

# A Tribute to John W. Brennan, Jr.

By Burns W. Roper

John Brennan was named to one of the top half-dozen jobs in public opinion polling when he was in his late 30s. He was one of the best at what has become standard public opinion polling fare—presidential approval, attitudes towards national political issues, presidential candidate preferences, exit polls, and the like. John was without equal, however, when it came to non-standard opinion poll fare. In his first four years as director of the *Los Angeles Times* poll, he conducted studies among both Korean Americans and Vietnamese Americans in Southern California about their American experience and attitudes; among Catholic priests and nuns about their attitudes toward the hierarchy and their feelings about change in the Church; among lower-ranking members of the armed forces about the military, the role of women in it, and the acceptability of homosexuals in it. These and other unusual polls—studies, really—were in addition to a full menu of regular polls conducted in the four years he served the *Los Angeles Times*.

John Brennan was one of the newest members of the Roper Center's Board of Directors. He was elected to the Board at its March 26, 1994 meeting.

John Brennan occupied a very special place in my heart and mind. We shared a great deal in common—not because we were contemporaries for, had John been my son, he would have been younger than any of my three actual sons. But John and I shared similar interests and similar values, despite our nearly 30-year age difference. John was fascinated with the opinion research process—not because opinion research was a fast or easy route to financial success, but because of the potential it holds for human enlightenment and social progress.

John loved politics, as an observer and a student. He displayed a constant concern for what is ethical, both in opinion polling and in life in general. And, he felt that humor had an important role in daily life, including at work; and he made a significant contribution to all around him in the humor department. He was very funny.

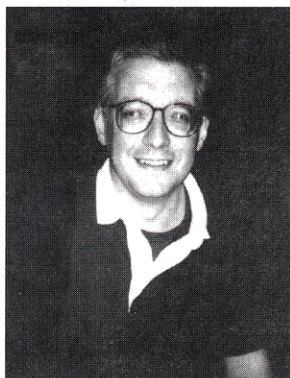
There is still more. Possibly the thing that caused us most to feel like contemporaries, even though we were not, was our mutual love of "Big Band" music. Although I grew up in and lived

through the Big Band era, John had not even been born until about the time it had ended. Nevertheless, he knew more about it than I did. He told me many things about it, in person and over the radio, that I had never known before. And when he spoke of things I *did* personally know about, he was never wrong.

John Brennan was a remarkable man. While some aspects of our relationship were unique, many others were typical. He touched many lives, even where his contact with a person was short and limited. At Christmas I received a long note from Carol Costello, a UConn student of mine who knew John when they both

*How devastated I was to learn recently about our loss of John Brennan. He was truly one of the most special people—both professionally and personally—I've ever known. Working with him as briefly as I did, I grew to adore him and respect him in so many ways. Brilliant yet humble, his own harshest critic, yet so generous and supportive of others and their talents or shortcomings, so driven and so funny, so serious and so warm...There are so many things to say about John because of the incredible complexity of who he was, the many ways in which he contributed, and the grace with which he accomplished everything. I miss him a great deal. He had a big impact on my life (as he seemed to with many people) and I'm happy that I was able to know him even for a little while. He was a great man. I'm not a particularly religious person but my thoughts—and prayers—are with him this holiday season.*

—Carol Costello



were at the Roper Organization. I have Carol's permission to "reprint" the last half of her Christmas note—the part that speaks of John. It clearly shows how he affected Carol. But it also suggests how he affected the lives of others—many, many others. I, too, feel privileged to have known John. He was a remarkable man to have done so much and delighted so many, in less than 42 years. I already miss him. And the opinion research world will miss him and the tremendous, innovative, additional research contribution he would continue to make.

In a "final letter," which neither my children nor my wife have yet had cause to read (I'm happy to say), I said that if they wanted someone from the opinion research world to speak at my service, I would suggest a handful of people that I would feel honored to have speak about me. Needless to say, John Brennan was one of that handful. In terms of our ages, it is ironic that I am speaking about him. But in terms of my feelings about John, it may be quite appropriate.

