

Why She Danced

1920–1938

Biography is a novel that dare not speak its name.

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ONE SATURDAY MORNING in 1926, in a quiet Chicago suburb, a small girl peered through the wooden lattice that screened the women in the upstairs gallery of an old synagogue from the men below. At first she could see only a mass of black frocks and broad-brimmed black felt hats swaying subtly to the rumbling incantations. Then, as a group, the men beneath these hats, their long black side curls reaching the lapels of their coats, turned. They faced the two small narrow doors of the Ark, the cabinet that held the ornately wrapped scrolls of the Torah. Precisely on cue from their prayer books, they bent their knees and bowed their heads as one.

The girl held her breath in anticipation of the final ecstatic prayer. “Shem’a Israel, Adonai, Alonihenu, Adoni Ehad . . .,” the rabbi intoned, and the full congregation joined in, the women softly from upstairs and the men more forcefully from below. This day, Simchat Torah, was the most jubilant Jewish holiday of the year, marking the changeover in the Torah reading cycle when the Book of Deuteronomy is concluded and the Book of Genesis is begun anew. The rabbi and the cantor carried the Torah scrolls around the synagogue as the boys and men sang and danced behind them in serpentine lines. Their arms flung upward and their feet stamped the ground as the rhythm of devotion, the physical passion of faith, rose up, sending their bodies into intoxicated action, echoing their joyful hosannas of communion with God.

Six-year-old Ann Schuman caught sight of her grandfather, Nathan Schuman, his head thrown back, his arms upraised, and his long white beard and long silky white hair swaying as he joined in ecstatic prayer. Years later she recalled, “I just thought this was the most beautiful dance I had ever seen. Not only that, but I thought he was God. He looked like God to me, and he acted like what I thought a God would act like. So I thought that God was a dancer.”¹

Nathan Schuman had been a prosperous tailor in Kreminecz, a small town outside the old Russian port city of Odessa, which at that time had not yet been emptied of its Jewish population by emigration and a series of devastating pogroms. He had been born into as comfortable an existence as any Jewish resident in that area could hope to attain in the 1860s. At an early age Nathan learned from his father, a skilled and enterprising tailor, how to make finely fashioned clothing. As the eldest son of a prominent Orthodox Jewish family, Nathan was the only one of his parents’ seven children permitted to attend the local school. There he learned Russian, a sign of begrudging social acceptance by the local government. When he was in his twenties, Nathan, who maintained his family’s strict orthodoxy, married his stepsister Bertha, an equally devout young woman.

As Nathan’s reputation for making fine quality clothing grew, so did his clientele. By the mid-1880s, when his second youngest son, Isadore (Ann’s father), was born, Nathan had become the official tailor of the town’s sizable Cossack regiment. Employing a number of assistants, Nathan made all the uniforms—long outer coats decorated with fur and braiding, close-fitting breeches, and side-buttoning shirts—for the Cossack soldiers. Since the 1840s, in villages around Odessa, the Cossacks had been burning and looting Jewish households, often killing their occupants. Sometimes the Cossacks abducted eight- or nine-year-old Jewish boys to serve twenty-five-year-long subscriptions in the Russian army in Siberia, where few survived the first year. Driven by the pogroms as well as the scarcity of economic opportunities, brutal despotism, and killings—all of which were frequently encouraged by a government confounded by the unwillingness of the Jews to assimilate and convert—the Jews of shtetl cities throughout Russia and Eastern Europe had begun a mass exodus. To stay was to face a government policy of “relentless butchery against the Jews.”²

However, Nathan, along with his family and his growing business, was always spared during the Cossack purges. He may have been a Jew, but he

was indispensable. In a macabre echo of the Passover tale, in which the Jews of ancient Egypt escaped the ordered killing of their firstborn sons by marking their doorposts so the angel of death would pass over them, Nathan and his family were saved by an identifying mark the Cossacks themselves put on their door indicating that the Jews who lived there were to be spared. Further, family legend has it that Bertha never learned to cook, because in Russia she never had to—the Cossacks kept Nathan’s family supplied with servants as partial payment for their uniforms.

Yet Nathan knew that eventually his usefulness to the Cossacks would end and then he, his wife, and six children would all become victims. Placing his two oldest sons, Herman and Sam, in charge of the factory, Nathan, who spoke only Russian and Yiddish, left alone for an unknown future in America. He made his way to Chicago with its sizable community of German and Eastern European Jewish immigrants. The historian Irving Cutler has noted, “Between 1880 and 1925, over two million Jews left Eastern Europe, going mainly to American cities. In time eighty percent of the Jewish population of Chicago consisted of such emigrants and their descendants.”³ Nathan worked in the garment industry, the largest employer of Jewish men, women, and children. This industry was concentrated in the southern part of downtown Chicago, where many worked in crowded shops above storefronts. Workers usually labored twelve- and thirteen-hour days, six days a week, mostly doing piecework.⁴ Nathan, who never really learned English, used to get to work by recognizing certain signs along the tram route. When the tram route changed one day, he was lost and frantic he would lose his job. He was eventually led back to where he was staying, and the next day a friend guided him to work, continuing to do so until Nathan recognized the new tram route.

Even within the Jewish communities of Chicago there were tensions, particularly between the more affluent and educated German Jews and the newly arrived and frequently illiterate Eastern European and Russian Jews like Nathan. The character of Chicago’s Jewish community was changing, and by 1900 Eastern European Jews would outnumber German Jews by 50,000 to 20,000. According to Cutler, “The poverty of the Eastern European Jews”—like Nathan—“was much more desperate than the German Jewish poverty had ever been and their piety was generally much more intense.”⁵

It took Nathan a number of years, laboring as a tailor’s assistant, to earn enough to send for his wife and two daughters. The four boys were to be sent for later, once Nathan saved the money for their boat passage. Herman, as the eldest son, had been permitted to attend Russian schools, so

he, like his father, had the advantage of being literate—a big help in the task that lay before him.

In the early part of 1898, Nathan arranged for Herman and Isadore's passage from London to Ellis Island. It was their responsibility, however, to get from Odessa to London, alone and on foot. With pieces of gold sewn inside their boots, the boys walked the hundreds of miles from Odessa to the Polish border. They wore coats with identification tags and, sewn inside, the itinerary of a network of sympathetic families who would aid them. At the Polish border they bribed the Russian guard on duty to permit them to enter, but as they ran across the border the guard suddenly changed his mind and fired in the air while pursuing them.

Herman and Isadore did make it to the Polish side, only to discover that the first link in their underground network had failed to show up. Terrified, they spent the night in the barn of a nearby farm, slipping in under cover of darkness, hastily eating the pieces of sausage and bread they had carried with them, and leaving again before daylight. Easily recognizable as Jews because of their short clipped hair with long side curls, white shirts, and black breeches with the tassels of their fringed prayer shawls hanging out, Herman and Isadore were soon spotted by a Polish Jew. Knowing how dangerous it was for two young Jewish boys to wander through Poland, which at the time shared Russia's official dislike of Jews, he helped the boys make it safely to their next contact. They then spent nearly one year, moving from one sympathetic family to the next, until they finally made it to Le Havre in France, from there across the English Channel to London, and finally, on steerage passage, to New York's Ellis Island. Years later, Isadore, weeping, would recount to his grown children how terrified he had been on that transcontinental crossing.

Isadore worked hard to become assimilated quickly. Soon after he arrived in Chicago, his father opened a clothing manufacturing business, and Isadore became a salesman there. His ability to read and write English remained minimal, however, and his guttural Yiddish accent stuck with him his entire life. As an affluent, self-made man, Isadore used to joke that he could get by without reading or writing; all he needed to do was purchase a rubber stamp with his name to deposit the checks that kept rolling in.⁶

By the time his daughter, Ann, witnessed her grandfather praying, the importance of religion in Isadore's life had greatly diminished. As was true for many Jewish families rushing to assimilate at the time, Isadore and his family expressed their Judaism privately, in their home, as part of their cultural heritage—usually just on major Jewish holidays. Instead of celebrat-

ing their coming of age at thirteen with a bar mitzvah, Ann's brothers were "confirmed" in a Reformed Jewish ceremony when they turned fifteen, and so was Ann. "We were so Reformed we were actually close to being Unitarian," Ann's brother Albert once quipped, noting that their synagogue's services were held on Sundays rather than Friday nights and Saturday mornings.⁷ As Ann recalled years later:

Being Jewish was more social to me than religious. It was a feeling of being part of a tribe. It was belonging. It was being able to tell jokes and know that they would understand. It was having certain intonations in your voice. It was having certain expressions that you would say and you would know that everybody would understand. It was the feeling of belonging more than it was any kind of religious connection.⁸

To fit in and be accepted rather than doggedly standing out as different was what Isadore and most other young Jewish immigrants in Chicago wanted. They had experienced the high price of being different in the old country. One link to his life in Russia that Isadore never forgot was his sympathy for the "little guy." "He was a staunch Democrat," his daughter remembered. "He had to be taken to the hospital when Nixon was elected. He got sick from the news he was so upset."⁹

Compared with her father, Isadore, her father's father, Nathan, seemed exotic and mysterious to the young Ann. This Orthodox Jew, who went to synagogue daily, davened, and spoke mostly Yiddish with a smattering of Russian, was a blood relation with the allure of a foreigner. In her rapt pleasure at Grandfather Nathan's "dancing," Ann discovered herself, responding to a love of movement wedded to ritualism. That Saturday morning in the synagogue Ann witnessed what Howard Eilberg-Schwartz has called the "savage" in Judaism.¹⁰ This central ritual of worship for the Jewish male, with all its primal spiritualism, fascinated her. It offered a vivid contrast to the contained existence of her mother, aunts, and indeed all the adult women of her extended family, where there seemed to be no avenue for escape. Now Ann had seen an outlet for expression come from her staid grandfather—a man she could never talk to because of their language differences, but someone she already connected with almost intuitively, through touch, communicating more closely with him than any of his other grandchildren.¹¹

We would go and visit my grandfather and grandmother every week, and since he only spoke Yiddish he communicated with me by touching me.

So he touched me a lot. My father never touched me. So [with the grandparents] there was a lot of touching, and Grandfather would pat me and he would stroke me and he would talk Yiddish to me, but he knew that I didn't really understand.¹²

Ann had seen her grandfather in the most sacred of places, the synagogue, expressing his fervor through dance. Here was a language she understood. For the young Ann, her grandfather's Hassidic dance helped initiate a process of learning about herself, and it lent support to her own nascent nonconformity. As she has stated:

I think that my connection to Judaism, the idea that you don't bow down before a golden idol, implied for me a sense of intellectual freedom, artistic freedom. It gave me the sense of being myself and acknowledging other people to be who they were. Not having expectations that there were dogmas to follow influenced me very much.¹³

Already at six, Ann loved dance—and now she had seen motion linked to the divine, to ritual, to some raw part of humanity's communication with the spiritual. Dance could be intoxicating by its honest ritualism and also important enough to be the ultimate avenue of ecstatic expression to God. It would be years before Ann would also discover that from that initial vivid childhood incident came another lasting lesson—through dance one can find an interior self. In her lifetime, all of Ann's art would, in some sense, be part of a larger search to find that hidden soul of herself.

Ann's mother, Ida Schiff Schuman, may not have understood all that dance would come to mean for her daughter, but she did sense its appeal. A warm, patient, benevolent woman, whom her children and family friends repeatedly described as "angelic," Ida gave her only daughter dancing lessons beginning at age four, simply because she herself had always wanted to dance.¹⁴ She assumed that Ann would, too.

Ida had been born in Chicago in 1893 to Samuel and Hannah Schiff, who had met in Chicago but had both emigrated, separately, from small towns in Lithuania a decade earlier. Ida enjoyed a comfortable, close-knit family climate at home. The push toward assimilation was there, as it had been with Isadore Schuman's family, but never at the expense of a harmonious family environment. Whereas excitability and the drive to get ahead were

strong traits in the Schuman clan, in the Schiff household good deeds counted for everything. Samuel, who had learned his trade from his father, owned a small haberdashery in Chicago's South Side. He and Hannah quickly began their family. Always more comfortable in their mother tongue, Yiddish, than English, the couple accepted their American-born children's eagerness to embrace new American values—but only to a point. When two of their sons, Jack and Charlie, married non-Jewish girls, Samuel and Hannah disowned them and never spoke to them again. Hannah went into mourning and “sat shiva,” the Jewish ritual when one mourns for someone who has died.

Ida, the last of seven children, was indulged by her two sisters and four brothers as the baby of the family. When her mother died in her fifties from what was likely diabetes, Ida, just fifteen at the time, was raised by her father and siblings. Four years later, on a family holiday to French Lick, a popular Jewish resort area in Indiana, Ida met Isadore Schuman, about seven years her senior, and they married shortly after her nineteenth birthday. Isadore, who had already worked his way up to a prominent position in the Chicago-based Schuman cloak and suit business, impressed her with his ambition and teasing sense of humor.

Ida and Isadore's firstborn, a much-desired daughter, Ruth, died a few days after birth, the victim of a too-violent forceps delivery. Then there were two boys, Stanton, born in 1914, and Albert, born in 1917. Three years later, on July 13, 1920, Hannah Dorothy Schuman, the long-awaited daughter, was born in the family's home at 623 Laurel Avenue, Wilmette, a lakeshore suburb forty-five miles north of Chicago. Named for Ida's mother, Hannah instantly assumed a special place in the family—an only girl with twelve male cousins and two older brothers. Ann, as she soon came to be called, was small and wiry like her father, with his intense blue-green eyes, but with the flaming, red frizzy hair of her mother. Ann stood out from the start.

Ida, like most middle-class women at the time, did not work outside the home, and Isadore saw to it that she always had plenty of household help. A full-time nanny helped with the children, a maid did the housework, and by the time Ann was seven, a full-time German chauffeur and gardener, Hugo, had been hired as well. Ida spent her days overseeing this household, cooking for the frequent social gatherings the Schumans hosted, and playing mah-jongg and bridge with other Jewish housewives. More than ever Ann became her focus, perhaps as a result of her own private restlessness in not having found an avenue of personal expression.

Always shrewd in business, Isadore began buying and selling property, eventually shifting from the clothing business into real estate. While Ann was growing up, he moved his family into various homes around Winnetka, the almost exclusively non-Jewish suburb of Chicago. Named after a Native American phrase meaning “beautiful land,” Winnetka has been considered one of the most prestigious residential locations on Chicago’s North Shore since the beginning of the twentieth century. By the time she was in high school, Ann’s family had moved seven times, always within a few-mile radius. Ida dreaded the moves but said nothing. She just obediently gathered up the household and did as Isadore wanted. “Dearie,” he would say, “we’re moving.” “It was a man’s world and my mother had little to say,” Ann recalled years later. “So she never said a word. She just went along with it. I hated it. I had friends in the neighborhood, and it was always very disorienting to have to leave.”¹⁵ To Ann, moving seemed “repulsive”; indeed, since she and her husband built their home in Kentfield, California, in the early 1950s they have never moved, living in the same house for more than fifty years.

One of the Winnetka homes that the family moved into was an authentic Swedish farmhouse with thatched roof, secret compartments, beamed ceilings, and stenciled patterns along the windows. Miriam Raymer (now Bennett), a childhood friend of Ann’s who lived four houses down the street, remembered the Swedish house as one of the most unusually beautiful in the neighborhood. To Isadore, however, it was primarily a good business investment. A few years later, as Isadore’s wealth grew, he had a mansion custom-built three blocks from the Swedish home, on Tower Road, the most fashionable street in town. Situated on a spacious knoll, the two-story, Tudor-styled brick house had rooms of palatial proportions, including a huge bedroom for each child, and there was a pond that would freeze over, becoming a kind of private skating rink. When the stock market crash and depression hit in 1929, Isadore sold the Tower Road mansion and the family moved into a rental house. It was only a temporary setback, while he reorganized his finances. Not all the Schuman brothers were as resilient. In 1927, as the personal pressures among Isadore’s brothers began to mount, Isadore’s older brother, Herman, turned on the engine of the new car he had recently purchased—his first—and sat in the garage until he died of asphyxiation.

Perhaps because his reading comprehension was so limited, Isadore never trusted investments he could not wear, touch, walk on, or live in. When,

after Herman's death, he turned the family wholesale clothing business over to his other brothers, Sam and Abe, he concentrated almost all his wealth in real estate rather than in stocks. As a result, he was hurt far less than many by the stock market crash. He got back on his feet quickly by using the property he did own as leverage. Isadore was learning how one's mastery of a new culture could be emblazoned through ownership of the urban landscape.

As an outward sign of success, Isadore loved clothes. Short, slender, with olive skin, blue-green eyes, and jet-black hair well into his eighties, Isadore, was an impeccable dandy. His closet contained scores of hats, from straw ones for the summer to fine felt ones for the winter. All of his shirts were silk and prominently monogrammed. He had dozens of suits; jackets of every color, including custom-made gray and white silk ones and a favorite gold tie. "My father wasn't parsimonious at all," Ann recalled. "If he needed one cashmere sweater he wouldn't get one of anything, he'd get six. He had a Cadillac because that was the best car."¹⁶

Isadore seemed to work all the time. "He was primarily a provider," Ann remembered. "He was never a pal or someone who would come to school or PTA meetings. He didn't enter into family life much."¹⁷ Ann was twelve before the Schumans attempted their first (and only) family vacation. They drove to Northern California to visit Ida's brother, Jack, who lived in San Rafael. While Ann stayed with her parents at Uncle Jack's home, her two brothers hitchhiked to Los Angeles for a week to see the 1932 Olympic Games. What Ann remembers most about the whole vacation was the car ride. The car got several flat tires, and each time Isadore exploded in rage. The chatter of the restless kids in the back seat also infuriated him, and he would wheel his head around and bark in his heaviest Yiddish-inflected English, "Shut up or I'll trow my teeth at you!"¹⁸

Isadore did, however, have playful side. "When he was alone with my mother he wasn't funny at all, he was very demanding," Ann later said. "But give him an audience and he was a funny man. He never told jokes: he was just funny. He had a comeback for everything anybody said. He had really Jewish, sarcastic humor. And when he talked he would gesture typical Jewish gestures. His face would be so expressive. Had he had a different upbringing I think he would have been a famous comedian, like the Marx Brothers."¹⁹

Early on Ann shared her father's gift for comedy, at first unwittingly. Ida recalled that when Ann was four she was laughed out of her first ballet class because she was so tiny, so cute, and so restless. Later, on Broad-

way in the Burl Ives musical *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* Ann did an unintentional comedic solo when the bloomers on her costume fell down and she kept trying to dance, prompting one critic to proclaim her “the Fanny Brice of dance.”²⁰

Isadore’s irascibility, however, was sometimes more than the young Ann could take. At mealtimes, if Ida offered an unwanted suggestion, he might shout, “You crazy fool! You just stick with your pies and I’ll take care of the business!” Ann began to get severe stomachaches whenever she sat down to a family dinner, and by age twelve she had a case of colitis so severe that she was put on a bland diet of broth, boiled chicken, and rice for a year.²¹ Her brothers retreated too, Stanton by establishing close relations with Ida and Albert by becoming very quiet and introverted.²²

Despite the emotional tension in the family, Ann recalled only one instance when tensions escalated into physical punishment. Stanton had done something that triggered Isadore, who grabbed the boy and a hairbrush and took him in the bathroom and spanked him. Ann was so upset that she stood outside the bathroom door sobbing.

For Ann, Ida and her side of the family always represented calm, stability, and infinite patience in the face of Isadore’s and his siblings’ edgy irritability.

My mother’s side of the family was very close-knit. They loved each other. They enjoyed being together. There was a loving kindness throughout that whole family. They were just delightful. Whereas, my father’s side of the family—somebody was always fighting with someone. They were more high-strung. They were very dramatic and theatrical. There was always turmoil.²³

The benevolent and the neurotic—Ann herself would vacillate between these two extremes of temperament as she attempted to balance what she wanted to be—an artist—and what she was raised to be—a wife and mother. For much of her life it would be an uneasy union.

When Ann’s family left behind the religious and cultural familiarity of the Jewish community of Wilmette and moved to the predominantly non-Jewish suburb of Winnetka, they were drawn not only by the real estate opportunities, but also by the promise of the comprehensive reforms under way in the Winnetka public schools. The “Winnetka Plan,” or “Individu-

alized Learning,” was an innovative Progressive curriculum designed by educator Carlton Washburne and implemented from 1919 into the late 1930s.²⁴ Although some critics labeled Washburne’s program subversive, it grew out of a belief in individual learning. It belonged to a period when education was seen as the primary means for achieving societal repair and personal change, a perspective initiated by such intellectuals and educators as George Stanley Hall, John Dewey, and Edward L. Thorndike. These visionary thinkers implicitly linked pedagogy and social reform, a pairing that Ann would eventually echo in her dance work.

Ann spent her early life as a student exclusively in Washburne schools, beginning in 1926, when she entered first grade at the Hubbard Woods Elementary School, through 1934, when she graduated from Skokie Junior High School. The experience-based curriculum was ideally shaped to help Ann acquire the tools for becoming an artist and dance educator. Indeed, the reconceptualization of the individual in education paralleled a rethinking of the whole person in several arts disciplines at this time. The internal dimensions of humankind, our spiritual and psychological sides, became the subject matter of the visual and performing arts. In her dances of the late 1920s and early 1930s, for example, the choreographer Martha Graham revealed a new fascination with what she called “the interior landscape.” Graham delved into the desires and motivations that shaped an individual’s behavior, outlook, and capacity to make sense of the world.

Washburne’s educational program promoted aesthetic understanding by heightening students’ sensitivity to the world. He believed that processes can only be understood if they are based on experience and that a child’s body and emotions, not just the mind, must be stimulated as facets of the whole individual. Washburne directly stated that he was cultivating “each child’s special aptitudes” rather than genius in the arts or a particular subject.²⁵ As a Progressive, Washburne was unusual in his emphasis on the arts in education. His design allowed students to spend a substantial portion of each day engaged in painting, sculpture, drama, folk dance, music, or a combination of these disciplines. But even more unusual was how Washburne used the arts educationally. Instead of seeing classes in the arts as training for art making, he encouraged work in the arts as training for life, as a tool for learning about the world.

For Ann, the classroom experience provided support and encouragement, without the strain of competition with students fighting for the top grades. “There was never any homework,” she recalled, and whenever the weather was decent, everybody carried the tables and chairs outside, so the class could

be conducted outdoors for the whole day. Indeed, Washburne felt strongly that the spontaneous kinds of learning that take place outside the classroom are just as valid as those that happen within. He believed that students needed “time out of doors for gaining experience, for hobbies and explorations.” Cultivating one’s ability to attend to the world around may sound like a generic skill, but it is a key quality for an artist. Learning first to experience, then to understand, and finally to *represent* the particulars of experience as something vivid are prerequisites for an artist.

Although the curriculum broke boundaries, there were certainly religious and ethnic, if not class, separations among the students. Ann and her classmate friend Miriam Raymer (Bennett) recalled the extreme social isolation they felt as the only Jewish children in their class. As Ann put it:

Knowing that I was different was sometimes very painful to me because I was discriminated against because of that difference. I wouldn’t be invited to certain social events at school, and it took me a while to realize that was because I was Jewish. But all I knew as a kid was that I was different. My hair was bright red and very kinky. Everyone else in my school had blond hair and blue eyes, and the girls could swish their hair around. I would try and swish my head, and my hair would stand up and never come back down. So I knew that I looked different as well.²⁶

They were always excluded from birthday parties, and the school seemed either ignorant or indifferent to this.

Stanton also remembered with painful vividness the outright hostility of the Winnetka community to Jews. “They built spite fences,” he said in an interview in Winnetka in the 1990s as he pointed to eight-foot-high wooden fences that had been erected in the late 1920s by neighbors irate at having the Jewish Schuman family living next door, just a few blocks from Washburne’s model school.²⁷ These early encounters with anti-Semitism would color Ann’s approach to dance:

Growing up and going to school in an anti-Semitic environment meant that having a Jewish extended family was very important to me. It gave me lots of security and a lot of loyalty. It did shape a lot of my attitude about dance because I felt a great injustice around this. I felt a great sense of loss and my dignity and self-esteem were very challenged. I really experienced being a minority person and had a lot of sadness around that. And a lot of resentment. I think that it did shape a lot of the directions that I ultimately went into.²⁸

Although anti-Semitism made it difficult for Jewish students to make friends, Winnetka schools did foster a close relationship between all students and their teachers. Ann, like other students, at times brought her teacher home for lunch. On other occasions, teachers ate supper at students' homes in order to chat with the fathers just as they had with the mothers at lunch. Through this practice, one imagines, the teachers got a much richer sense of their students' interests and lives outside the classroom, perhaps helping them look more favorably on children like Ann, who did not excel in the traditional academic subjects, but developed a passion for the creative side of the curriculum. In her later work in dance Ann would often cap rehearsals and performances with communal meals as part of the social occasion where learning continued and teacher/student boundaries were bridged.

Ironically one of the most immediate identifying signs that marks Ann as a Winnetka alumna is that she cannot write cursive and is a poor speller. Part of Washburne's pragmatic approach to the curriculum was not to teach cursive writing. "Children learn manuscript [printed] writing more quickly than cursive," he said. "And the words look more like the words in books."²⁹

This decision typifies Washburne's boldness in reassessing canonized aspects of the curriculum. More important, though, is the way Washburne's innovations challenged the authoritarian use of space and the disciplining of student bodies so central to educational institutions for centuries. As Michel Foucault shows in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, the organization of classroom space "made possible the supervision of each individual and the simultaneous work of all. . . . It made the educational space function like a learning machine, but also as a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding." Foucault also discusses the control imposed by examinations and cursive writing: "Good handwriting, for example, presupposes a gymnastics—a whole routine whose code invests the body in its entirety, from the points of the feet to the tip of the index finger. . . . A disciplined body is the prerequisite of an efficient gesture."³⁰

Foucault's argument suggests that Washburne's abandonment of cursive writing, tests, and the traditional classroom hierarchies liberated Ann in ways more profound than anyone knew at the time. Not until high school did Ann encounter the usual compulsory obedience to rules and subservience to the teacher signified through the student's "docile" body. For Washburne, it was much more important to give students time for creativity and self-expression than to burden them with rote "lessons." In his words:

Progressive schools, . . . are alive with the singing of folk songs and good music, with “rhythm bands” for little children (beating time on sticks and cymbals and triangles), and orchestras and bands for older children. They are colorful with the original painting of the youngsters. . . . There is dancing—folk dances, square dances, rhythms. There are “creative dramatics”—plays made up by the children themselves, the parts spoken spontaneously, not memorized. And there is “creative writing”—original stories and poems, often “published” in a fully illustrated room or school magazine or newspaper.³¹

Rather than cultivating exceptional talent in a few students, Washburne’s program encouraged an artistic sensibility in every student. The connection between the Winnetka Plan’s reliance on dramatics and the genre of personally confessional dance/theater that Ann would develop is striking. Washburne seemed to see the arts as important social tools for understanding oneself and the world. For Ann, it was not just that Washburne’s ideas fostered artistry, but also that his focus on the social utility of art helped shape the kind of artist she would become. It prepared her to rethink the institutional structure of a dance company as well as the kind of dialogue with society she would have as an artist.

A dramatic example of Washburne’s intended curriculum can be seen in the special projects at each grade level. Ann particularly remembered the time her class built an entire, full-scale Indian village on the school grounds. Her most vivid memory is of the several Native Americans who were invited to the village, where they wove baskets, cooked, and danced daily for a two-week period while the students observed them, asking questions and trying their hands at any of the various tasks they wished. Ann also recalled weekly field trips, such as the evening when her entire class assembled late at night to view stars through a telescope. Another time Ann’s class visited an orphanage and afterward they sent sandwiches each week to the children there. Occasionally, though, the emphasis on having a “real experience” could prove too much for some students. When Ann’s elementary class visited the stockyards in Chicago, she became physically ill at the sight and smell of the slaughtered cattle.

For Ann, whose life work would involve how to represent publicly her inner experiences, being a student in Washburne’s schools proved seminal. “The emphasis on the arts, on creating and the freedom of choice, the way we built together, acted as a group”—all these influenced her greatly. “The most important thing that I remember about school in Winnetka was that

I loved it,” she said.³² She and her friends didn’t want to skip school at all, even when they were sick.

Ann always struggled academically. She called herself a “motor learner” to explain her lack of facility in math or academics. “I was in the slow learning class because I couldn’t grasp concepts,” she later commented. “I couldn’t do math. Abstract thinking was very difficult for me. I excelled in motor learning.”³³

It was physical activity—a pick-up game of street baseball rather than playing paper dolls with Miriam Raymer and her friends—that interested Ann.

I remember riding my bicycle and going down this big hill to go to school, and I remember going down that hill and feeling like a bird just flying, I wasn’t riding the bike anymore, I was just relating to that moment of flying. It was a very powerful movement experience which gave me a feeling of freedom and liberation and ecstasy and a sense that I could immediately switch into the movement for its own sake rather than for a goal. I was no longer considering that I was going to school, I was really just in that moment.³⁴

Always fiercely competitive, Ann was “an ultimate tomboy,” as Robert Raymer remembers it. “She wanted to excel at whatever her brothers were doing, whether it was swinging in a tree or participating in a neighborhood baseball game.”³⁵ Ann’s brothers, Albert and Stanton, excelled in both academics and athletics: Stanton became an honors student and star football lineman at the University of Michigan and went on to become a prominent real estate attorney in Chicago; Albert, an excellent swimmer, track man, and football player, eventually received a degree in engineering from Stanford University and became a businessman in Santa Barbara. Her brother Albert once remarked that part of the work ethic he, Stanton, and Ann were raised on emphasized two things: becoming a professional and becoming a person who did something that contributed to the world. “I only know two dirty seven-letter words,” Albert quipped when he was in his late seventies, “Bastard and Retired.”

Even as a young child, Ann used dance as her source of achievement. When Ann was laughed at in ballet class because she was “so funny-looking and so ridiculous,” she recollected, “my mother was so insulted that she

took me out of the ballet class and then decided that I needed something a little freer, so she enrolled me in an Isadora Duncan-type of class.” This interpretive dance class was more tolerant of little Ann’s energy. For the next two years, Ann studied creative movement at a local dance school in Winnetka, waving scarves up and down and tossing balloons in the air with the other young girls. She enjoyed skipping, galloping, and sensing in her body the pulsing piano rhythms the teacher played: “I just loved it. It was very free and I felt very comfortable in that kind of atmosphere.”³⁶ For Ann, the experience may not have been of dance as art at this point, but it was one of raw physical motion and expression.

Ann’s father did not always understand her desire to dance; instead, Isadore encouraged Ann, as well as her mother, Ida, to study the harp. The image of two women, mother and daughter no less, playing this celestial instrument fit right in with the neo-romantic trends of the time. This was after all the heyday of Maxfield Parrish’s nostalgic portraits of an idealized American girlhood. Ida and Ann had no interest in learning to play the harp. But Ann did study piano for eight years, from the time she was ten until she left for college. She played the family’s grand piano. “I had a hard time sticking with the piano because I didn’t like the discipline of sight-reading and playing,” she said. “I’d get on the piano and improvise. I liked that so much better. It was hard for me, but I was a good pianist for a long time. I’d play in concerts up until the time I went to college. After that I just lost touch.”³⁷

By the time Ann was in her early teens, Ida had discovered Alicia Pratt, a local dance school owner who brought in modern dancers from the Denishawn school founded by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn to teach master classes and workshops. These classes consisted mostly of music visualizations, drapery manipulations, and decorative poses. “I loved it because it appealed to my fantasy,” Ann recalled. “I could be an Indian, I could be a Nautch girl, I could be anything I wanted to be. They were very exotic.”³⁸ St. Denis’s dance notes of the time detail the kind of exercises that would lead up to these movement “fantasies.” A typical set of instructions, according to St. Denis historian Suzanne Shelton, would read: “Walk forward—back through veil. Bend forward in pity. Hands in teaching attitude. Hands in prayer. Take veil in right hand, wrap around right wrist. Pose right hand then left.”³⁹ A music visualization might have the students dancing to the first movement of one of Beethoven’s compositions. One girl might take the part of leader, and the rest became members of a small army involved in a vague battle that ended in victory, but with casualties.

Ann digested everything she learned in these weekly dance classes by put-

ting on impromptu recitals for her parents, brothers, and whoever else happened to be at home. Sometimes she would use her friends in the shows as well. The important thing was not so much what one did as that she had an audience. Albert remembered Ann dancing around the living room and the fact that his gentle teasing did not phase her in the least. From the start, Ann knew how to be comfortable in the limelight. By 1934 she had appeared in her first major public performance, at the Chicago World's Fair.

Ann's privileged place in her immediate family was amplified at big family get-togethers. Here she was the youngest girl, the fair-haired special one in a culture that traditionally gave women little voice, but at the same time stipulated that they were the ones with the power of passing on the Jewish heritage.⁴⁰ It was because she was still young that Ann's passion for dance was indulged, but no one in Ann's family really expected her to have a career. The family's goal for her was to get a good education so she could then make a good marriage to a nice Jewish boy.

Ann had other ideas, but at the same time she enjoyed her special status as a girl. "Girls were protected," Albert remembers. "She was spoiled by everybody. But then we were all brought up to make up our own minds about things and Ann certainly did. She's always been a *natural*, natural. She got started in that direction at age five and she just kept going."

By the time Ann arrived at Winnetka's New Trier High School, she was already living and breathing dance, and she rebelled angrily against this non-Washburne school's rules. In particular, she objected to taking the girls' soccer class in physical education—a requirement for graduation. She was one of the best female athletes in the school, so it was not playing soccer she objected to. What upset her was the idea that dance was not considered an equivalent physical activity. This enraged her. At lunchtime she often did not bother to eat, preferring to make up tap dance and soft-shoe routines with one of her black high school coaches. "I had absolutely no discrimination—as long as it was dance I really just loved it all," she said.⁴¹ She finally made such a fuss that the school administration agreed to exempt her from soccer and let her substitute her outside modern dance classes for the PE requirement. She was the only student in the school permitted to do this. Like Isadore, Ann expected to get her own way. "She always objected to structure," according to her brother Albert.

The one place where Ann did employ structure was in the neighborhood classes she began teaching for her friends and their mothers when she was

twelve years old. These classes consisted primarily of stretches and warm-up exercises as a prelude to improvisational situations. Ann wanted to give her students the same freedom she found so appealing in dance.

Ida agreeably took Ann to as many dance classes as she wanted, but it was modern dance that captured Ann's attention. "When I was introduced to modern dance, that's when the real dedication came," she later explained. "I was absolutely enamored with modern dance. It was physically challenging and it gave me a chance to begin to understand that it was ok for me to express my own creative life. That was a great turning point for me."⁴²

Although I'd been exploring all kinds of dance just for the love of it, it wasn't until I was an adolescent that I was exposed for the first time to the primary innovators of modern dance—Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Martha Graham, and Hanya Holm. When I saw them a light went on. Here were dancers responding to political and social themes, using a freedom of movement I had never dreamed possible. It was Humphrey I was able to identify with most closely. I couldn't identify with Martha Graham at all, possibly because our body types were so different. Also she was so intensely dynamic it was overwhelming.⁴³

By the time she was in high school, Ann was making weekly trips to Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago to study with Frances Allis, a modern dance teacher who had studied with the ballet dancer Adolph Bolm and the German expressionist dancer Harald Kreutzberg. The trip was a two-hour train ride from Winnetka, and at least one other student in the class, Pearl Lang, took note of this level of dedication. Lang, who went on to a distinguished career with Martha Graham's dance company and then formed her own dance theater in 1954, remembered the unusual intensity Ann displayed in those classes and how it matched her own: "I do know we danced well. We were so enthusiastic. We worked day and night and we had a lot of energy at that time. The two of us were going to be dancers. There was no doubt." They both also decided early on which modern dancer they wanted to work with: "Ann said Doris Humphrey and I said Martha Graham," Lang recollected. "Ann had a very sparkling energy. She was interested in finding out and experimenting with movement."⁴⁴

One day, inspired by a recent master class Doris Humphrey had taught at Northwestern University, near Chicago, fifteen-year-old Ann stripped her fancy bedroom bare in a gesture that also echoed the liberated spaces of the Washburne schools' classrooms. Ann's room, painted pale blue, had

had ruffled curtains, a canopy bed, and a big dresser with an oval mirror and frilly lampshades. Ann tossed all this out in the hallway, rolled up the rug, and set her mattress on the bare wood floor. She had decided she wanted to live in a dance studio.

Ann's tolerant and devoted mother took it all in stride. A short while later, she surprised Ann by inviting Tatiana Petroviana, who taught interpretive dance at the Alicia Pratt School in Winnetka, to live in the Schuman house. Ida gave Tatiana free room and board for the next year so that Ann could interact with someone equally interested in dance. Ann's two brothers were both away at college, so there was plenty of room in the house.

Tatiana was followed by Josephine Schwartz, a former dancer with Charles Weidman, who had also worked with Doris Humphrey. Josephine had been directing a dance school in Dayton, Ohio, with her sister, Hermine, but they were struggling financially, so Josephine, or "Jo" as Ann called her, came to teach at the Pratt School and lived with the Schumans for a year, playing four-hand piano with Ann in the evenings. Jo related to Ann as a big sister, taking her to see dance classes and all the major dance attractions in Chicago. It was with Jo that Ann first saw Doris Humphrey's dancers perform *Shakers* and the *New Dance* trilogy. "I remember being very impressed with *New Dance*," Ann recalled. "It challenged me. I kept wondering how did she do it? It was such a noble, philosophical statement, it stuck with me."⁴⁵ Many years later, in the year before Ida died, Ann asked her mother why she had taken those dance teachers into the house. "I did it just because you were so interested in dance," Ida replied simply.⁴⁶ Yet this was an incredibly radical thing to do in the mid-1930s. As Selma Jeanne Cohen, writing about Doris Humphrey and modern dance in 1935, noted:

At the beginning of 1935, the modern dance was anything but a household word to middle America. Few had heard of it; even fewer had actually seen it. Ballet was somewhat familiar, for Pavlova had toured in the 1920s and the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo began its American travels in 1933. But Isadora Duncan had performed rarely in her own country, while the Denishawn tours had taken repertoires of exotica, amply adorned with colorful sets, costumes, and picturesque paraphernalia. When audiences did see modern dance, even in its Broadway form, they didn't seem to recognize it.⁴⁷

Petroviana and Schwartz shared more than their interest in dance with Ann; they provided her first up-close model of what it might be like to be

a woman out in the world with a career in dance. Ann's study of dance flourished in this environment, and she began increasing her classes in Humphrey technique at the Pratt School to three times a week. In 1934 she had appeared in her first major public performance, dancing with a small student group at the Chicago World's Fair, where they performed Denishawn-style dance under Pratt's direction. What Ida and Isadore had not counted on was just how influential having dancers living in the house would be for Ann.

Ann, however, was not really aware of how financially tenuous the life of a modern dancer was in this period. The January 1935 concerts of the Humphrey-Weidman company that excited Ann were performed in the vast Chicago auditorium, which, was only half-filled.⁴⁸ Dancers on a two-week tour of the Midwest with Humphrey in February 1936 reportedly received thirty-five dollars a week in wages, a significant improvement after months of unpaid rehearsals and teaching for a salary of two to five dollars a class. One collective dinner—a twenty-cent soup, bone, water, and vegetables—was made to last for three days.⁴⁹ (It was a good thing Isadore did not know this. Robert Raymer remembers Isadore, in his old age, proudly boasting about his successful daughter by saying that Ann was in the studio “making lots of money.” Of course she wasn't, but that was Isadore's only real way of understanding accomplishment.)

Rebellious and emboldened by having these older dancers in the house, the teenaged Ann began testing limits, but in a way that still allowed her parents to control her. For example, she started dating some of the older boys in the high school. Not only were these boys not Jewish (there were only two or three other Jewish families in the Winnetka schools then), but their families were snobbish and anti-Semitic as well. Moreover, Ann didn't like taking direction from any men at this time. Robert Raymer, a neighbor who was a year ahead of Ann, remembered catching a ride to high school with her every morning and shivering the whole way because Ann insisted on keeping her window wide open in the midst of January. She wanted “to maximize the fresh air.”

At the beginning of her senior year, Ann did her first piece of choreography, a solo about nature entitled *Pastoral*. She performed the dance at the Evanston Women's Club and the Goodman Theatre in Chicago under the auspices of the Chicago Dance Council. In a note she wrote to herself about the dance a couple of years later, she remarked how the dance seemed to fall right into the form of the music by Poulenc. “I paralleled

the music exactly. The dance, like the music, was lyrical, gay and light. . . . I did this because the music made me do it. I danced in no particular floor pattern, although I was conscious of where I was traveling. I danced to the audience.”⁵⁰

Toward the middle of her senior year, seventeen-year-old Ann entered the annual high school talent show. This was going to be the first time she would show her peers her own modern dance choreography. Remembering that modern dancers always had composers write music for their dances, Ann asked a young musician to write some original music to accompany her solo, earnestly titled *Saga of Youth*. She wore a rust-colored silk-crepe dress with a cream-colored sharkskin slip. She noted the following about the dance in 1941, when she began to compile a list of her choreography:

The idea in this dance was one of struggle and growth. After the dance was finished I realized it was the story of Adolescence. I treated the material in a dramatic form. It was my form and not the form of the music for I had the music written after the dance was completed. The whole quality of the dance was serious, subjective, wild, terrifically spectacular (although I did not mean it to be) but most sincere. . . . [It] finally ended after a spectacular acrobatic tumbling to the floor, with me prostrated.⁵¹

The school assembled, and no sooner had she begun than the students started snickering and then laughing loudly. “I was going through this dance and hearing these people giggling, and what I was experiencing at that moment from the audience was so in contrast to what my experience was that I was absolutely devastated. I was so embarrassed that I wouldn’t go back to school. I simply couldn’t deal with facing my classmates because they apparently thought this dance I had done, was so weird. It was two weeks before I would go back to school, and during those weeks I kept thinking about what had happened. I decided I would have to make better art, better dance.”⁵² Ida let her stay home. She recovered sufficiently to perform the dance a few months later for the Chicago Council audition, where she was commended for her “splendid technique.”

Ida may have let Ann stay home from school for a couple of weeks, but the real test of who was in charge came when Ann announced that she had received an offer from Doris Humphrey to join her company. Humphrey, impressed by Ann’s musicality and high energy, invited Ann to come East and dance with her in New York starting the week after her graduation from

high school. “To have Doris invite me to join the company was absolutely heaven,” Ann recalled. “This is exactly what I wanted to do. But I had enough family obedience to not dare leave school. We all knew how much it meant to our parents for the three of us to get an education.”⁵³ Ann rightly sensed that for Isadore and Ida this would have been one of her few requests they refused. So Ann prepared to apply to college. She began by searching for the school with the best dance program.