

## In Memory of Mike Dempsey, Bosch XX

1980-2013



*Bosch XX Fellows (from left) Michael Dempsey, Chris Axarlis, and Bill Weber, on New Years Eve, 2003.*

By Elizabeth Book Kratz, Bosch XX and Lee Anthony Brown, Bosch XX

Michael Cameron Dempsey was 23 when he became of fellow of Bosch XX. He had just received his master's degree in urban planning and was one of the two youngest in our class. That made him one of the least experienced professionally in terms of years in the workforce, but his youth didn't hold him back as a fellow during his year in Germany; he was determined and dedicated. Mike had dreams to work and study in major cities and had very clear plans for his future as a planner and builder. His talent as an urban planner and his goal-oriented way of completing tasks were clear from the beginning. One of his greatest skills was that he noticed things others did not.

After completing his Bosch fellowship, Mike took on varied, diverse and complicated international posts requiring deft negotiation and intimate understanding of need. He worked as a planner in his native Detroit and also worked in Iraq and for the Ministry of Development in Abu Dhabi, UAE. At the time of his death, he was on medical leave from Afghanistan, where he was

serving a second tour with USAID, the U.S. Agency for International Development. Mike was 33 years old.

“Mike was a realist but also a dreamer who had a bigger vision of creating a landscape that empowered individuals,” said Anastasia Telesetsky, a Bosch XX fellow now based in Idaho.

“He lived to create structures and systems that improved people's lives in tangible ways,” said Lauren Day, a Bosch XX fellow who works in New York City.

Jeanne Fahey, who was the U.S.-based program officer for the Bosch Fellowship during the Bosch XX interview cycle, remembers Mike much the same way. “As one of the youngest Bosch fellow candidates, Michael impressed all of us on the selection committee with his intelligence, compassion and determination to make a difference in the transatlantic arena. During the selection interviews and social events he stood out among many seasoned professionals, some five to ten years his senior, as an obvious and capable future transatlantic leader,” Fahey said.

He also “vigorously sought out others' insights to help him to see things he might not have seen in order to be a better person himself. He was committed to self-improvement, and improving the lives of those around him,” said Adam Hunter, a Bosch XX fellow based in Washington D.C.



*At the 2003 Love Parade in Berlin, Bosch Fellows (from left) Susan Boedy, Adam Hunter, Marianne Russ Sharp and Michael Dempsey.*

“I don't think I've ever met someone as truly interested in the world around him as Mike was. He was that rare soul who actually listened to people, and beyond that he cared what you had to say,” said Marianne Russ Sharp, a Bosch XX fellow who now lives in northern California.

Mike was also a leader in our class; he had been elected a president of sorts of our Bosch class close to the end of our first seminar in Berlin. As such, Mike connected with others because of his talent as a listener. This is no easy feat; most people just like to talk. But when Mike listened, one had the sense that he was taking in what was said and processing it. His responses were always well-measured and thoughtful.

“When nobody in our group could get along with one another, he stepped up to mediate all the factions to bring some unity to our group,” said Chris Axarlis, a Bosch XX fellow based in Washington D.C.

“Mike expressed his great interest in people by his ability not only to communicate but to listen, and listen in order to learn about people and what they were thinking and meaning. He also had a special way of putting people at ease and connecting with people, whether by making a joke, or offering something personal of himself, which he did freely and often,” said Hunter.



*In Ghent, Bosch XX Fellow Lee Anthony Brown with two Bosch fellows from Middle and Eastern Europe, with Bosch XX Fellow Mike Dempsey in the background.*

“I can distinctly remember Mike's laugh -- wry but joyful,” said Hannah Lobel, a Bosch XX fellow living in Austin, Texas.

“Mike somehow made even the longest seminar days more tolerable with a good laugh, like when he serenaded the bus with a rendition in German of ‘She blinded me with Science’ (*Wissenschaft!*),” remembers Axarlis.

"The main things I remember about Mike were his deep voice, smile and sense of humor. He often had a very serious, studious look or demeanor about him, which made his laugh and occasional goofing off that much more enjoyable,” said Bill Weber, a Bosch XX fellow based in Washington, D.C.

“We had a lot of fun during our Fellowship seminars, but my favorite memory with Mike took place several years later,” said Day. “He was visiting New York, and we met for a bite to eat and walked aimlessly around Manhattan, chatting, just as we had done in Berlin, in Warsaw, in Luebeck, and many cities of Europe. The global financial crisis was drawing near. He said to me, “New York is known for three things: finance, film, and fashion. This is all fleeting stuff. If you live here, you have to try to make something that lasts.”

Susan Boedy, a Bosch XX fellow now based in Boston, said she distinctly remembers meeting him for the first time. “If you would have told me then that Mike would later become a good friend and roommate, I would have been surprised given his very serious and intense demeanor. I soon learned that he was in fact a warm, hilariously funny and incredibly kind person. His intensity made his sharp wit and memorable one-liners stand out even more. We stayed in touch after our time in Germany. In particular, I remember a day riding all over San Francisco during one of our Bosch reunions, reflecting on fond memories of adventures as Bosch fellows.

Russ Sharp, a journalist, also shared memories of her friendship with Mike. “He and I became good friends during our Bosch experience, and he helped me to more deeply understand things, as well as to laugh a little more. He offered up his couch when I needed somewhere in Berlin to stay during a story assignment, and my husband and I spent one of our most memorable evenings talking to Mike for hours in Prague about religion and life,” she said.

Hunter also remembered going with Mike to Love Parade, which was attended by a group of Bosch XX fellows during the summer of 2003. “Mike had a great love of music, techno in particular, which I remember surprised us early on as it didn't seem to comport with his very calm and bookish-at-times demeanor. In fact, upon reflection, it illustrates perfectly the multifaceted personality he wielded so well to enrich the lives of others as well as himself,” he said.

Ebru Uras, a Bosch XX fellow, who, like Mike, hailed from Michigan, shared Mike’s distinction as being the youngest fellows in the group, and had a special bond in that they both were

passionate about international service; Uras joined the State Department after completing the fellowship year. "I kept in touch with Mike after the Bosch year via e-mail and he reached out to me after his tour in Baghdad while he was getting ready for Afghanistan. I had come out of a very challenging tour in Islamabad, Pakistan, and I was moved by his empathy and concern while hearing about my experiences. He seemed genuinely excited to go back in the field and I believe his work made a significant contribution in helping the Afghan people rebuild their country."

Weber also felt a kinship with Mike because they were both from the Midwest. "I am so proud that a fellow Boschie from the middle west made it all the way to the middle east doing public service and international development in his chosen field of urban planning. I think that's exactly the sort of thing Bosch sought to encourage in all of us. I'm not sure if I told him that during our post-Bosch years, but I certainly should have."

Russ Sharp possibly summed him up best: "Mike Dempsey was one of those people you don't forget. You could use any number of words to describe him: kind, intense, hilarious, genuine, crazy-smart, ambitious. Mike made it clear that he planned to make a difference; to leave the world a better place than he found it. I have no doubt that he succeeded."

Almost ten years have passed since our fellowship year ended, and we as fellows of Bosch XX have perhaps taken this time of Mike's loss to do a little soul searching ourselves. We have changed jobs countless times; visited many cities, worked stateside and internationally, in jobs that impact many and jobs that impact few. Many of us have married, and some have become or are soon to become parents for the first time. We have new relationships with colleagues and partners and live each in our own corner of the world, but we still have this shared bond of a year together in Germany, meeting and working with exceptional people like Mike.

"I just spoke to my partner the other day about Mike, before I heard of his passing," said Boedy. "I was saying what a remarkable, adventuresome, very smart and wonderful friend he was and I couldn't wait to catch up with him and introduce them to one another. His passing is such an intense loss for so many but I'm so grateful to be left with such wonderful and fun memories of him. I will miss him so dearly."

*Condolences can be sent to Mike's family care of John Dempsey, 350 S. Main Street, Suite 300, Ann Arbor, MI 48104.*