

JosÈ Hobday, Native American spiritual author, dies

Thomas C. Fox | Apr. 7, 2009



JosÈ Hobday

Franciscan Sr. José Hobday, an influential spiritual lecturer, author and storyteller, died April 5 at age 80 at the Casa de la Luz Hospice in Tucson, Ariz.

Hobday, a Native American, thought that Christians have much to learn from the Native American tradition, including how to make prayer more creation-centered, how to have a greater appreciation of the connection between the living and the dead, how to love and respect silence and cherish solitude, and how to place a greater emphasis on celebration. Native Americans, she once said, have a tradition of creating sacred space within the natural environment and then "giving it back."

She also spoke of our need to cultivate a love for the land in order to stop the destruction of its beauty. She said she saw the Divine present in the people she met, ordinary people doing everyday things: an elderly woman with cancer, a supermarket worker, a truck driver, cowboys, policemen and especially the poor and downtrodden people of world.

She said her own mother showed courage in her life and dedicated her children to Mary.

Franciscan Sr. Florence Deacon, director of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi congregation based in St. Francis, Wis., remembers Hobday as a very charismatic, warm woman, both down-to-earth but also fanciful. She was holistic long before it was in vogue, encouraging us to have a zest for living and to experience the spiritual life with all our senses.

I can still see her purposeful stride, rhythmic and strong, beneath the skirts of her flowing religious habit. She led us on a five-mile walk to a park so we would discover that we, too, had much more strength and endurance than we realized.

Hobday, who was baptized JoAnn, was born in Santa Anna, Texas, to John and Esther Hobday.

She entered the Franciscans in September 1952. When she became a novice in 1953, she received the name Sr.

José. Hobday began her high school teaching ministry as a second-year novice in Wisconsin Rapids, Wis. She completed her bachelor's degree at Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee, and professed vows in 1955.

Hobday earned degrees in theology, English literature, architecture and space engineering, but she referred to herself as a "student of life" and a "missionary at large."

Hobday taught in a Milwaukee-area academy for girls, but eventually moved to Arizona. Soon her writings and lectures were gaining wider notice. She was a regular author of Credence Cassettes, produced by the National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company.

In any given year, she traveled some 75,000 miles giving lectures, retreats and workshops.

She is the author of several books, including *Stories of Awe and Abundance* and *Simple Living: The Path to Joy and Freedom*, and audio collections such as *Morning Has Broken?* and *The Spiritual Power of Storytelling?*

Hobday was a member of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Native American Parish in Tucson, Ariz., where services will be held on Wednesday, April 8, at 2 p.m. A memorial Mass will be held on Wednesday, April 15, at 6:30 p.m., at Our Mother of Sorrows Parish, also in Tucson. Services will be held at St. Francis Chapel at the congregation motherhouse in St. Francis, Wis., Wednesday evening, April 8.

Her body was donated for science to the University of Arizona.

Tom Fox is NCR editor

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