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Letter, Virginia Brainard to Dudley and Merl Brainard [May 19, 1942]

Virginia Brainard

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Tuesday, May 19, 1942

Dear Mother and Daddy,

Dr. Paulene Nickell, head of the Home Management Department here and my senior college counselor, wants me to live with her ~~in~~ during the first summer session, cook for her so that I can do my home cooking practical, and at the same time work for my room and board.

I'm sending this special delivery because I must know right ~~away~~ what you think of it. I'm scared to death. On the one hand it's a wonderful opportunity but on the other hand, if I failed,, it wouldn't be so good.

Do you think I can do it and make a success of it? She live out on Country Club drive which would be quite a walk to the campus. She has a lovely home--a house with a living room, two bedrooms, kitchen, two baths, and a back porch. I would sleep on the porch and have my own bath. ~~Myself~~ The evening meals would be my chief responsibility. She eats very little for breakfast and ~~now~~ is never home for the noon meal. I could take my lunch to school or eat at the Union or downtown. I ~~would~~ have no afternoon classes and would have that time to study and to ~~go~~ get dinner. And even dinner wouldn't be a problem some of the time because she eats one or two meals a week ~~at~~ one of the home management houses.

Every Sunday evening she entertains and that would constitute a major problem, stage fright, a more work for me. Imagine cooking for the Iowa State faculty every Sunday evening, planning the meal, decorations, serving, etc., etc. It scares me right now.

During the week there would be just the two of us to plan for, and possibly her aunt who may stay through part of the summer.

I would also be responsible for keeping the house clean, of course, planning all the meals and doing all the buying.

Now you know all my many faults and limitations. Can I handle it? For one thing, it's quite a walk ~~to~~ from the campus. Then, too, the summers here are terrifically hot and I just don't hit on all cylinders in hot weather. You know you have ~~often~~ had to club me over the head and drag me into a kitchen and how inept and clumsy I can be in one. I know little or nothing about meal planning and buying. Would I lose my head working under those conditions and without the sympathy of my family to back me up?

Then, too, Dr. Nickell, as the head of the Home Management Department, makes a science of that work and you certainly know I'm a very poor amateur at it.

But on the other hand, it is probably the most wonderful opportunity that has come my way since ~~the~~

I've been here. Dr. Nickell has a good deal of influence and if I make good, she'll be my friend for life and will move heaven and earth to see to it that I get a good job. Then, too, my grade for Home Management, which I go into next fall, will be practically cinched.

She is very human and easy to get along with. She probably would be rather exacting but I would learn a great deal from working with her. She has had college girls working for her all along and must understand them and make allowances for all their mistakes.

I would plan the menus a week in ~~advance~~ advance and go over them with her. I would order every Tuesday and Friday so as to get on on the free deliveries. She would teach me how to order and plan scientifically so as to save money--in fact I would have to learn it because it would be her money I was spending. Just think of everything I could learn from her--the head of the Home Management Department--that's her profession.

The one thing I am sure of is that I can cook. I mean, I can usually follow a recipe and get a good standard product. The planning is what would throw me but, as I said before, I'd have to plan my menus a week ahead of time and go over them with her. So ~~she would~~ she would help me on that. So the meals and the cooking would be pretty simple after the first week. And the Sunday evening entertaining would be wonderful experience for me.

Keeping the house clean would take time but I have all my afternoons free.

I'd have to be clean and neat all the time. I couldn't throw my clothes any old place and leave them there. I'd have to make my bed every morning. I'd have to get up early without anyone calling me every morning. I'd have to keep accounts and keep them up to date and accurate all the time. I couldn't backslide, which is my favorite recreation, on anything. That's wonderful--that's just what I need. But can I do it? Is it possible for me to do things like that? I ~~could~~ would just have to make good. She would do most about anything for me if I do, but if I don't, it ~~might~~ might not be so good.

for the first summer session.

And I would be able to save you almost \$50. That would be the beginning. I might be able to work into a Home Management advisership or an office position through her influence. Through her I might be able to get a good job that would see me the rest of the way through college--if I make good. The opportunities might be worth the risk. Are they?

Miss ~~the~~ Goepfinger, Mary Burnham, my former women's editor, and Fred all think I should take it, by all means. Mary thinks it's the most wonderful thing that has ~~ever~~ ever happened to me. So does Miss Goepfinger. Fred said, "It's a wonderful chance for you, Ginny, and I wish you'd take it because I think it will please your Dad. Besides, living with a career woman for six weeks ought to cure you of any ideas you have of having a career."

Well, what do you think? Please write me immediately because I have to make definite arrangements with the Foods Department.

I can't understand why my PEO acceptance didn't reach ~~me~~ you on Monday. I sent it Saturday. Knowing the mail service here, I even sent it special delivery. I feel terrible about it, Mother. I didn't get your telegram until after ~~about~~ 7 p.m. Monday because that service is also slow and I wasn't home. And then there wasn't any time to do any explaining to you or ~~the~~ Mrs. Talbot. I hope you'll do it for me now. My only excuse is that I didn't take the mails into consideration in planning ahead. Did the telegram come in time?

I'm having so much trouble with my feet now that I can wear only one pair of shoes--the pair I got at Christmas and they are worn down to the rims. I can't wear the new pair you sent me before I went to Eagle Grove at all anymore. Could Connie use them? I don't know what to do. I'm so discouraged about it. Having my feet bandaged doesn't do any good. I think I'd better come home after my finals are over. I do want to but I'm not through until Wednesday ~~at least~~ now. I'd get home Wed night, and have to leave Sunday noon. Is it worth it? Please let me know what you want me to do. Fred wants me to come home because he wants me to talk some things over with you. He can't get me to say I'll marry him or even that I'll wait for him, and he says, "It's time you went home and had a long talk with your Mother." Besides that, I'd like to have my feet looked at and get some shoes and get a brief change. Would Daddy and Grandma and the girls be back by that time? Also, if I take this job, I may need that time to move in and get settled with her.

What shall I get Connie for graduation? ~~Anything~~ I am going to write her a long letter. Have her get a job by all means this summer, if it's at all possible. It is probably ~~the~~ most valuable recommendations for a permanent job after college graduation that a person can have. Sometime, especially during times like these, we may regret that I spent so much time going to summer school just to finish on a certain deadline when I could be picking up valuable experience and helping pay part of my expenses at the same time.

My board is due again. Please answer this right away. Fred says, "If you'd only marry me like I want you to, this home cooking project would be all taken care of."

Love, Virginia