

The *New York Times* stories used in Reading Lab #13 are below, and they are also linked.

“Pearls of Wisdom”

Every birthday, my Filipino grandmother gave me pearls: necklaces, earrings, bracelets, rings. Always tissue-wrapped and labeled with her fine handwriting. Pearls are what she believed a woman should be: polished, elegant. When I was in my punk-rock teens, her gifts drove me crazy – then guilty. “Please, grandma, save your money!” She didn’t listen. She lived to 95. When she lost the ability to walk, shop or remember, I’d sneak previous pearls into her jewelry box. By my early 30s, I’d learned that it’s the giving that matters. She’d find them, delighted to have the perfect present for me, again. — *Gendy Alimurung*

“Talks with suga bear”

Suga Bear (legally, Larry Washington) was the security guard at my high school campus. From his booth, Suga Bear watched me catch footballs until it was dark. As I drove off, he’d say a word or two (“keep working”). After my first touchdown, he gave me a hug, and I felt I had done something important. After one particularly bad game, Suga Bear gave me a pep talk. Twelve years later, I have recurring dreams of a ball flying across the sky. When I wake, I can still feel his eyes kindly watching me, encouraging me. Thank you, Mr. Washington. — *Daanish Jamal*

“Opposites and all that”

My best friend Maya is messy and stomps around our off-campus house. I’m neurotically clean and light on my feet. She works in private equity, investing in something called “digital infrastructure.” I’m getting a master’s degree in something called “social anthropology.” She’s a Manhattanite — “fifth generation,” she brags as we drive to her family’s upstate house. I’m from Orlando, Fla. — first (and likely last) generation. She’s tough; I’m a people-pleaser. When we fight, she wins. I hate the cliché, but I’m sure she would love it: Opposites attract. — *Hamzah Jhaveri*

“Divided by an ocean”

During a call with British Airways, I watched our Goldendoodle step toward me and then collapse. “Oh God! I think our dog’s having a seizure,” I said, dropping the phone. Lacy trembled in my arms. “It’s OK, sweetheart,” I said over and over, like a mantra for both of us. Minutes passed. She continued to shake. We needed help. I reached for my phone, and that’s when I heard a polite British voice ask, “Everything all right?” Turns out, I wasn’t alone. The airline representative had quietly waited. Divided by an ocean, yet somehow still connected by our shared humanity. — *Mindi Ellis*

“When is it enough”

After a six-year struggle with ovarian cancer, it was clear Judy’s time was short. Heartsick, we left our home and moved into hospice together. As we sat looking out at the deceptively sunny day that would turn out to be Judy’s last, she sighed and said, “If I have to leave you, at least you’re young enough to start over and have another life.” Teary-eyed, I responded, “Thanks, honey, but I can’t imagine. You’re the perfect partner for me.” Ever the pragmatist, Judy touched my cheek and smiled. “It doesn’t always have to be perfect. Good could be enough.” — *Carrie Thorn*

“Fleeing the Flames”

“Got your passports? Underwear? Flashlight radios?” My family of five split into two cars, figuring a car saved was a car gained. Mid-dinner, “Evacuation Order” pinged on our phones. The inferno scorched the foothills, threatening our San Jose, Calif., home. We sped to a beachside inn, the waves our protector. Amid the hazy Pacific air, Dad — bereft of utensils — whomped a watermelon open. My sister, Arianna, humored spotty video classes. My mom and my brother, Aidan, dug a sand tunnel. Whether our house would survive was anyone’s guess, but in this salty seaside suite, we found hearth and home. — *Melody Cao*

“My Mini Me”

“Are you going to have a baby?” I asked my mother over a game of mancala. I was 8. Though she had told me to be careful asking women about pregnancy, I was curious. She cocked her head then answered yes. “I would like a little brother,” I replied. Twelve years later, the moment is still on my mind. “Hey, Big Head,” my little sister says whenever I return from college. I can’t help but grin in response. My parents gave me an annoyingly charming Mini-Me. Not a brother but someone with a similarly big head. — *Eghosa Eguakun*

“More Chess? ‘Yes.’”

We met at a chess tournament when we were 17. He asked me if I wanted to play more chess. I said “yes.” The next morning, we met in a nearby Montreal park and played a few games. We continued playing through lunch, on the bus ride to an amusement park, on a picnic table, under the picnic table, during dinner at KFC. We even played “blind chess,” visualizing the game while in line for ice cream. When the day ended, he leaned over and kissed me. Quickly, we realized that we loved chess much more than this kissing stuff. — *Olya Kaye*

“A Rap for Rebecca”

Was surrounded by my pals, but my mind was on a gal. Her car pulled up and that was it — should've put cuffs around my wrists. My heart beat red then flashed blue (felt sad that the party was through). Only time she had my spirits low wasn't her fault; she simply had to go. I wanted her to come back, kept messaging like a maniac. Four years later, she's still here, slapping at my hand that nervously tugs at my ear. Grabbing my waist during concerts as if she protects me from monsters. — *Joshua Corona, California State University of Northridge*