nuclear arsenals of the United States and the Soviet Union — not just freezing them but actually rolling them back. It was an idea before its time, but it was a way to change the conversation and bring new language to an old problem. Even though Hart's campaign was aborted, Janne had, as his adviser, helped to shift the ground rules of the debate. When the Cold War ended, many of these ideas found new resonance, but this frustrated Janne even more. She could not understand why this radical change in the geopolitical landscape produced a meager response from those responsible for nuclear policy.

That fact drove Janne to understand better the “tyranny of consensus,” as she named one of her eight books.¹ Her earlier book, *Guardians of the Arsenal*, had identified the problem of group think among those — on both sides of the aisle — who held the keys to the vault that protected the dominant view of nuclear policy.² Janne always felt like an outsider among them. But she was not. She challenged from within and the respect afforded her from even those who disagreed with her made Janne a formidable weapon in the effort to bring about change.

Sometimes, this meant simply supporting the deal that was on the table — even if Janne would have hoped for more. And so she helped to organize former military officers and policy analysts in

1 Janne E. Nolan, *Tyranny of Consensus: Discourse and Dissent in American National Security Policy* (New York: Century Foundation Press, 2013).

2 Janne E. Nolan, *Guardians of the Arsenal: The Politics of Nuclear Strategy* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).



support of the ratification of the Obama administration's New START Treaty. Those experts would, in turn, find bipartisan congressional support for the treaty. Janne served on the Defense Policy Board, the commission to investigate the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and numerous other task forces and blue ribbon commissions. She was an insider's outsider and that gave her views real weight.

Janne never gave up though on changing the perception of nuclear weapons and nuclear policy. Her work at the Brookings Institution was equally influential with policymakers and the attentive public. She organized regular dinners at the Cosmos Club to influence opinion leaders outside of foreign policy circles and conferences at Wye Plantation in Maryland. Janne loved ideas and the debate of them and fostered conversations between experts and the public whenever she could.

Janne was committed throughout her life to teaching and training a next generation who would understand the issues and act on them. I first taught with her at Stanford where we were teaching assistants in the marquee course on nuclear arms control. It was one of the most popular courses on campus and produced extraordinary students who cared deeply about the issues. Janne was a talented teacher who kept in touch with many of those students who would go on to work in government. Others would become better informed citizens in other professions — among them a constitutional lawyer in Colorado and a star in academic psychiatry in California. Later in her career, her eyes would light up when she talked about her students in classrooms from Columbia to Georgetown to the University of Pittsburgh. One of her last projects — a congressional fellowship program for young people aspiring to government service — was a capstone idea. She wanted the best and brightest to seek public service.

Janne was especially devoted to bringing more women into the profession. We laughed that Stanford had taught us that it was fun to finally have other “gorillas” in the room — a reference to her description of what it is like to be the only woman in the room. “They stare at you like a gorilla in the zoo,” she would intone, complete with very funny “gorilla-like” gestures.

Janne combined her keen intellect with abundant good humor and a sense of the absurd. She was genuinely a good person, doing hard work in a field not always receptive to young women who wanted to make a difference. But make a difference she did. I am glad that we had that year together at Galvez House at Stanford. It bred an extraordinary friendship that flourished throughout our lives. I miss

her dearly but am so grateful for her life and her life's work. The world is better as a result of who Janne Nolan was and what she did. ★

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