Japanese-American man recalls journey from WWII internment camp to home

ENCINITAS — In the late 1930s, Tak Sugimoto watched construction workers build the new San Dieguito High School. A kid at the time, be dreamed of graduat-ing from the school.

The aspiration grinded to a halt in February 1942. Following the Pearl Harbor attack, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an order all Japanese Americans living

By April, then 14-year-old Sugimoto and his family boarded a train in Oceanside with their few remaining pos-sessions. Soon after, the train's doors locked, the windows were shut and armed guards posted at each end.

"It was a feeling of rehension," Sugimoto "We had no idea where

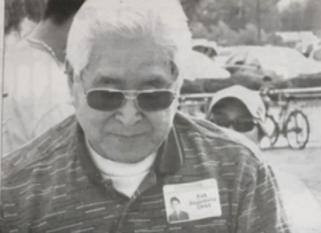
we were going to." Hours later, they arrived From Later, they arrived as Sugmon to the horbed-wire fencing, just word in the south of Parker, Ariz. The south of Parker, Ariz. The south of Parker, Ariz. The southing hot dimate was a far cry from the cool ocean unpuid whereoes in Enciratas.

"The area was the most desolate you can imagine," Sugimoto said.

Sugimoto said.

Sugimoto grew up on a 60-acre farm where the Magdalena Ecke YMCA stands today. His family, arriving in Excinitas shortly after the Eckes, planted and sold encything from squash to cell-ty. Crops and trees — not ceres — ran through most of climitat, Signinoto unid. In the seconds of the seconds of the seconds of the the roads in the area with the reads on that the seds on that the sakes they attached roller jate wheels to. Sugimoto is with a laugh it's peool of with a laugh it's peool of with a laugh it's peool. Sugimoto grew up on a

wheels to Sugimoto with a laugh it's proof Encinitar' skateboard re goes back a ways. We didn't have sophisti-toys," Sugimoto said



Tak Sugmoto looks down at commemorative bricks at San Diegullo inscribed with notable alumni. Listed among them, his family was forced to leave its Encinities farm-and taken to an interment camp during World War E. Thos

unpaid while they were held, his family lost the land.

Even with the hardship, Sugimoto described his fami-

ly as stoic throughout. "Culturally, the Japanese

sand.

He got a taste of the community's altrustric nature when Paul Ecke, a German munigrant himself, offered to store his family's 1940 store his family is forgotten I was a part of the community store his family is forgotten I was a part of the community store his family is forgotten I was a part of the community store his family is forgotten I really knew the community had nothing against me or my family is forgotten I really knew the community had nothing against me or my family is forgotten I really knew the community had nothing against me or my family support of the community had noth

21 years old ing bock."

ately, Sugimoto's But ence in the camp, ther was just shy of surrounded by poor living birthday when the conditions, Sugimoto and his

at if they would return to the other extracurricular activicommunity. Compounding the hopelessness, Sugimoto's father, who the camp wouldn't admit due to disease, died

much larger than mine — they had all this freedom I didn't during that period," Sugimoto said. a "Culturally, the Japanese are very authority conscious,"

A sugimoto said. "When the product say to sugimoto said. "When the proventment or police say to you've got to do something, you don't content it."

Before and after the camp, Sugimito experienced the armophobia that gripped the among should be action when a passing the sught the using of hand Dieguito. He got that chance when a business teacher at the among steacher at some called San Dieguito Academy, sponsored his return home at the age of 16.

But before Sugimoto clung to San Dieguito High, now called San Dieguito Academy, sponsored his return home at the age of 16.

But before Sugimoto clung to San Dieguito, he got that chance when a business teacher at the aprofile of the growth of the same and the product of th were in captivity. Yet Sugimor

"He stuck his neck way out by doing that," Sugimoto said. "With that one truck, we ed the small sum Suzimoto took in while working in the

Also, the terms of his consorship prevented him om attending dances and

continue to live in Encinitas.
"I got into the profession because I realized I'm a peo-ple person," Sugimoto said. "I liked talking to families when they came into the store and staying in touch with them through the years."

In 1946, Sugimoto's life

tager ordered to serve his country doesn't escape him.
Yet he said the community's support is one reason he doesn't hold bitterness.
"There are more good people in this world than had I suspect," he said.
As part of a property of the country of t

As part of a recent cere-mony, the San Dieguito Academy Foundation unveiled bricks at the base of the school's bell tower to commemorate notable graduate Sugimoto's name is inscribed on one of the pavers. It notes he was the first Japanese-American to graduate after World War II.

His yearbook quote reads, "There's nothing half so pleasant as coming home again."

The standing ovation he received during his gradua-tion ceremony in 1945 sticks out as one of his best memories.

"That was one of the best In 1946, Sugamoto's life "That was one of the best was upturned again when he feelings I ever had—to know was drafted into the U.S. I was accepted," Sugamoto Army and sent to Japan. The said. "And I fulfilled a irony of being detained and childhood dream."

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And his education and

"Their maturation was

social development lagged behind that of his peers.

cist, owning and operating La Costa Pharmacy for more than 30 years with his wife Roth. They sold the store about eight years ago and

Regardless, became a successful pharma-

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