

ART LINKLETTER SAYS THE DARNDEST THINGS!

For seven decades, the broadcasting legend has entertained and inspired generations of Americans and still remains at the top of his game.

by Patrick Perry



At 17, the ever-adventurous Linkletter explored the world, hitching rides, jumping freight cars, even riding the high seas as a deckhand on the American Legion (above) and covering over 21,000 miles in one year.



A college senior preparing for a teaching career, Linkletter got a call from a local radio station manager, who offered the outgoing youth a part-time job as a radio announcer. The call, he says, changed his life.

In millions of American households, television and radio broadcaster Art Linkletter became a member of the family. As host of two of the longest running shows in broadcast history—*People Are Funny* and *House Party*—Linkletter pioneered what we know today as “reality” television, where ordinary people star in the program. And over the decades, millions of people continue to tune in to what the beloved broadcaster and motivational speaker has to say.

At 91, Linkletter is still going full throttle, traveling and lecturing around the country and tackling vital issues affecting seniors.

Despite a childhood and early youth marked by poverty and want, Linkletter has achieved phenomenal success. Abandoned in a tiny hospital in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Canada, and later adopted by the older, poor, but loving Reverend Linkletter and his wife, young Art spent his early years in Lowell, Massachusetts, moving to San Diego at five. After high school, he left the safe confines of home to travel the world.

“I was 16 when I finished high school, a somewhat skinny, short and immature 16,” Linkletter told the *Post* in 1952. “I felt insecure about going to college with older boys, and I had not decided what I wanted to do in life. With ten dollars in my pocket and no particular itinerary in mind, I made the break. It never occurred to me that I was running away from home or that this was any kind of

flight from reality.”

Over the next year, Linkletter traveled from San Diego to New York and Rio de Janeiro, then back. Wanderlust satisfied, Linkletter enrolled in a junior college in San Diego with plans to become an English teacher. But the athletic, outgoing, and curious student of life has always kept an open mind. A phone call came, inviting the ambitious collegian to consider a career in radio. After

graduating in 1934 with a B.A., Linkletter became a part-time radio announcer at station KGB in San Diego. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Ad-libbing with a mike since high-school days, Linkletter was a natural crowd-pleaser and used his talent in the reality-based program *People Are Funny* to coax people into sharing their narrowest escapes, luckiest breaks, and dearest wishes. The results were fantastic. After the success of the shows on radio, in the 1950s he took *House Party* and

People Are Funny to television audiences.

His ability to interview children proved a huge asset—using the unexpected to his advantage—on the beloved *House Party* program, where over 27,000 school-age children shared hilarious and innocent reflections on American home life.

Always embracing the unexpected, Linkletter enthusiastically welcomes each and every day of his life. For Linkletter, the golden years represent



In 1935, Art was smitten by a blue-eyed San Diego beauty named Lois Foerster, who has been his wife for the last 68 years and grandmother to nine grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.

Art Linkletter: Uniting America's Generations

Art Linkletter is national spokesperson for United Seniors Association (USA) and USA United Generations, a nonprofit grass-roots organization that addresses critical issues affecting seniors, their children, and grandchildren—such as economic growth, Social Security reform, and Medicare coverage. Linkletter travels to Washington regularly to meet with elected officials and political leaders. Some of the issues the group promotes include Social Security reform with personal retirement accounts, while protecting the benefits of today's seniors and those nearing retirement; keeping Medicare solvent by creating a flexible system of private healthcare coverage for the next generation of retirees; and urging support for the simplification of our tax system, including elimination of the estate tax, abolishing the marriage tax penalty, eliminating taxes on Social Security benefits, and reducing marginal tax rates. For more information about USA, located in Fairfax, Virginia, visit www.usanext.org or call 703-359-6500.

have one."

"Yes, you will," he said and convinced me to have one. They found a cancerous polyp. Again, my life was saved.

Post: Someone is looking out for Art Linkletter.

Linkletter: That's right. But I am also looking out for myself. Every individual has to do the same.

Post: What roles do attitude and humor play in life?

Linkletter: The Bible says, "A merry heart doeth good like medicine." And it's true. We know scientifically that humans possess tiny chemicals in the brain called endorphins that make us feel good and happy. Laughter activates endorphins. A good laugh will shake up your endorphins and scatter the right kind of drug, made by your body, throughout your system and provide a sense of well-being. When you

have a sense of well-being, you do everything better. You are a better person, more agreeable, and people like you more. Of course, a sense of humor is a key to my success.

Post: Do you still hear from kids who appeared on *House Party*?

Linkletter: No matter where I go or what I am doing, people come up to me. They may have been on the show, knew someone on the show, or wanted to be on the show.

A couple of years ago, a cop stopped me on Sunset Boulevard because I was driving a little fast.

He said, "Art Linkletter. When I was a kid, I always wanted to be on your show."

"You write out that ticket, and you will never be on my show!" I said.

The program started in 1943 and wound up in 1970. It was one of the longest-running shows in the history of broadcasting. I had four kids every day, five days a week, ranging in age from five to ten years old. That was the group that was very much concerned with families. After age 10, peer pressure begins to surface.

Of course, I asked the kids questions about their family, and everybody across the country got such a kick out of their replies because they were common to their lives, too.

Post: Have you held many different jobs?

see Art Linkletter on page 86



In college, Linkletter's prowess as an athlete came to the forefront. He won three letters in basketball, became a Pacific Coast champion for the backstroke, and tried out for the Olympics. Later, he played handball in national tournaments until age 50. He now skis every winter at Vail, Aspen, Steamboat Springs, and Sun Valley, and continues to surf. Last summer, he rode Hawaii's waves! Staying active is one of his secrets to longevity.



the randomized controlled trial will confirm the consistent results of the open label studies. This is, that a substantial proportion of people sick with Crohn's disease will heal when treated with these agents.

I have a cohort of people, some of them quite young, who had end-stage colonic Crohn's and were facing irreversible surgery and a lifetime of living with an abdominal stoma. Today they are walking around living normal lives because of these anti-MAP drugs. ■

Art Linkletter

continued from page 51

Linkletter: Many. I was a hobo. I saw the country from freight cars. I hitchhiked from San Diego to Walla Walla, Washington, to see the world. To go over the Rockies, I ran into some people riding freight trains, so I started jumping and riding freight cars around the country. Wherever I got off, I would get a job. I was a busboy in a nightclub in St. Paul, Minnesota, one time. When I asked the guy at the employment office what jobs were open, he said that they needed a busboy in a nightclub. Having never been in a nightclub, I thought a busboy helped old people off the bus. I hung up liners in the Armour production plant, then worked on Wall Street as a typist in the National City Bank in New York: I was 17 and slept in the gymnasium at the YMCA in Brooklyn. While on Wall Street, October 28, 1929, came along. I saw the fall of the financial empire, an event that made a big difference on many of my later judgments.

In the big blow-up about four years ago, I had stops on almost every one of my good stocks. I told my stockbrokers that I had seen something like this in 1929, so when my stocks drop 15 to 20 percent, sell. I came through this big last depression without the losses of many others. I learned that lesson at 17.

Post: Did you initially plan on a different career?

Linkletter: When I was a junior in college at San Diego State College, I was going to become a teacher.

One day, I was making Waldorf salads in the college cafeteria—one of my four or five jobs at the time—and the phone rang in the kitchen. It was the radio station manager, who had heard about me from my professors. I was president of the student body, a debater, and in many school activi-



ties, including basketball. He called me out of the cold—a call that changed my life.

That is why, in my talks, I say, "Life is what happens to you while you are making other plans."

He asked if I would like to talk to him about becoming a part-time radio announcer. I said sure. It was 1933, the bottom of the Depression. If a gravedigger called me, I would be digging graves today.

I went to the interview, but didn't see a future. Then, the only people making money were singers, actors, and humorists. I had none of those abilities that I knew about then. I was ready to take a job at a junior-high school in the fall. But my life changed again when I heard a couple of young guys in Dallas, Texas, do something that had never been done in the history of entertainment.

They took a microphone onto the

street and had the temerity to think it entertaining to stop and ask people what they thought and where they were going.

It was the first TV reality show! I thought, *This is something I could do*, so I didn't take the teaching job. Instead, I sold *Man in the Street* shows, then the first quiz and game shows. Then the first stunt show, *People Are Funny*, which along with Ralph Edwards' *Truth or Consequences* were two of the closest things to the present-day audience-participation shows like *Survivor*, with one major exception. The top prize then was \$100. Today, they give you one million! I then became nationally known and accomplished many other things.

Post: You are also busy tackling senior issues. Why did you step forward to work with the United Seniors Association (USA)?

Linkletter: The senior group got me interested in their health issues. I found United Seniors doing things that I like. I go to Washington about every four months. I also make television commercials, urging senators and congressmen to take a stand on issues we believe in.

Post: Are you happy with the passage of the recent Medicare bill?

Linkletter: That bill is so important. I have been in so many hospitals and talked to seniors in the trenches and on the frontline. I know what seniors want. They want independence. We have organized under the umbrella of USA a group called United Generations.

Our idea is that 76 million young people and baby boomers need to be involved in solving the Social Security and healthcare crises. USA United Generations will be one of America's most successful groups to champion the power of building a legacy through market solutions, not unelected bureaucrats.

The idea is based upon a new way of giving our grandchildren and children the real wealth they own,

rather than cursing them with a bankrupt system that we are now leaving them.

As an organization, USA is linking the generations across America. We are serving seniors and preparing to serve future generations of seniors. We are uniting the generations for America's future. If that could be on my tombstone, I would be very happy: "He helped to unite the generations for America's future."

And I will go on doing it, even in greater force now with the stimulus of these huge changes which have never happened, but must happen.

Post: Does the program include a health savings program?

Linkletter: Yes. People want to own something. We think that it will be a big part of the election campaign. We know the USA plan will work. For 22 years, there has been a working model of a successful personal retirement account in Texas, apart from Social Security. A guy named Judge Ray Holbrook from Santa Fe, Texas, in 1981 organized a successful alternative to the Social Security system. He led three county employee retirement plans out of the federal system, creating personal accounts owned by the retirees. In the 22 years that have passed, the returns are so much better than those of Social Security. The success has been sensational.