

Tessa Bielecki was born in Norwich, Connecticut on September 16, 1944. From early childhood she loved the diverse peoples and cultures around our planet and studied Russian and French at Trinity College in Washington D.C., preparing for a career in international relations.

Her dream took a more spiritual turn when she met Fr. William McNamara in 1965 and with him co-founded the Spiritual Life Institute. With a brave band of fellow-monks, she helped create a monastic community and four retreat centers over four decades: Nada Hermitage in Sedona, Arizona in the 1960s (lost to land developers in 1981), Nova Nada Hermitage in Kemptville, Nova Scotia, Canada in the 1970s (lost to logging development in 1998), Nada Carmelite Hermitage in Crestone, Colorado in the 1980s (closed and sold in 2020), and Holy Hill Hermitage in Skreen, County Sligo, Ireland in the 1990s.

After serving as Mother Abbess of these centers and traveling between them for almost 40 years, Tessa left monastic life in 2003. In 2005, with friend and colleague, Fr. David Denny, she created The Desert Foundation, a small informal Circle of Friends exploring the wisdom of the desert and the inner desert of loss and grief, offering stories of hope in a welcoming tent of meeting.

With Fr. Dave she was an adjunct professor at Colorado College for almost fifteen years, teaching courses on *Fire and Light: A History of Christian Mysticism* and *Sand and Sky: Desert Spirituality from the Middle East to the American Southwest*.

Tessa is a seasoned retreat leader and the author of numerous articles and several major works: [Teresa of Avila: Mystical Writings](#), [Holy Daring](#), [Ecstasy and Common Sense](#), [Season of Glad Songs: A Christmas Anthology](#), [Desert Voices: The Edge Effect](#), and the Sounds True audio learning course, [Wild at Heart: Radical Teachings of the Christian Mystics](#). She is currently working on a memoir and designing her own web site. You will find recent podcasts at [Messy Jesus Business](#) and [Contemplify](#), her e-course on the Christian mystics [here](#), and a webinar on interspirituality [here](#).

Fulfilling her dream of more peaceful international relations but from a more spiritual perspective, Tessa has years of experience with interspiritual dialogue, most notably with Buddhists throughout the 1980s at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. She has led pilgrimages to Spain, Italy, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, and visited Russia, Mexico, Germany, Denmark and The Netherlands, where she participated in symposiums called *Women for Peace* and *Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy*.

She had the privilege of speaking three times at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland and was part of the Lindisfarne Fellowship during its early years in Crestone, Colorado. She was also a member of the first group who met in Rio de Janeiro to draft the Earth Charter. Under the auspices of the Embrace Foundation, she represented Christianity in a gathering of major world religions at the United Nations Chapel.

Tessa now lives as an “urban hermit” close to her beloved Saguaro Cactus in Tucson, Arizona. She loves not only her eremitical silence and solitude, but the full four seasons of the year, colors and flowers, big earrings, good food and drink, cooking and celebrating with friends, and serving wherever she is needed, especially writing, and facilitating retreats and workshops.