



Orange County

MAY 2014

Westways

THE MAGAZINE FOR AUTO CLUB MEMBERS

L.A.'s Union Station

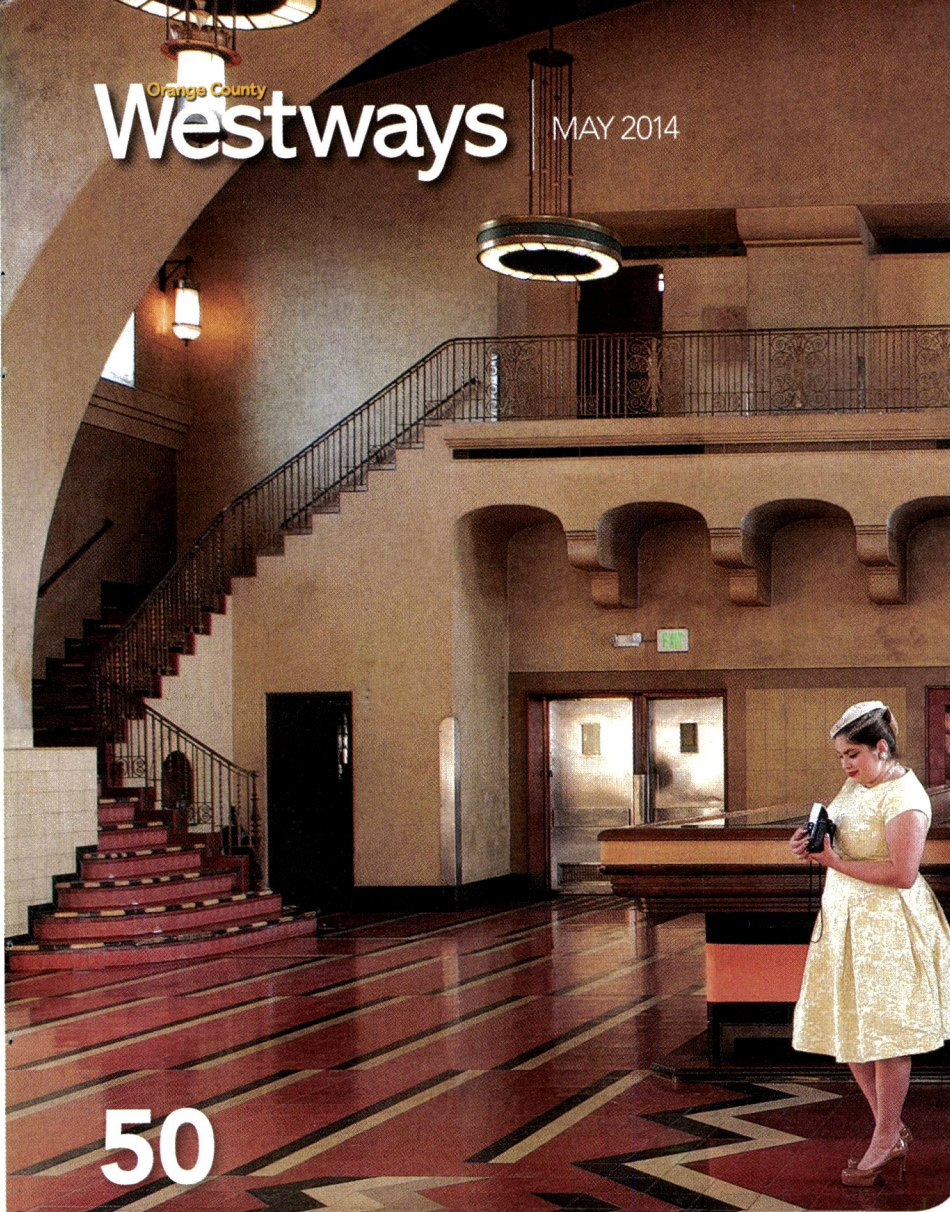
An architectural classic celebrates **75** years



Riverboating on the **American Queen**

Auto Club Annual Review

A Conversation With: **Anthony Bourdain**



50

FEATURES

46 Twain Travelers
Our writer tells the truth, mainly, about a father-son trip aboard one of America's last great riverboats
BY ALAN RIDER

50 COVER STORY Forming a More Perfect Union
A look back at the making of L.A.'s great railway station, which turns 75 this year
BY DAN ALLEN

ON THE COVER

Union Station is the grand backdrop for real-life couple Jamie and Christian Schmelebeck's engagement portrait session. For more views of the L.A. landmark, turn to page 50. PHOTOGRAPH BY JUDY AND GAVIN PHOTOGRAPHY

WEB EXTRAS

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Union Station Memories
Readers reminisce

App Reviews
Language apps for travelers

First-Time Guide
Mountain biking



A Brooklyn Tale
The borough regains its mojo

Train Trio
Iconic rail trips in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico

DEPARTMENTS

- 6 MailBox**
- 9 ForMembers**
AAA Travel Agent Tips: Europe river cruising; a Huell Howser-inspired map; members-only night at Magic Mountain; and AAA discounts
- 15 AnnualReview**
- 22 SmartCoverage**
Know what's covered—and what isn't—regarding home water damage
- 24 Out&About**
Places to go and things to see, near and far
- 38 TravelSmart**
Hotels that put fine art in the forefront
- 41 DayTrip**
Topanga: nature trails, vintage finds, and woody outdoor dining at Inn of the Seventh Ray
- 42 QuickEscape**
Picturesque Avila Beach embraces the blues with its annual music fest
- 58 AConversationWith. . .**
Anthony Bourdain, adventurous chef and world traveler
- 61 CarReviews**
O! Standbys Reprised: Honda Civic EX Sedan, Mazda3 s Grand Touring 5-door, Toyota Corolla LE Premium
- 66 DriveSmart**
New oil-change intervals let car owners go green and save
- 68 BonAppétit**
Southland restaurants reviewed
- 72 CurrentEvents**
Five Southern California events worth driving to, and more
- 80 OffRamp**
A quail's tale of California's state bird

FORMING A MORE PERFECT UNION

As L.A.'s iconic train station turns 75, a look back at the forces that helped shape its many facets

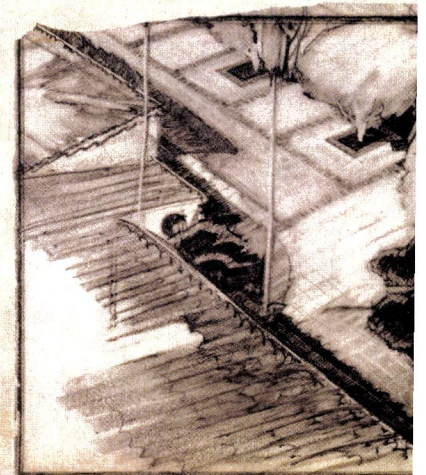
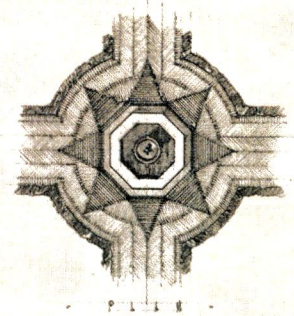
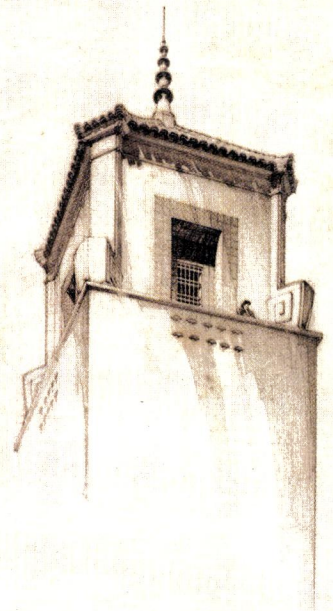
BY DAN ALLEN ■ PHOTOGRAPHS BY GLORIA MESA

Even in a year of splashy debuts, this one stood out. Just months before *Gone With the Wind* set Atlanta ablaze and *The Wizard of Oz* tornadoed into Grauman's Chinese Theater, downtown Los Angeles had a star-studded blockbuster premiere all its own. A three-day celebration drew half a million fans and even featured an elaborate play, *Romance of the Rails*, performed on a massive stage erected atop train tracks.

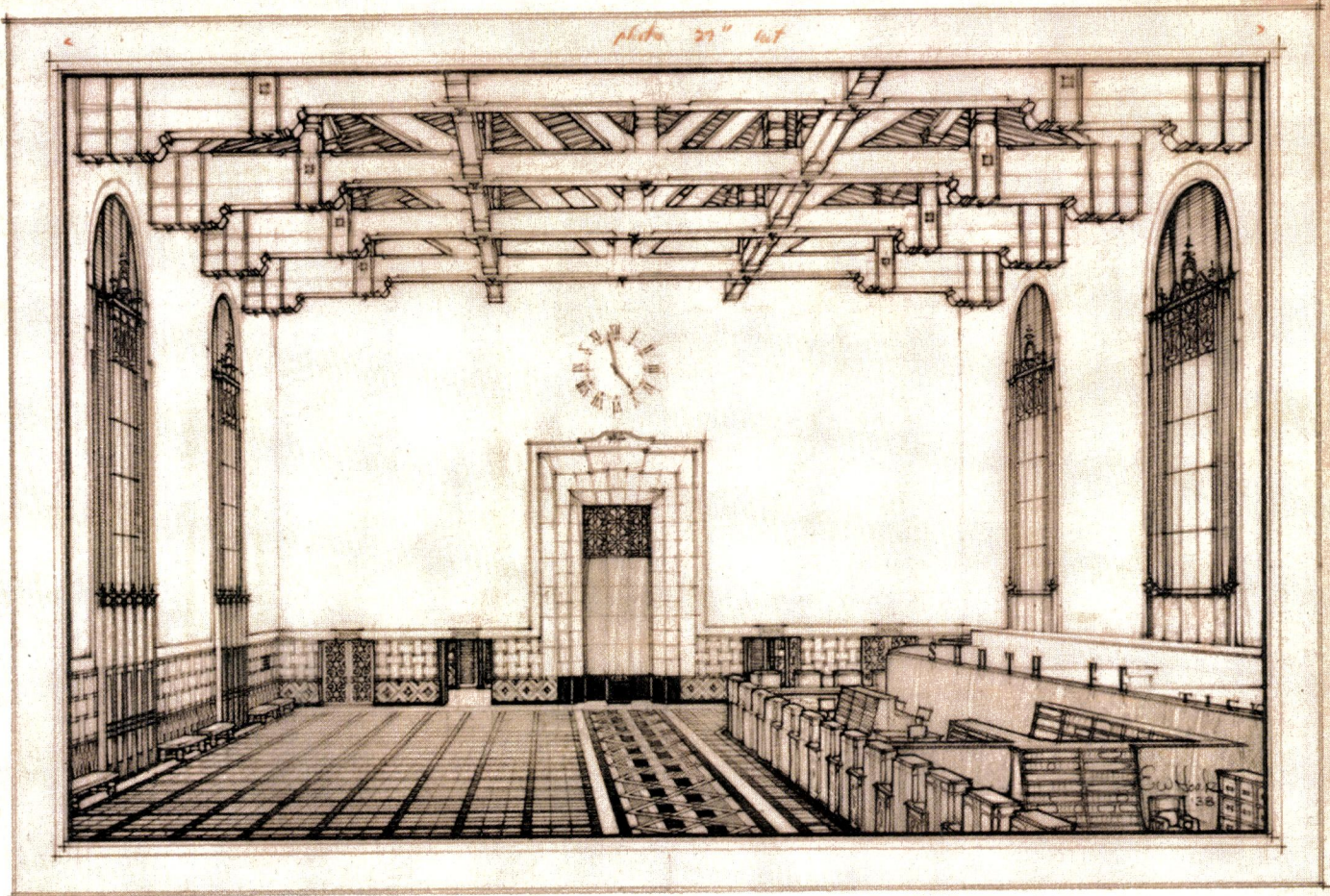
Such was the momentous launch party for L.A.'s Union Station in May 1939. Decades in the making, the bold \$11 million edifice finally gave Los Angeles the grand train station it so deserved.

The idea for Union Station was born in the early 20th century as a solution to the traffic snarls and dangers blamed on competing rail companies' maze of tracks and terminals. L.A. civic leaders demanded the creation of a combined, or "union," train station. For the city's three main railways—Southern Pacific; Union Pacific; and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe—coming together was a hard pill to swallow. They fought the project for years, proposing instead a web of new over-street tracks to link their existing smaller terminals. The matter finally was put before the public, which in 1926 voted overwhelmingly in favor of the unified-terminal concept. Far more narrowly, voters also chose the station's location—Los Angeles Plaza, at the city's historic heart. With everything settled, the task of creating the building itself could begin at last.

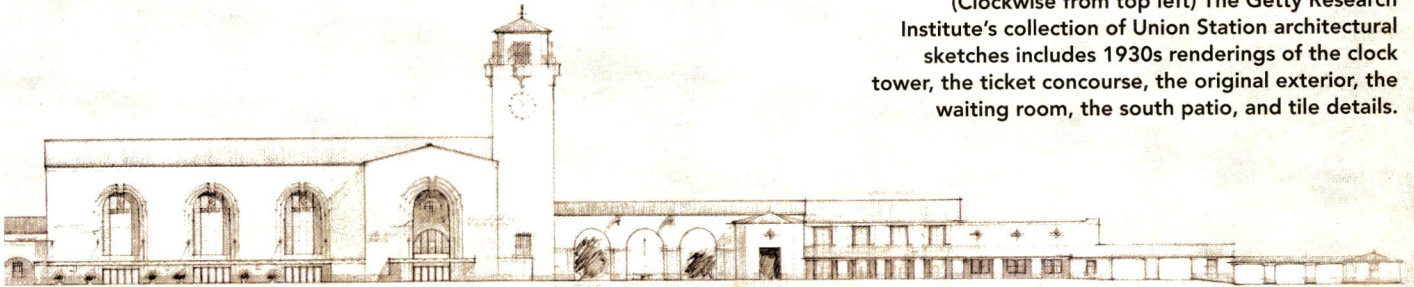
To help celebrate Union Station's 75th anniversary this summer, the Los Angeles Public Library's Central Library will host "No Further West: The Story of Los Angeles Union Station." This Getty Research Institute exhibition explores the complex architectural design, civic planning, and cultural politics that eventually brought the terminal to life. "Union Station is a monument to many things, from the golden age of rail to a sense of urbanism rooted in centralized functions and grand architectural gestures," says Auto Club historian Matthew Roth. *Westways* takes a behind-the-scenes look at some of the key elements of this landmark station.



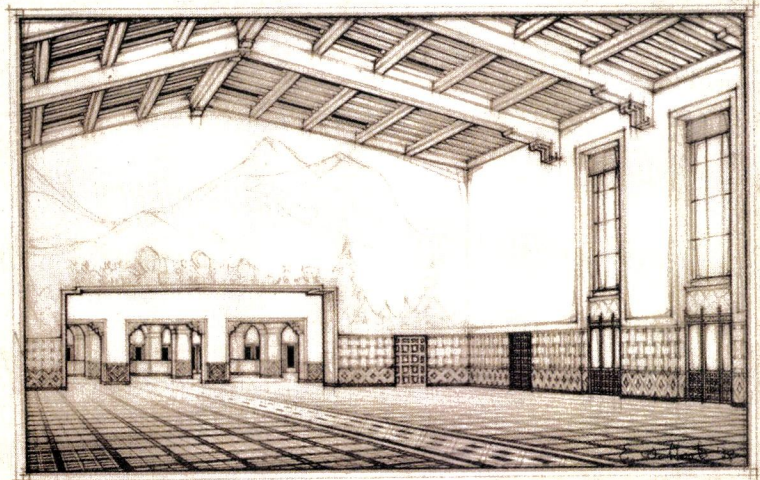
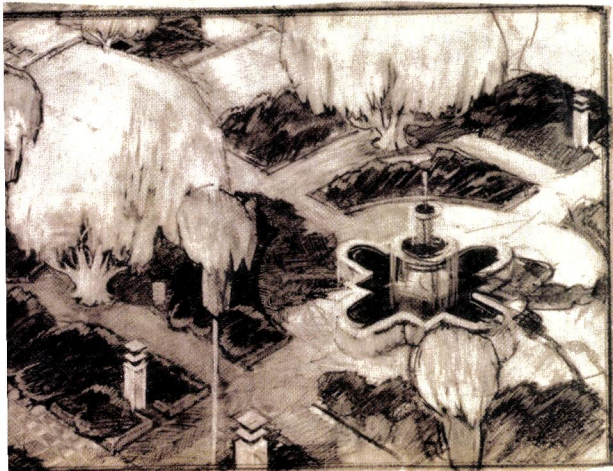
ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS FROM THE GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, LOS ANGELES, AND COURTESY THE J. PAUL GETTY TRUST, INCLUDING CLOCK TOWER, TICKET CONCOURSE, WAITING ROOM, AND SOUTH PAVILION BY EDWARD WARREN HOAK (AMERICAN, 1901–1978).



(Clockwise from top left) The Getty Research Institute's collection of Union Station architectural sketches includes 1930s renderings of the clock tower, the ticket concourse, the original exterior, the waiting room, the south patio, and tile details.



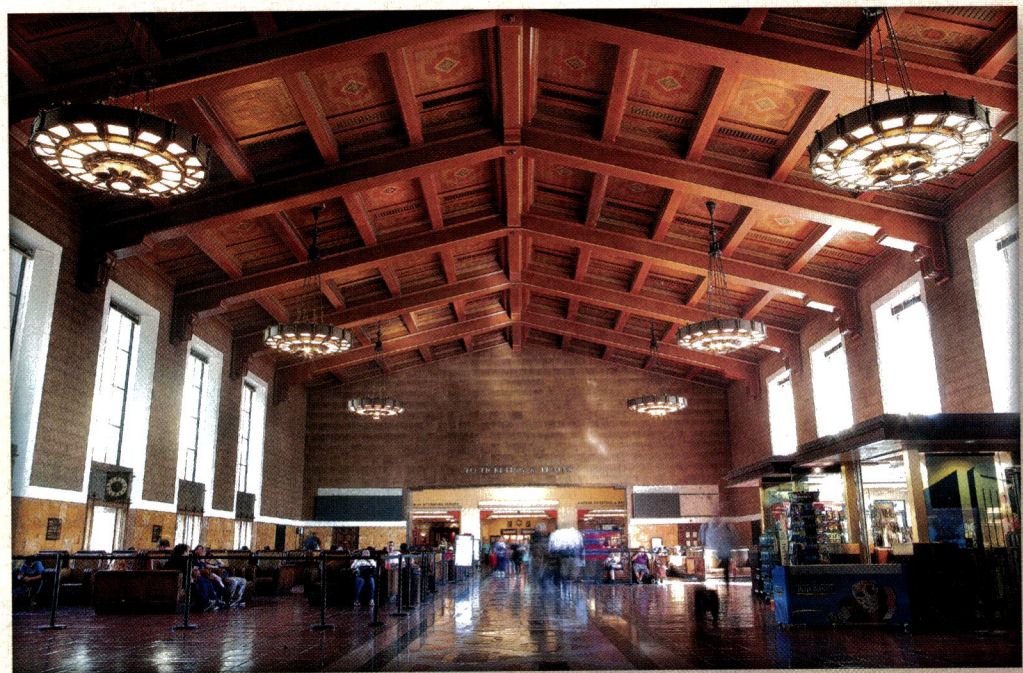
ALBINOPE 11. ELEVATION





THE WAITING ROOM

This majestic space features a towering ceiling that appears to be crafted of heavy timber. "Of course, it isn't really—it's a steel system that's been furred out to look like wood," Musicant says. "Everything here was built to the highest seismic standards of the day." That's a comforting thought for anyone settling into the room's original leather chairs, above which are poised massive 3,000-pound circular chandeliers.





RAIL EVENTS

MAY 2–AUGUST 10

"No Further West: The Story of Los Angeles Union Station"

In 1990, an executive with the Catellus Development Corporation discovered a large, long-forgotten Union Station archive from the 1930s in the building's basement. The findings consisted of some 6,500 architectural drawings, sketches, blueprints, and negatives and were subsequently donated to the Getty Research Institute. This exhibit, curated in part by architecture critic Greg Goldin, presents the highlights of those materials to the public for the first time, along with rail travel ephemera from the Huntington Library, Los Angeles memorabilia from the Auto Club Archives, and photos and rare books from the L.A. Public Library's own collections. Los Angeles Central Library's Getty Gallery. (213) 228-7000; getty.edu/research.

MAY 3

Union Station 75th Anniversary—National Train Day

This annual family-friendly event, sponsored by Amtrak and held at Union Station, celebrates the railway station's 75th anniversary with guest speakers, live entertainment, demonstrations, historic railcar tours, model trains, educational exhibits, and displays highlighting the history and future of Union Station. nationaltrainday.com.

THIRD SATURDAY OF EVERY MONTH

Los Angeles Conservancy's Union Station Walking Tour

Each tour runs 2½ hours and allows access (subject to availability) to parts of the terminal that usually are off-limits to the general public, including the Harvey House. "Most people who take the tour have been to the station before, but they love it so much they want to know more about its history," says Linda Dishman, executive director of the Conservancy. "Tour-goers run the gamut of ages, so it is not unusual for a group to include folks who rode the train regularly in the 1940s and '50s, as well as people who now commute to work by Metro." \$10; reservations suggested. (213) 623-2489; laconservancy.org.

THE TICKET CONCOURSE

With its soaring 62-foot ceiling and massive arched windows, the station's original ticket concourse is breathtaking—fitting, since this was where departing passengers would first experience its interior. A 110-foot ticket counter running along the concourse's eastern wall accommodated all three rail lines, in a particular fashion: "The station was proportionally owned and operated by the three railroads, meaning the Southern Pacific owned 44 percent and paid for 44 percent, and so on," Musicant says. "So that's how real estate at the ticket counter was doled out, too."

Like all other interior areas, the ticket concourse was meticulously designed. "There was no catalog," she notes. "Everything was completely custom and thought out to the most minute detail, whether it was for aesthetic or electrical considerations, or durability. The designers had conversations about every little detail."

Although it's now usually closed to the public, the original ticket concourse is viewable, albeit across a wooden divider, from the station's main vestibule. For a closer look, the Los Angeles Conservancy offers monthly tours (see sidebar at right) that may include access to the ticket area.

Travel writer Dan Allen uses many modes of transportation, but he'd rather always take trains.



TREASURED MEMORIES

Train stations have long been platforms upon which the world would welcome friends and loved ones and oftentimes bid a sad farewell. Los Angeles' Union Station itself has borne witness to countless such heartfelt scenes. Here, *Westways* readers share their memories of this special place.

For more unforgettable letters through the decades, visit AAA.com/unionstation.



HAND IN HAND

I grew up in El Paso, Texas, where my dad worked for the railroad. My parents, sister, and I would ride the train to Los Angeles to visit my aunt's family. I would always look forward to arriving at Union Station because it was so much bigger than the one in El Paso. On my very first visit to Los Angeles, my cousin, Rose, was real happy to see her cousin from El Paso, and she greeted me with a big smile. At the time, World War II was winding down and the station was full of soldiers, sailors, and Marines, all waiting to take trains to their destinations. Upon arriving at the station, my dad took a picture of us, walking hand in hand, she helping me with a suitcase. I'll never forget those memories. By the way, I'll also be 75 years old later this year.

MARCOS M. ROMERO, BAKERSFIELD

STARSTRUCK

I am 93 years old, but in 1942, I was 21. On August 13 of that year, I boarded the train at Los Angeles' Union Station. I was headed for New Orleans to be married to Dick R. Wilson, 2nd Lt. Army Air Corps. I joined a train full of young U.S. Navy sailors headed for service to their country. I believe I was the only girl on the train. Also aboard was a charming U.S. Army colonel and Clark Gable, who had enlisted the day before. The Army colonel introduced the fabulous movie star to me, giving me another memory that I've enjoyed for over 70 years.

**FERNE KERR WILSON,
VISALIA**

GRAND OPENING

I was born in and grew up in Los Angeles, and I remember going with my parents to a big panoramic show, which was produced for the opening or preopening of Union Station. There was a Western town and stagecoaches, and then two trains arrived—facing each other—and a spike was driven to complete the rail line. We sat in the bleachers to watch the show. Thank you so much for the memories.

JACK GRINNAGE, WEST HOLLYWOOD

FAMILY REUNION

*In March 1939, my parents fled Nazi Germany, escaping to Shanghai, China, where they spent nine years in a refugee and internment zone. I left for Palestine on August 30, 1939, shortly before Germany's invasion of Poland. In 1941, I volunteered with the British Army, serving in the North African desert and Italy campaigns. Unable to make contact with my parents, I did not know if they were alive, and vice versa. We reconnected in 1946 and applied for visas to the U.S. In 1948, my parents immigrated to the U.S., and I followed later. Arriving in New York by ship, I boarded the train to Los Angeles. Three days later, I arrived at Union Station, where my parents, tears streaming down their faces, awaited me. Now that I am 90 years old, Union Station remains in my heart, the place where our lives were once again complete. **W***

JOHN H. ADLER, LOS ANGELES

