

I have heard the story of how my grandparents met almost a million times. They were walking down 8th ave and, as fate had it, happened to bump into each other. They always used to talk about the beautiful American elms that towered over them as they fell in love that fateful day. I always thought “hm, sounds magical,” so, one day, I went to experience it for myself. The street once shaded by towering elms was now bare. Why? Dutch elm disease crept into South Dakota during the late 1960s, spreading silently from Minnehaha County to every corner of the state by 1985, and by the early 2000s only few of these giants remained. In their place, our communities planted resilient ash trees, restoring green arches and cool summer havens, but now we face a similar challenge. Emerald ash borers have emerged as the new invader, threatening to repeat history's bare-branch tragedy.

But this time, there is a difference. Thanks to readiness plans, quarantines, and community action, “Urban Conservation can heal our Communities,” before the branches fall.

Those trees framed my grandparents' love story; and even though they weren't able to save them, we can. It's our generation's turn to protect the trees, and we've already started. First, communities have been quarantining and setting up guidelines for firewood. When camping or traveling people have been buying and burning firewood locally instead of hauling it from home, especially into or out of quarantine counties like Minnehaha, Lincoln, Union, Turner, and Brookings. Homeowners in Sioux Falls and other cities are also choosing to treat healthy ash trees every 2 years with professional injections, which kill larvae and adults

feeding on treated trees. **According to the 2018 Emerald Ash Borer Management Plan for Aberdeen** 43% of all trees in the city are ash trees, which has created concern among city officials and citizens alike. Because of this Aberdeen has devised a plan to remove 5% of all ash trees each year.

My grandparents, Anne and Dennis, did as much as they could to save their trees back in the day, even as simple homeowners. My grandfather always insisted on planting many types of trees in his yard. Not only did he love seeing all of the different leaf colors during the fall but also in case of an infection like this. If he had all elm trees like many of his neighbors his yard would have been wiped out. This principle can still be applied today. Home owners can opt to plant many types of trees in their yard so they too can experience fall wonders without worrying about a wipe out. As we all know grass grows like a weed in the summer. It's like every other day I have to mow my lawn. As I've started mowing more often, my dad has given me a few tricks. The one that has stuck with me the most though is that "YOU NEVER BLOW YOUR GRASS CLIPPING IN THE ROAD!" I was like "geez ok,". But turns out when you use fertilizer on your grass the rain washes the clippings and the chemicals into our water ways, creating algae blooms in our lakes, streams and rivers. To stop this, communities can spread the word about safe mowing and keep our streets clean.

My grandma's biggest accomplishment is her garden. I genuinely think she loves that piece of land more than her own children sometimes. She said she felt the most fulfilled when her morning

walk through the grounds turned into a bountiful spring harvest. It was great, at first. I mean there are only so many things you can make with zucchini. So my grandma started to offer her veggies to her neighbors, but her garden kept producing. It got to a point where if you left your car door unlocked when you got back there would be several ripe zucchinis waiting for you. This system built longlasting bonds within her community. And nowadays Aberdeen is following in my grandma's footsteps. The Aberdeen insider details, "City Forester Aaron Kiesz said 87 apple, pear, cherry and plum trees have been planted,". This free community orchard out at the Kuhnert Arboretum can not only provide fruit for citizens but also surrounding wildlife, supporting biodiversity around the Aberdeen area. Nearby fruit trees support pollinators, boosting cross-pollination and helping gardens thrive stronger together. Studies show these gardens deliver physical exercise and mental health boosts, reducing stress and building community ties.

Those bare streets my grandparents loved now inspire us. From firewood rules to diverse plantings and grandma's gardens, urban conservation heals—not just trees, but people. Let's keep fighting, so our grandchildren walk shaded streets, sharing love stories under resilient canopies. Urban conservation truly heals our communities.