

15 minutes with Art Linkletter

By Peter Jones
Staff Writer

Art Linkletter says the darndest things.

Be it the contextual f-word or discussions of his sex life.

The affable 94-year-old American institution has taken on aging with the same vigor that kept him on television for multiple decades. His best-seller "Old Age is Not for Sissies" summed up his straight-forward approach to seizing one's geriatric period as a new challenge, rather than an excuse to retreat or become sedentary.

Linkletter's latest book, titled "How to Make the Rest of Your Life the Best of Your Life," challenges seniors to not just hop off their rocking chairs, but also stay fit, remain financially independent, become a "seniorpreneur" and, last but not

least, enjoy sex.

In recent years, the conservative Republican has taken on the arguably left-leaning American Association of Retired Persons, by co-founding a political alternative called USA Next — USA, in this case, an acronym for United Seniors of America.

Linkletter made his national radio debut in 1944 with "House Party" and took it to CBS television in 1952. The host is best known for the show's "Kids Say the Darndest Things" segment, in which he elicited candid, sometimes parentally embarrassing responses from children via his easy-going live interviewing style.

The TV veteran will speak equally off the cuff Oct. 5 at the Hyatt Regency Tech Center Hotel, 7800 E. Tufts Ave., at the 13th Annual Earthen



Art Linkletter, 94, will speak at the 13th Annual Earthen Vessel Dinner next week.

Vessel Dinner. The event is sponsored by Christian Living Communities, operator of five retirement villages in the south metro area, including three in Centennial — Holly Creek, the Johnson Center and the Village.

Linkletter spoke with the

Centennial Citizen this week about television, politics and the hard work of aging gracefully.

Citizen: You have now spent a third of your life as a senior citizen. What has surprised you most about aging?

Linkletter: The big thing that I have been struck by is that almost all of my best friends are dead. That's something you can do nothing about, except to mourn their loss. In my group, born in 1912, you could expect to live to be 47 years of age — with the exception of my wife, who is 90 and in good health, my best friends are dead.

Citizen: What are the chances of both halves of one married couple living that long and staying healthy?

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Linkletter: Very, very low. Both of us have lived the same kind of life. We've been married 70 years. We don't smoke. We don't drink. We haven't had any bitter fights or divorces. Successful aging requires that you have as calm a life as possible.

We've had a couple of tragedies, two kids died — one by suicide or drugs and one by an accident — which were things that either enhance or diminish you. If you make up your mind that life is what happens to you while you're making other plans, the best you can do is make the best of the bad things that happen.

Citizen: You say aging is not for sissies. How tough do you really have to be?

Linkletter: It's not acting tough. It's demanding your own empowerment rights. There's a feeling that if you're 65, you're either sick, senile or sexless, and that's not true. You can be busy doing meaningful things for other people or yourself.

Citizen: Not to get overly specific, but when you talk about remaining sexually active into your 90s, are you speaking from personal experience?

Linkletter: Well, yeah. Viagra helps. And sexual life is not always sexual intercourse. There's a certain amount of intimacy and hand holding and caressing and evidence of your love. Kiddingly, I say sex is less like the 4th of July and more like Thanksgiving.

Citizen: Seniors say the darndest things. Anyway, you started USA Next as an alternative to AARP. Did you support President Bush's push to partially privatize Social Security?

Linkletter: Oh, yes. 100 per-

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— Art Linkletter,
on sex as a senior citizen

cent.

Citizen: Some have said that there's nothing conservative about investing Social Security funds in the stock market.

Linkletter: We're talking about 10 percent, if you want to make the choice. The stock market is stocks, as well as bonds. Social Security is an invention that sounded good in 1935 when people didn't live to be more than about 60, but now they spend every god damned cent! They're going to have to start saying to our children and grandchildren, here's some nice new taxes to pay for it!

Citizen: Changing subjects entirely, what are your favorite memories of "Kids Say the Darndest Things"?

Linkletter: A favorite of mine was this little boy who went to Sunday school. I said, "What church?" He said, "I can't remember. We're either Catholic or prostitutes." One kid said, "I'd like to be an octopus. There are a lot of bad kids at my school that beat up on me. I could grab them on the head with my testicles." Those are the kinds of things, and no censors cut it.

Citizen: You once did an audience stunt show called "People are Funny," which was criticized for being demeaning to its contestants.

Linkletter: It was a show that certainly called on people to do ridiculous things, but nothing like "Fear Factor,"

eating cockroaches and spiders and lying in coffins filled with — Jesus! I can't even begin to say it! We'd send a volunteer up to the Brown Derby to order a meal and then tell the waitress he had no money. If she helped him out, we'd give her a trip to Hawaii. We did a live show every week, 52 weeks a year, for 18 years.

Have you ever seen "The Sopranos"? My god, there are guys killing each other and (expletive) each other and every four-letter word you can think of. You can't say "Pass the salt," unless you say "Pass the (expletive) salt."

Citizen: Live TV is your specialty and now you do live speaking engagements, like the one coming up in Colorado. You did very few movies or anything else that had to be scripted.

Linkletter: Yeah, I didn't like that at all. I don't like shows that are done upside-down and backwards, you stop, you go over and over again with no audience. I was spoiled by ad-libbing. I did stage plays too. You do the same lines every night. To hell with that!

For information on the live event, call 720-974-3555 or visit christianlivingcommunities.org.