

# Danny's Voice: an Elegy

by Gary Walton

*For Danny Miller 1949—2008*

I always thought your voice  
Was out of place and time  
Like a Klaxon on a Lamborghini,  
Its *basso profundo* seemed crafted  
To the contours of the North Carolina hills  
Specifically built to shout from one hillside  
To another, to holler above the hollow, to  
Call men to supper and women from their  
Gardens or the tending of bees—

That voice rang out like a bodacious bell  
Meant to bring the faithful to church on a  
Frosty Sunday morning, radiating out and floating  
On air full of wood smoke, pine bark and  
The felt turbulence of turbid winter creeks  
Bubbling from the runoff of a midnight snowfall,  
Even while the folks themselves were still  
Filled with the soft warm embrace and snug  
Inertia of patchwork quilts and banked iron cast  
Cook stoves—

Such sweet resonance seemed too much to  
Be confined in these constricted concrete  
Walls called a university; too free and full of  
Vital essence to fit into these claustrophobic  
Cubicles and choked hallways, always yearning  
Like a captured brown bear for his chance to  
Break out and scamper head down and breathless  
To the cover of the unshorn grass and an untended  
Stand of burly locust trees—

Still, it was such a joy to hear, here where  
We most needed to feel it, among the stultifying  
talk and talk and talk that wears on you like  
sand in a metal joint or pebbles in a shoe—  
what relief that laugh bubbling and rising, like a balloon  
Above the circus or like a long awaited call to

Recess after a dull day of vacuous study or  
like an invitation that squeezed your shoulders and  
said come on to the back porch, sit yourself down  
and relax, who knows perhaps someone will pick  
up a dulcimer or an old Martin guitar and we can  
sing some of the old songs about requited love  
or someone can tell us a tumbling story about  
kinfolk or the hard life in the mines—

Yes, I think in the end it is the laugh  
I will miss the most and, of course  
The inevitable hug that came after.