

**Letter from “Dear Mama” to Dr. John Romulus Brinkley**

**(n.d.)**

KHS Dear-Mama-to-BrinkleyJ-Tuesday

Transcribed by Jo Norwood and Ky Walker

For ENGL-618: Research Methods in English

Instructor: Dr. Brian Gastle

November 30, 2025

## **Introduction to the Series**

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography was prepared by students in ENGL 618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English degree program at Western Carolina University (WCU). The learning outcomes for this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate effective and ethical scholarship.
  - a. Effectively find and use advanced research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, bibliographies, etc.) appropriate to a subject.
    - Students will be able to use a wide variety of such tools and evaluate those tools.
  - b. Find appropriate advanced research (print and electronic scholarship) and apply that research to specific disciplinary questions or issues.
    - Students will be able to find a variety of scholarship, evaluate both the appropriateness and rigor of that scholarship, and incorporate that scholarship correct and effectively.
  - c. Develop accurate bibliographies and reference citations.
    - Students will be able to annotate, abstract, and cite materials following standard MLA format.
2. Understand the process by which the texts we use are made available.
  - Students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.

All work is present as submitted by the graduate students. While they take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are possible. As they learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires meticulous research and corroboration by authoritative sources. Our objective is to provide transcriptions and annotations of WCU's Special Collections materials that will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, patrons, and all users of our library's resources.

If you wish to submit an emendation or correction for this document, please email Dr. Brian Gastle ([bgastle@wcu.edu](mailto:bgastle@wcu.edu)).

## Introduction

This letter is addressed to John R. Brinkley II. Brinkley, a self-proclaimed doctor, was born July 8, 1885. He is best known for his practice of xenotransplantation of goat testicles in an attempt to cure issues related to the prostate or sexual function, and he became wealthy doing so. But that is not where his self-proclaimed achievements ended. Brinkley was the founder of his own radio station, KFKB, which broadcast everything from gospel readings, to music, to comedy, and Brinkley also threw his hat into the political ring in Kansas where he attempted to become governor. While he was unsuccessful in these attempts, he nearly won twice, and he is still famous for being one of the first to use radio in a political campaign.

The letter is signed “dear mama,” and throughout the letter, the author provides no indication of who they may be. Brinkley’s biological mother, Sarah Burnett gave birth to Brinkley out of wedlock when she was 24; at the time, his father was married to Sarah T. Mingus, Burnett’s aunt. Burnett, died in 1891 when Brinkley was only five years old, and he was thereafter raised by Sarah, whom the family referred to as “Aunt Sally.” Sarah (Aunt Sally) died Dec. 26, 1906 at the age of 68 when Brinkley was 21. Brinkley would settle briefly in Chicago, working for Western Union as a telegrapher, but not until 1907, a year after “Aunt Sally’s” death, which makes it unlikely, though not impossible, that the author of the letter was Sarah Mingus.

The contents of the letter suggests that “mama” may possibly have been one of Dr. Brinkley’s patients, though references to Brinkley’s family and friends suggest a more familial relationship. The author includes information about weight loss and fever, as well as information concerning a baby’s health, but no indication if it is her baby or a common acquaintance’s. It also mention “Dr. Jones,” a professional partner of Brinkley’s, and refers to Brinkley as Doctor, and Brinkley’s family commonly addressed him as such. The author is likely related to, or a family friend of, the Jones or Brinkley family.

One of the ambiguities of this document is its date. No date appears on the manuscript except for the day, Tuesday. Given the reference in the letter to blooming tulips, it was likely written sometime between March and May, prime blooming season for most tulips.

At the end of his life, John Brinkley’s luck had run out. He was eventually stripped of his fraudulent medical license in multiple states, lost his radio stations, and had many lawsuits filed against him due to his medical malpractice. He, along with his wife and six other associates, was sued for mail fraud by the federal government. Brinkley would never see a trial for his mail fraud, however, as his health was rapidly declining. After suffering three heart attacks and a leg amputation, John R. Brinkley died on May 26, 1942, in San Antonio, Texas.

This contents of letter reflects the popular belief in Brinkley’s medical acumen, with the author ranging widely on their own and family medical issues such as weight loss and fever. It reinforces our understanding of Brinkley as a well-respected physician, at least in certain communities.

## **Editorial Statement**

This transcription is a diplomatic edition, maintaining the integrity of the original text, including original spelling, punctuation, abbreviations, errors, and special characters presented in the original letter.

The document, written in pen, is 6"x9" with the letterhead of the Hotel New Southern in Chicago, IL. The letterhead includes a description of the hotel's location and details that the hotel has 300 fireproof rooms, is two blocks from the Chicago Coliseum, 1 block from the south "I.C. station," the Illinois Central rail station. The Hotel New Southern appears to have been active in Chicago at least through the mid-1920s.

## Transcription

Dear Dr. Brinkley<sup>1</sup>,

I want to write you and tell you I weighed yesterday and I have gained 4 ½ lb since the 16th I weighed on Saturday before we left for Detroit. I am still with out fever, normal all the time. This is a beautiful sun shiny morning & warmer. I was out to Evalyn<sup>2</sup> yesterday after noon. John<sup>3</sup> came out to see me last night. Every one thinks I look so much better. The tulips are still pretty.<sup>4</sup> baby has an awful bad cough. Dr Jones<sup>5</sup> is about the same. Sister has just come in.

So I will close with worlds  
of love to each of you

Dear mama<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> John Romulus Brinkley II (1885-1942)

<sup>2</sup> Evalyn Ada Jones Chase (1898 - 1987) Sister to Minerva "Minnie" Jones Brinkley, John R. Brinkley's wife. She married Jamie Sherman Chase. No children are listed between them.

<sup>3</sup> John Richard "Johnny Boy" Brinkley III (1927 - 1976). Only son of John R. Brinkley and Minerva Jones Brinkley.

<sup>4</sup> Due to the mention of tulips, this letter was likely written sometime in March through May, prime blooming season for most tulips.

<sup>5</sup> Probably Dr. Tiberius LeRoy Jones (1887 - 1968). Brother of Minerva "Minnie" Jones Brinkley, John Brinkley's second wife..

<sup>6</sup> Unknown author, potentially a relative or patient of Brinkley

## References

- “Dr Tiberius LeRoy Jones.” *U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current*, AncestryLibrary.  
[https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40255852/tiberius\\_leroy-jones](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40255852/tiberius_leroy-jones). Accessed 7 Dec. 2025.
- “Evalyn Ada Chase.” *U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current*, AncestryLibrary.  
[https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40346573/evalyn\\_ada-chase](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40346573/evalyn_ada-chase). Accessed 7 Dec. 2025.
- “Jamie Sherman Chase.” *U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current*, AncestryLibrary,  
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40346627/jamie-sherman-chase>. Accessed 8 Dec. 2025.
- “John R. Brinkley - ‘Goat Gland Doctor,’ Radio Pioneer, 1885-1942.” *Kansas History Society*, 2023, [www.kansashistory.gov/kansapedia/john-r-brinkley/11988](http://www.kansashistory.gov/kansapedia/john-r-brinkley/11988). Accessed 3 Dec. 2025.
- “John Richard “Johnny Boy” Brinkley III.” *U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current*, AncestryLibrary. [https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40235342/john\\_richard-brinkley](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40235342/john_richard-brinkley). Accessed 7 Dec. 2025.
- Lee, R. Alton. *The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley*. University Press of Kentucky, 2002. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2nwq9hd>
- Mehmood, Arshad. “When Do Tulips Bloom? A Complete Guide to Tulip Season and Festivals.” *Black Petals*, 31 July 2025, [blackpetals.us/blogs/news/when-do-tulips-bloom-a-complete-guide-to-tulip-season-and-festivals](https://blackpetals.us/blogs/news/when-do-tulips-bloom-a-complete-guide-to-tulip-season-and-festivals). Accessed 7 Dec. 2025.
- “Tiberus LeRoy Jones.” *U.S., Veterans Administration Master Index, 1917-1940*, The Blackstone Group.  
<https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/search/collections/61861/records/3695318>. Accessed 7 Dec. 2025.