

Nancy, Susan, and Dan

in conversation and in movement

Nancy Smith Fichter, Susan Gittler, and Dan Wagoner actively and creatively keep dance in their lives as movers, teachers, dance-makers, performers, and mentors. Each of these extraordinary individuals has a direct lineage to the pioneers of American modern dance and early dance greats - Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Merce Cunningham, and Paul Taylor. What are the pleasures and joys derived from teaching, performing, and witnessing dance? What fears and obstacles have they faced as they have moved through this chosen life of the dance artist? How do they adapt to the inevitable changes of the aging physical body in an art form that relies so heavily on the body and its physicality?

I met with Nancy Smith Fichter at the Lillian E. Smith Center in Clayton, GA to film our conversations about her life and career as dancer, teacher, choreographer, administrator, and mentor. It was on these very grounds at her Aunt Lillian's summer camp for girls more than seven decades earlier that Nancy learned about modern dance and its pioneer Martha Graham. Graham became a major influence on Nancy, her teaching, and choreography.

Susan Gittler, dancer, sculptor, teacher and choreographer, turned 94 during my visit with her in Berkeley, CA where I filmed her performing an original solo, and taking classes in the Feldenkrais Method and dance improvisation, and rehearsing with the Bay Area Scottish Fiddlers. We later met at the American Dance Festival in Durham, NC where I directed her in a duet for the camera with 95 year old dancer Frances Wessells shot in Duke University's Sarah P. Duke Memorial Gardens.

The rural landscape and Dan Wagoner's 18th century farmhouse provided the perfect background for our conversations and creative sessions together. We talked about his career performing in the original companies of Graham, Cunningham, and Taylor, directing his own dance company, and teaching modern technique and dance composition at universities throughout the U.S. I directed and shot Dan improvising on his native West Virginia soil.

