



Interview with Linda Hoag and Ed Wertz

November 7, 2003, Santa Monica, California

Interviewer: **Nancy Cantwell**

Nancy: Linda, we are here to talk about your relationship to the Dharma Family and your relationship to Ed, as well as your feelings, how you see the group, and what you want to do or what you want not to do. Linda, talk about your relationship with the group. How long have you been doing it?

Linda: From 1988. I joined the meditation group because the information Ed had given me prior to my joining had been really useful. I was curious to know what it was like to sit with other people.

Nancy: When did the Dharma Family become the Dharma Family?

Ed: Whenever we decided to call it something.

Linda: I remember my start date because I was going to Pacific Oaks at the time and having a very hard time.

Nancy: Linda, were you a client of Ed's?

Linda: Yes, I was trying really hard not to drop out of graduate school a second time.

Ed: There were about 10 people, which seemed to be about the right size. This was in Pasadena, on Prospect. I was doing one at IBMC until Thien-An An died. He died in 1980.

Nancy: You guys have been meditating together for 15 years, once a week without any breaks. That's a pretty consistent Dharma Family connection.

Ed: And then I caught her a couple of times.

Nancy: You caught her? What does that mean?

Ed: Linda, you were the one that was caught.

Linda: It wasn't me.

Ed: Her understanding peeked out and then she got caught, but it wasn't her.

Linda: Whatever you were passing on, you didn't own it, and whenever it got received, I wasn't there.

Nancy: Talk to me about specifics.

Linda: I was at Pacific Oaks, in their Marriage and Family Therapy program.

Ed: You were also doing AIDS counseling.

Linda: Yes, I had been involved in AIDS work. My sister-in-law's brother died of AIDS in 1980 and we didn't know what it was at that time, but I was very curious about it. So, in 1983, I started doing AIDS-related work and sex education at the L.A. Free Clinic. I had continued to do that, and then at some point thought it would probably be a good idea to get a counseling license and go on doing that.

Nancy: Did you write any papers or thesis that included Dharma Philosophy?



Linda: Not intentionally. What I wrote about for my thesis for Pacific Oaks was about a support group I had been running for HIV positive women, because nothing much had been written about that experience. I wanted to write about not only what I had been doing in the group, but what that experience had been like for me. It was a sandwich of my experiences and a sort of manual that could be used by other people who were doing groups at the time.

Ed: From my perspective at the time, it seemed like a relatively heroic effort.

Nancy: Because?

Ed: Because there was so much suffering that she was dealing with. She was very compassionate, very heroic (in a) difficult activity.

Nancy: Were you personally suffering?

Linda: I had to know. I had just come back from North Africa in 1980. My sister-in-law called me up to tell me that her brother, Jimmy, was dying, and she asked me if I could be there with him. I had never had that experience before, of being with someone who was dying. If you could point to a single event that changes the direction of a life, that certainly would be the one for me.

Nancy: Were you two doing counseling at the time?

Linda: No, that Jimmy's death was earlier, but in 1988 I started seeing Ed for therapy.

Ed: I don't think that lasted very long.

Linda: It lasted for 70 sessions, and the only reason I know that is because I was counting the hours for licensure.

Nancy: So therapy (is) part of your training?

Linda: Yes, but it wasn't like I didn't need it! No, about suffering, what was hard was that there was no road map for how to support persons, particularly the women, who were HIV positive, because most of the models for care assumed that the persons would be gay men, IV drug users, or persons who had gotten transfusions.

Nancy: What was the life expectancy for a woman with HIV in the 80's?

Linda: Not very long, because nobody sought treatment until there were serious symptoms and there was little treatment available.

Ed: The way outside would be two, two and a half years.

Linda: I was going to say two years.

Nancy: Well, that's condensed suffering.

Ed: She was dealing with a lot of condensed suffering. Facilitating people, trying to reduce their suffering and help them find their way through this weird path of the unknown death agent. It was really pretty scary. And ways of dying then were not very attractive. Not only did they not have any treatment, they didn't have any methods for facilitating the termination of life.



Nancy: Do you think they have better technology now?

Linda: Well, everything is better now with AIDS treatment.

Nancy: In AIDS treatment, but in general?

Ed: You don't always get access to it.

Linda: AIDS outreach was interesting to me because for a while I worked as a volunteer at Marianne Williamson's Center for Living. They had an outreach program where people could just call you from the hospital and ask you to come and be with them.

Ed: And you would do that.

Linda: Yes, I would do that, and I would go and say, "Hi, I'm Linda from the Center." And do whatever people wanted to do. Sometimes people wanted you to hold their hands, talk to them, pray with them.

Nancy: If you prayed with them, what would you do?

Linda: I would ask them if they had any spiritual beliefs, but otherwise I would make it up.

Nancy: Did you bring any Dharma beliefs with you?

Linda: I think my ability to do it was grounded in dharma teachings at that time. Like the four noble truths. That life had some suffering in it seemed pretty clear.

Nancy: That was very noble. Even if you didn't know that you were involved in dharma, you were practicing it.

Ed: Yes, like I said, I think of it as heroic.

Nancy: The question that I would have to ask is what would ever compel you to do that?

Linda: Jimmy. People had been really good to him. The Mormons had come to his house everyday toward the end of his life. I was very grateful for that. Anything that anyone could do for folks was helpful.

Ed: Yes, but the definition of compassion involves the willingness to help. Feeling bad for people is not compassionate.

Linda: Right. Yes.

Ed: Feeling bad for people is not compassionate, but compassion is the willingness to help. Maybe you can't do anything, but you are willing to help.

Linda: I felt that showing up was fine.

Ed: Showing up is fine. Compassionate based heroism.

Linda: After that, I was so grateful to get my education at Pacific Oaks out of the way. Pacific Oaks is a college in Pasadena that offers a BA in Early Childhood Education and an MA in Marriage and Family Therapy. They also offer a teaching credential. It has Quaker origins.

Ed: Our friend John is a Quaker or has been a Quaker. Occasionally he attends Quaker meetings.



Linda: They started Pacific Oaks in the 40's because they wanted a place where they could educate teachers with Quaker values.

Nancy: Do you think that your relationship is exemplary of psychotherapy on the west coast? Let's talk about lineage. Do you think that there is a lineage there?

Ed: I don't have any...I studied Gestalt therapy, and as I said in my interview for the Dharma Family Journal, I was disappointed in them. Because they had a lot of understanding, but they couldn't find a way to practice the hard aspects of it. So they tended to go for the intellectual and critical conventions and got more what's called humanistic psychology. They were working too hard not to be confused with Humanistic psychologists, so they didn't have a lot of humanism.

Linda: Mr. Perls was a tough guy.

Ed: Perls was a tough nut. And so a lot of people molded themselves after Fritz Perls. Basically they were cruel. Not only were they cruel, they blamed the patients because they were sick.

Nancy: So you two don't feel a particular bond via psychotherapy lineage?

Ed: But I am indebted there, because they had a lot of information and a lot of techniques, but they didn't have any base to hang it on.

Nancy: But what about the two of you?

Linda: Well, certainly over the years I have asked Ed a lot of questions about the practice of therapy. To me, the quintessential piece of information was once I asked Ed, "How do you do such a good job of this? How do you do it?" Ed said, "I project health onto my clients." That's really useful!

Ed: Well that's what somebody told me. That I would more likely project health onto my clients than illness.

Nancy: Well, my first experience with Ed in psychotherapy, I went in and he took care of me. And then I would go because it was fun. And then I decided, "What the hell am I doing here? I'm healthy."

Ed: How did that Happen?

Nancy: How did that happen? Exactly.

Ed: Well, I have a piece of art in my office. It was given to me by Alexis Smith. And what it is, is a tea bag and there is a quotation under it. It is a quotation from the art of making tea. The art of making tea is to make it so it is not noticed at all. She said that was her experience of doing therapy with me.

Linda: In 1993 I got interested in some ideas from Japan about therapy. In the United States this educational process is called Constructive Living, and it is based on the work of Dr. David K. Reynolds. Constructive Living has an action component, which uses ideas from a psychiatrist named Dr. Masatake Morita, who was a contemporary of Freud's. Morita therapy encourages clients to acknowledge their feelings, know their purpose, and do what needs doing. Morita grew up in a milieu, which included Buddhist philosophy, but he didn't make a point of calling himself or his ideas Buddhist. Constructive Living also has a reflection component, based on questions known as Naikan developed by a Shinshu Buddhist layman, Ishin Yoshimoto. The three Naikan reflection themes are: What have I received from others? What have I returned to others? What troubles have I caused others?



Nancy: Is Japan primarily a Buddhist or a Taoist country?

Ed: Well, it has been both at different times. So in terms of numbers they are probably mostly Christians. There is a lot of Nichiren-shoshu and Golden Chrysanthemum. Their temples are...they build golf courses with their temples...yeh.

Nancy: Is there any other particular qualification you feel that makes you want to encharge Linda with the Dharma family?

Ed: First, because I caught her a few times and I know she has some good insight. And she is well grounded in compassion, she has training in psychotherapy group dynamics and probably she is one of the most reticent persons I know. Hooking her in from the back row. So I was very pleased when she took the bait. But that was my intuition and I was pleased with the consequences of my intuition. A nice combination of the things I highly value, like not shoving yourself forward except when that's your job. Not self-assuming? Is that the phrase? Unassuming and nice and experienced, a breadth of unique life experiences. And she is not afraid of undertaking difficult situations with difficult work. Enough confidence that she can see them through.

Nancy: Linda, what do you think about all of this?

Linda: I think it's going to be wonderful to have a group of people to meditate with and to continue the process we've been doing together.

Nancy: Do you have any ideas about what you are going to bring to it?

Linda: I often think about how I can get out of my own way.

Ed: That's a really important skill.

Linda: And I try not to have an already figured out notion of what it is going to be like. Because it keeps surprising me, so I figure that's the way it is going to be.

Nancy: The group surprises you or the meditation surprises you?

Linda: What becomes possible when people practice meditation regularly. It is full of delightful surprises. Certainly that is what I wish for all of us. And it has always outstripped my ideas. The reality of it is always more interesting than anything I have thought about it. And I expect it will continue to be that way. It always seemed such a good thing, for one night or two nights to have a group of people to sit with. And it would be sad for me to think of not having that available.

Ed: Well, when you are running a group like that you cannot know beforehand what is going to happen. For a lot of reasons: A. you don't know who is going to be there, and B. you don't know where they are coming from. So, if you have some predetermined thing that you are going to do, you are going to be wrong. Whatever the significance of that day and that moment, that group and those people are. It may not be something earthshaking is going to happen. I never knew what meditations I would even start with. The only time I knew is when I had put together a retreat agenda and because I had an idea about the sequence of experiences that would support each other. You just can't know ahead of time. So you have to be comfortable with not knowing what you are going to do if what you are doing is worth anything. There is lots of not knowing, but faith in showing up. Not the faith that something is going to happen, but the faith in showing up to do the job.



Linda: Ed, am I right about this? There are a couple of meanings of the word Dharma. One is the teachings, one is just reality.

Nancy: It's the work, the path.

Ed: Do you know why this is the Dharma Family? Because that's my family name?

Nancy: One of the things I think about or is exciting is the continuation of the practice here on the west coast, which has been responsible for bringing a lot of the eastern philosophies to the foreground.

Ed: Another reason I like "Family" is that it's the church qualities of a lot of places that get them into trouble. You can be in the family, half in the family, one foot in, show up once every five sessions and you can still identify with the family if you choose to.

Linda: How much did you and Thien-An An talk about this?

Ed: It wasn't discussed much. He and I and Melinda went to Japan in 1976. Most of the temples were given from father to son. In the biography of Shunryu Suzuki, Crooked Cucumber, Suzuki talked about what it was like growing up in a temple and how difficult it had been coming to the United States.

Linda: He was still pretty young then, wasn't he?

Ed: Yes, and Maezumi was here. He had a similar experience in terms of a family temple. He and his father were both alcoholics and he got in a lot of trouble here with his group, within his own church, so he went on the wagon. He died when he revisited his family's temple, got drunk one night and drowned in the hot tub.

Nancy: So temples are privately owned, there is no church hierarchy?

Ed: In Zen, in about the 5th or 6th century they had a succession of patriarchs. Then they said, "This doesn't work," so they eliminated the patriarchal system, so then some major temples had some sub temples, but it didn't go any further than that. So that people could come together to support each other in some way, but there was no official hierarchy, which I thought was really smart. But what little hierarchy and structure that they had was frequently a problem. We don't have a temple, we don't have a bank account, we don't have anything. So it is good not to have an it.

Ed: You know, one of your jobs is to be really tough, except when people think being tough is being right. Then you've got to be really soft. Once you get really soft you've got to get really tough again.

Linda: How would this toughness manifest itself?

Ed: Did I get a little tough last night at meditation group? You have to bear down as part of the instruction. There is no wiggle room for effort. Except that there is always compassion. You go back and forth between the pressure to practice and the practice.

Linda: Run that by one more time. I understand about the soft when people think that being hard is good.

Ed: You need to keep after them so there is no wiggle room allowed. So there is something about not a scintilla of inattention. But, on the other hand, enlightenment is guaranteed. Which is the right way?

Linda: Skillful means.



Nancy: What is your own meditation practice like?

Linda: For myself, I find the morning is the most conducive to practice.

Ed: Well people need to be asking you about your practice.

Nancy: Is there anything in the Buddhist literature that specifies the sitting practice? How is it to be done?

Ed: Well, my favorite is Hakuin Zenji, whom I always quote: "The position for meditation is sitting, standing and lying. Take your choice." He wrote books like the Embossed Tea Kettle.

Linda: Do you think it is best not to be specific about how much meditation is helpful?

Ed: You can give them suggestions. For example, I always tell people the best time to meditate is 4:00am. It really is. But I don't do it very often. It's really a sweet time. You can always make recommendations to them. How not to be a devious person, while not providing a straight answer.

Nancy: Linda, I know that you have done a lot of reading. When did you start reading on Zen?

Linda: I was a literature major, the first time I went to school. But I think the first time I read about Zen was in association with the Beat Poets, the San Francisco folks. Since my reading was not grounded in any life experience, I promptly forgot about it. I still have a couple of cool little books by Paul Reps.

At this point Ed starts laughing so hard about Paul Reps that there is nothing to do but join him and end the interview.