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Tucsonan recalls childhood days at 'Rivers' camp

Sometime in 1943, Tom Foust came to the camp he still calls "Rivers."

"We lived in barracks at the edge of the camp. There was a separate area for staff," says Foust, whose dad, Tim Foust, was a camp purchasing agent. The elder Foust died in 1993.

Tom Foust, a former editor at the Star, was only 8 at the time and wrestling with his own personal enemy: a mild case of polio, which he had contracted a few months earlier.

After undergoing treatment in Phoenix, he, his mother and younger brother joined his dad, already working at Rivers.

"It was just like a town with two separate camps," says Foust. "The camps were close enough that I could ride my bicycle between them."

He remembers going to school with Japanese kids — and being teased when he wore a new red jacket his grandmother had given him for Christmas. "The little Japanese boys told

me only girls wear red. I took that jacket home and stuffed it in the dresser drawer."

Such gentle banter did not extend to the nearby town of Casa Grande. "All kinds of signs went up in the stores: 'No Japs Allowed,'" says Foust.

"They were not too happy to even serve the staff that worked out there," says Foust, remembering how store clerks would sometimes ignore his dad.

In a 1988 interview with the Star, Tim Foust said he

thought that it was wrong to intern the Japanese-Americans and that they were no threat to national security.

But he also said people inside the camps were safe and free from abuse.

"They raised cattle and did a lot of farming," says Tom Foust, who learned to eat rice the Japanese way.

"My mother and dad hired a Japanese lady as a housekeeper and baby sitter. Mother served us kids rice with milk

and sugar on it. This Japanese lady said that was no way to cook rice. We had to eat plain old rice."

His family was among the last to leave the camp in early 1946.

Among his memories: a memorial at the top of a hill. "They put the names of the guys who went into service on that memorial frame."

Years later, he revisited the site. The frame, he says, was still there. But the names were long gone.

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