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Water is supposed to be safe, clear, and life-giving – but what happens when it isn't? For as long as I can remember, my life has revolved around being in the water. Whether it was camping at a lake or being at the pool, I was there. I wasn't always at the pool to splash and have fun, but I was often there helping my mom. She was the Certified Pool Operator of our city pool, and I loved being her sidekick. Some of my favorite memories come from volunteering my time to help my mom and the park board members clean out all of the leaves and winter debris in the spring. My all-time favorite memory, however, comes from the challenge of balancing the newly filled pool in the spring. The challenges found in our town's water have shaped how I see responsibility, water, and advocacy.

As I mentioned, my mom has been in charge of maintaining our summer pool since I was a young girl. My summers have been spent helping her once I was old enough to understand the basics of water chemistry. I watched her struggle year after year to get the pool just right for the local kids. Helping her wasn't just a job; it was a meaningful part of my childhood that shaped me. One summer stands out vividly – the summer our pool turned purple for the first time.

This summer, we followed our usual routine. We cleaned up after winter, refilled the pool, and added chemicals. Every summer, when we add chlorine to the water for the very first time, the whole pool turns brown. My mom was used to this happening as she knew the water supply wasn't great; it was what happened next that surprised everyone. The pool turned a deep unnatural purple. This delayed the opening date, and some community members grew frustrated, not understanding why it couldn't be fixed. Despite my mom's efforts – calling experts and trying everything she could – nothing worked, and she ultimately decided to drain the pool.

After refilling it, the water turned purple again, though less intense, and eventually cleared after several days of filtering. This situation led many people, including my parents, to question the town's water system and push for further testing. The results revealed high manganese levels in the water. While this might sound harmless, further research showed it could pose serious concerns.

One major issue was visibility. The purple water made it difficult for lifeguards to see clearly, meaning the pool couldn't safely open even when chemically balanced. Another reason that this discovery was scary to the town residents is the many health risks it poses. High manganese levels have been linked to Alzheimer's disease. This is scary to think about, considering our county was ranked third in the state of North Dakota for the highest rate of Alzheimer's. These reasons are some of the biggest ones that drove my parents to push for change to be made.

Watching my parents push for access to a rural water pipeline was incredibly inspiring. I saw firsthand how difficult it is to manage a pool with a poor water quality, and learning about the health risks made it clear that change was necessary. They didn't just talk about the problem; they asked questions and pushed for answers even when progress felt slow. Watching their persistence showed me that real change often takes time and effort. Because of their efforts, our town is now expected to gain access to rural water starting in 2027. This whole experience regarding the town water has encouraged me to stand up for the issues I care about and take action when something needs to be fixed.

The purple pool water was more than just a strange moment. It had a lasting impact on my life. It taught me how to recognize problems that need fixing and how to take steps toward solving them. It also taught me that some issues go beyond what we can see on the surface. This pool predicament wasn't just a turning point for my community and me; what began as a frustrating situation turned into a sliver of hope for better water and healthier people.