

## Life Sketch

Dennis Will Robertson was born on August 24th, 1978, as the first son of Bill and Kathy Robertson, and as a 4th generation native of Jackson Hole. He was a happy, inquisitive, exuberant child, who loved the outdoors — a deep passion and connection that stayed with him throughout his life.

His childhood was filled with adventure. As a young boy with the playground paradise of Munger Mountain as his back yard, Dennis was always building forts, having fort wars, exploring with his brothers, Mike and Shawn (aka “Vern”), cousins and neighbors. Going for a hike with Dennis was always an adventure, as he would notice the smallest detail—an animal track, scat, hair caught on a branch, or the perfect place to make a shelter. Summers were often spent at the Sandy Beach on the Snake River or in the mountains on family pack trips to Bailey Lake and other majestic places, riding horses, fishing and spending time immersed in nature.

He loved having his Grandparents nearby and loved being with them. His strong relationships with each of them continued into his adult life and we rejoice now for his reunification with those who passed before him.

Dennis was bold. He could face tasks that others would find difficult, with ease. His Dad, Billy, fondly remembers the time on a horseback ride, Dennis saw a cottontail rabbit and asked if he caught it could he keep it. Billy said sure, knowing there was no way he could catch it. But moments later sure enough Dennis caught the rabbit and it was brought home in the saddle bag. Dennis also grew up on a horse, able to catch the most unwilling mare in the herd. The horses would follow Dennis’s lead — he was in charge and they trusted him. Even throughout his struggles, he retained the ability to connect with horses and master the outdoors.

He started wrestling at the age of five and when he broke his back in middle school, he proceeded to win 3rd in the state competition one year later, after his recovery. Not to mention teaching himself how to ride his bike with a body cast that covered his torso and part of one leg! He still remains a legend for running a 5-minute mile at Jackson Hole High School with a fish hook in his foot. Yes, you heard that correctly - with a fish hook in his foot. We believe this resilience is part of what made Dennis fight so hard to maintain what he loved about life through his struggle with schizophrenia.

Dennis Robertson had heart. While some of you knew Dennis in his younger years, and lost contact, others new him more recently. A few of you had life long relationships with him. But I know that all of you were touched by his kind, loving and generous heart. Dennis had a deep love in his heart — a compassion for others, a desire to connect, an ease about speaking deeply with anyone he met — about his faith and life.

And the hugs. So many of you have mentioned the hugs and it is so true. His warmth radiated through his hugs and to have known Dennis as a friend is to be blessed. His deep faith and compassion for others led him into some amazing ministry work that some of you may not know about. Dennis was the founder of a great ministry called Banner House, a discipleship house which provided a place of healing for those facing difficulties and

struggle through an evangelistic ministry approach. He worked side-by-side with his friend Arnica, who he would later marry, to minister to people in bars, on the streets and throughout the community. In his later years, he was so blessed to have a caring and supportive church family in Driggs who embraced him how he was — they met him where he was and loved him just like that — a true act of Christ's love.

Dennis was a master of artistic expression. It was awe inspiring how he could turn experiences and feelings into an art form, even from an early age. His work wasn't just meticulous and detailed, it presented a different perspective for looking at life — often filled with great beauty and inspiration. Whether it was leather crafting, flint knapping, metal working, making arrowheads, working with beads or amazing drawings, he left a legacy of beautiful art in our world. Even after illness struck, Dennis lost his ability to draw, but continued to create and express his inner workings through art.

Dennis persevered throughout his struggle with schizophrenia. Despite the heart wrenching setbacks to his life which stripped him of many of life's joys, Dennis continued to work to participate in life fully. There were times his illness led him to homelessness, being lost and confused, feelings of isolation and losing the opportunity to maintain important relationships.

A tender memory of his perseverance through illness is about the extra bedroom Dennis prepared for his son Aurora who was born on April 2, 2011. Dennis was having a very difficult time with his schizophrenia and was living in chaos. He had been taken to the hospital in Idaho to recover and we arrived to clean up his condominium, where we encountered piles of clothing, trash, cigarette butts, non-sensible scribbles of paper and dirty dishes scattered about. When we opened the door to the 2nd bedroom, we stood in awe. The room was welcoming, clean and organized. It felt like a child's bedroom. Dennis had hoped that Aurora could come visit him. In the midst of his own struggle and chaos, he went to the thrift store and purchased a collection of colorful children's decorative items and spruced up the room for his son. He desired deeply to have a relationship with Aurora — a desire which was greatly inhibited by his disease.

His family struggled to understand the unexplainable, and Dennis often struggled to understand what was wrong. There were doors constantly closed for care in our mental health systems. At times the systems and bureaucracies seemed insurmountable. The longer it went on the more difficult it was for him to return to a functional state. It became evident that individuals and families need more options for treatment.

In the midst of the loss, however, God granted our family and Dennis with several beautiful moments of extreme clarity. There were several holidays where Dennis was able to participate with the entire family, including last Christmas when he showed up fully prepared with hand picked and purchased packages in tow for the family, including his nieces and nephews, which he loved dearly.

There were moments of stability and joy when Dennis was able to have a place of his own in Driggs. He loved the community and wanted to be a part of it.

He was able to participate fully in his brother Shawn's wedding, including being a part of the wedding party and reading a wedding blessing in front of the attendees. He was in full force on the dance floor that night, swirling and twirling everyone around. Especially his grandmother, Grace, whom he loved so much. He was in the moment, he was living, and we were all blessed.

A few years back the entire family went to his home in Driggs to celebrate his birthday. Dennis was incredibly lucid that day and filled with joy. We were also deeply blessed to have him present with the family on a pack trip to the Wind River Range a few years back. His strength in dealing with even the most difficult horse there was awe inspiring. He was able to converse with everyone at camp and enjoy the great outdoors with family and friends. These are some of the memories that will bring joy to the family in the midst of the current darkness.

Dennis suffered from Schizophrenia for close to 12 years. For some people this defined him, but to those who knew and loved him, he was our son, brother, friend, and evangelist. We will value and hold dear all the many lessons we have learned walking this journey along side him.

In closing we'd like to share a few words from our dear friend, Pastor Paul Hayden, who wrote eloquently about Dennis:

*...may the New Jerusalem and the "Cloud of Witnesses" that fills it prepare itself to welcome Dennis home. And, as he enters your presence, let him hear the words echoing from the throne of the King:*

*"Schizophrenia, you are not allowed here. Your next of kin: depression, bi-polar, rage, greed, lust for power or people, and all the other disorders of body, mind, and spirit aren't allowed here either. To Hell with you all for you are the work of the enemy who wants to rob, steal and destroy the lives of those I love.*

*But Dennis, come here! I heal you. I forgive you. I wipe every tear from your eye. You are my child. I love you. I died for you. You are forever mine. Enter into my rest.*

*In Jesus name. Amen."*

Dennis Robertson passed away November 2, 2016 at the age of 38 years. He was preceded in death by his grandparents, Dell and Leora Robertson. Dennis is survived by his parents, Billy and Kathy Robertson; his son, Aurora Sage; his brothers, Mike (Nicole) Robertson and Shawn (Katie) Robertson; grandparents, Grace and Dean Berg and Lee and Penny Langan; and numerous aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.

A celebration of life was held on November 12, 2016 at Mill Iron Ranch.