



## 10. LINDA CLAIR

"Linda was born in Sydney in 1958. She had virtually no interest in meditation or spiritual matters until at the age of 37 she was introduced to Peter Jones, an enlightened man who became her first teacher.

This meeting was an intense experience for her. There was a depth to the communication she had not experienced before, and it triggered a search for freedom which was soon the major focus of her life.

At this time she had two teenage children and was running a small business, but she managed to make time for intensive meditation.

In 1997 she had a profound awakening during a ten-day retreat in northern New South Wales with Peter Jones. She later described the experience as 'deeper than bliss'.

There was a marked change in her after the awakening, which was really a very strong glimpse of enlightenment. She knew now what was possible, and she also knew that she would not be satisfied until that state became permanent. She maintained the humble attitude of a student and continued to practise.

She meditated with Peter Jones whenever she could, and also regularly spent time with the enlightened teacher Barry Long. During this time she met the Japanese Zen Master, Hogen Yamahata, who impressed her with his deeply enlightened presence and equally deep humility.

Early in 2003 Peter told Linda that she would reach the depth of enlightenment with or without a teacher. She still had a strong desire for extended periods of meditation practice, and at that time Peter was not offering this.

A quick internet search revealed that Zen Master Hogen Yamahata was about to conduct a retreat in Cairns. Within a very short time her flight was booked. Hogen-san became her teacher; she spent most of the next two years with him.

In 2004 she travelled to Japan and spent six weeks at a Zen monastery with Hogen-san's Master, Harada Tangen Roshi, known as Roshi Sama. Her time with him was intense. She sensed she was close to the culmination of her journey. She returned to Australia in a deeply detached, peaceful state. Roshi Sama gave her the name Dai'an Jishin, which translates as 'deep peace, compassionate heart/mind'.

Her search ended during a ten-day retreat with Hogen-san at Springbrook, in the mountains behind the Gold Coast in Queensland"

Bio from,

[www.simplemeditation.net](http://www.simplemeditation.net)

## INTERVIEW

***Q: Can you please tell me about your teachers? Was Peter Jones your first teacher or was it Barry Long?***

Linda Clair: Peter was my first teacher. My partner was going to see Barry Long and I did go there once, but I wasn't really attracted to him. There was something there but it wasn't a strong connection. When I met Peter, it wasn't the first time, but after a few meetings something about him affected me and he became my teacher. So he was my main teacher. I had a couple of Zen teachers as well later on, but for the first six years it was Peter. I would go and see Barry Long and a couple of other teachers and energetically I was really affected by them, but Peter was my teacher.

***Q: When you went to see Barry Long, what was the set up that he had? Was it meditation or satsang?***

Linda Clair: At that time he would get up and talk and he would take some questions and answers. He had done a fair bit of meditation in the past, but

when I went to see him over those years it was mainly talking and question and answer. He had retreats once or twice a year. He would go to Europe once a year and in Australia he would have a 'Master Session', where there would often be three or four hundred people. He would have a big marquee, and he would talk and then take questions and answers too, so it was mainly a satsang format. I felt his meetings were reasonably expensive at the time, but I didn't begrudge it at all. I didn't have much money at all at the time, but he had to rent out venues and pay people, although some people did work voluntarily.

***Q: So with Peter was it kind of similar to Barry Long?***

Linda Clair: Peter was much more into meditation than Barry Long. That's what really appealed to me because I didn't want to rely on just sitting in front of someone all the time. He was into Burmese Vipassana and it just seemed very logical to me. He had meditation sessions on Tuesday nights and Thursday nights and we would sit for a bit over an hour and we would have discussions and feedback. He had retreats as well, and it was the same, mainly sitting with questions and discussions.

***Q: So with the vipassana meditation , did Peter have to rent out a space?***

Linda Clair: He had it at his own home most of the time, but sometimes he would travel and he would rent out places. Now, when he has retreats, he rents out somewhere, but back then he would have them at his home and people would have to stay somewhere else and then go to his house during the day.

***Q: So with Peter was it by suggested donation with dana or was it like a set fee?***

Linda Clair: When I first started going in 1997, about 15 years ago, it was 10 dollars for the evening. I was happy to pay because I could see he needed to make a living. Most people don't understand teaching, doing this sort of teaching. It's actually a very strong energetic thing to do and it's really tiring. So it's not just that time with the people, it's before and after and the next day. I don't feel it so much now, but I used to feel quite tired the next day after a two or three hour teaching session; it would really affect me. So I never begrudged paying him. I was willing to do anything.

Barry wasn't as accessible. He had a lot of people around him and he never particularly attracted me as a teacher as much as Peter did. I could have one to one contact with him, and I had a lot of contact with him outside of the formal sessions. We became friends, but he was always my teacher, there was always that edge to it as well.

***Q: What about when you went to the Zen monastery in Japan, what was the set up there?***

Linda Clair: Well I stayed there for a bit over six weeks and I was working in the fields so I didn't have to pay anything. If you go and you live there you don't have to pay. You actually get a little bit of money every now and again to help you to buy extra supplies. They relied on donations from the local community to buy their provisions. It's a bit like a church in Japan, so people would subsidize the church. It wasn't luxurious by any means. We didn't even have running hot water, but they survived on donations of money and food from the community. The monastery had fields, and we would work in the fields and use a lot of that food for meals. So that's how

they survived. They were not rich by any means but they survived. I did make a donation after I left because I could afford to do that, but you didn't have to.

***Q: When you began teaching yourself, how did you come to the decision to set up the meditation center the way that you did?***

Linda Clair: Well, when I first started teaching, I was just doing it from a small house that I had in the city in Adelaide. I bought that house with my partner and we were going to build a meditation room on the top part, but then we decided to buy a larger house out of the city.

I started off doing it by donation because I suppose I was pretty idealistic and I thought that people would support someone doing this. The thing is, when you are doing it to this degree, it's really hard to have a full time job as well because it takes a lot out of you. When we first started, I did it by donation, but some people equated donation as free. So some people would come because it was just something to do. There were also people who were really interested in meditation. I remember one guy came in and said the darts night wasn't on at the pub, so that's why he decided to come. (Laughs)

So, I started charging and we ended up buying a bigger place a little bit out of the city in the hills. We took a chance and we had quite a big mortgage - it wasn't the sort of house we would have bought just for ourselves. We thought we would try it for a year and see how it went because it had this huge room that was perfect for meditation. So we began charging. I think it was five dollars to start with. It was five or ten for an evening and I did feel a bit uncomfortable when I first started charging people to come and sit with me, but there were costs - advertising costs, power, and the mortgage.

We bought that house for that reason, so that was like paying rent. Rather than renting something outside, we bought somewhere bigger. Charging a set fee also meant that you only get people who are serious. It alters the energy of the whole group if you are getting people who really want to be there.

Now I don't have any qualms about charging. I can understand why people have to charge and I wouldn't be able to do what I'm doing and have a fulltime job. I was working part time in a bookshop for about five years, but after a while, it just got too much. Now my total income is from meditation retreats and sessions and I have quite a big mortgage. I've only just put a donation button on my website and that's the first time I've done anything like that. I don't know if I can afford to keep the center by myself because it's totally up to me to pay the mortgage, maintenance rates and things. So that's how it is and most people seem to really accept that and are fine about it. I don't know where people get this idea that if you are a spiritual teacher that you should do it for free.

Of course it's different from a normal business, but it does feel much clearer if you say these are the charges and if you don't want to pay then don't come. If anyone's in real financial crisis, I give him or her a discount or don't charge at all.

***Q: Why do you think you felt uncomfortable about it in the beginning?***

Linda Clair: I'm not sure. . . Even though I had done a lot of work and I realized where I was, it did feel strange at first charging people to come and sit with me- I felt a bit of pressure. Maybe it was a residual ego thing in me, maybe I was idealistic, but now it's fine.

So do you feel like the old traditions like dana do not work in the west because people don't understand that system?

Linda Clair: I think a lot of people don't understand it or respect what this whole practice is about, although not everyone of course. In somewhere like Japan, it is part of their whole culture, it's part of their community and if people are into it or not, they usually respect the whole thing. If you are a Buddhist and you start teaching, you are supported by the Buddhist community, but if you set up and start teaching independently in a non-sectarian way, there can be a fair bit of suspicion about it.

I didn't want to become a Buddhist teacher, even though I deeply respect the Buddhist tradition of course. I needed to set up in my own way because it's a mixture of the Buddhist practice and the things that I have learned from my experiences on the way.

Enlightenment is regarded with suspicion by a lot of people in the west. In the east it's revered and respected, but here not so much. There is a lot of fear around, but that's how it is . . .

But, I've got the freedom to teach exactly how I feel to, rather than being restricted by an organization.

What about the oversight that an organization brings with it. Would it be better to have someone to answer to, or is it just simpler to have someone tell you the way to do it?

Linda Clair: I felt that when I was in the monastery in Japan, it felt completely right. It was the right time and it was amazing, although I wasn't attracted to learning most of the rituals and sutras. I could see the value in them, but it didn't feel right to teach in that way in the west. I didn't feel comfortable dressing up in robes - I wanted to present something that was more available to people in the west. There are already many great Buddhist teachers in the west. One of the reasons that some people have come to meditate with me is that it's non - sectarian, and they don't want the rituals, or to have to commit to some sort of religion. The way Peter taught really appealed to me, partly because there weren't all those rituals. So, I feel the basic Buddhist practice is amazing and the way to go, but I don't think the rituals are so relevant in the west.

What about some of the people who are not familiar with the rituals or some of the practices, like taking the precepts. The way that you have it set up you probably don't give precepts.

Linda Clair: No.

Would you talk to them about precepts?

Well the precepts are just basic moral rules. I feel a lot of them are just pretty obvious. I feel this whole practice is extreme enough and disciplined enough without having extra rules. I feel that with the precepts, you just follow them naturally and I don't feel you have to have this rigid thing where you say you must do this and that. I feel it just happens naturally when you become conscious and clear.

What about on the retreats, do you have any kind of guidelines in terms of what is acceptable behavior or things that you can't do?

For example, if someone wants to drink alcohol or get a bottle of wine in the evening or want to have a sexual relationship with somebody on the retreat, is that permitted?

Linda Clair: Most of the retreats that we have here are silent – that is the only 'rule'. It just seems obvious that you don't drink alcohol when you are on a retreat. (Laughter) You don't start a sexual relationship with someone on a retreat.

So most people are aware of this you would say?

Linda Clair: Yes. There are usually about twenty people staying at the center during a retreat - we can't take any more people. The other people come for the day and they go home or they stay somewhere close by in the evenings. It's up to them what they do. If they want to drink and have a hangover the next day and they can't meditate properly, it's up to them. People learn by their experience and I have never had anyone do this, not that I know of. And of course there is no alcohol at a retreat, and you don't have to say that. If people want to drink alcohol the rest of the time it's up to them. It's not a moral thing.

END OF INTERVIEW