

Five Buckles



Scott Ressler,
Environmental Services Director
Mandan



Sheila and I are adjusting to the empty-nester situation we find ourselves in, since both kids are enrolled at North Dakota State University in Fargo. Many people have asked how it is going. Well, obviously, things are quieter and a little less busy, but it has also given me time to reflect on the past and think about how excited we are to see what the future holds for our kids. It has also made me wonder about my grandparents' generation and whether life really was simpler and slower than it is today.

So, I went back to some of my childhood memories and thought about some of the "simple things" — or at least what I thought seemed simple — in my grandparents' lives.

For instance, they had a root cellar in their yard, as many rural families did back then. Root cellars have been around since ancient times to preserve harvested foods using the natural cooling and insulating power of the earth, often located below ground. According to *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, the ideal temperature inside is between 32 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit to slow down

food ripening and bacterial growth. My grandparents stored most of their garden vegetables in theirs, just as many others did.

Some people also stored wine, beer or homemade alcoholic beverages in root cellars. Although I don't remember if my grandparents stored alcohol in theirs, I do remember my grandpa liked his beer at room temperature and kept it in the bathroom cabinet.

My grandparents' root cellar didn't have electricity and, with no basement in their house, the root cellar also offered a safe emergency shelter if needed during severe weather. I remember the structure was simple in design and maybe made for a simpler life — not an easy life, but simpler in many ways.

Was it dug by hand? I don't know for sure, but I imagine many root cellars across the state were hand-dug in those days. I wonder what the Gen Z generation would think about having to use a root cellar nowadays. And, yes, I remember when my grandparents didn't have indoor plumbing. We simply used the outhouse and didn't think twice about it.

For those who have been in a root cellar, you can probably close your eyes and still smell the exposed dirt of the walls. It's one of those smells you never forget, like branding iron smoke or Warbex. I wonder how many Warbex ladles are still hanging in North Dakota barns.

A while back, NDSA Immediate Past President Randy Schmitt was cooking supper. As he was preparing the food, he opened a bag of frozen peas and a few rolled onto the floor. His wife Stacey walked into the kitchen and asked what happened. Randy replied, "Not to worry, it was only a few escaPEAS!"

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

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HOW THE SERVICE WORKS

- Members contact the NDSA.
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- A site visit and evaluation are conducted.
- NDSA recommendations are prepared and delivered to members.
- The NDSA helps members file appropriate paperwork, seek cost-share assistance and identify qualified resource people, if applicable.

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