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USA TODAY

Life
SECTION D

Monday, November 29, 2010

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PointsPlus premieres, 4D



your Life

By Laurie Spahrham, The Weinstein Co.

Help for those who stutter
Know your triggers, experts say, 4D

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HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE A week of great gifts

TODAY Toys, high-tech to traditional, 3D

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WEDNESDAY Celeb-worthy gear to give and get

THURSDAY Holiday books for everyone

FRIDAY DVD favorites, music box sets

Lifeline

For entertainment news as it happens, visit the Lifeline Live blog at life.usatoday.com.

By Jessica Novomirsky, ABC

Dec. 9 special: Barbara Walters with Jenni, Ronnie, DJ Pauly D, Sammi, Vinny, Snooki, The Situation.

Walters is fascinated by 'Jersey Shore'

The rambunctious cast of MTV's hit reality show *Jersey Shore* has landed on Barbara Walters' annual list of fascinating people. Joining the pop culture phenomena on the list, which is now in its 18th year, is future British royal Kate Middleton, Academy Award winner Sandra Bullock, former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, actor/singer and *American Idol* judge Jennifer Lopez, actress Betty White, teen singing sensation Justin Bieber and NBA star LeBron James. The No. 1 most fascinating person will be revealed Dec. 9 on the ABC news special *Barbara Walters Presents: The 10 Most Fascinating People of 2010* (10 p.m. ET/PT).

Celebs go on Twitter strike for charity

Social media celeb followers might notice a few absences in their Twitter feeds starting Wednesday. Lady Gaga, Alicia Keys, Justin Timberlake and Usher are among celebrities who plan to sign off of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in honor of World AIDS Day. The efforts are for a new campaign called Digital Life Sacrifice, on behalf of Keys' Keep a Child Alive charity. Once the charity raises \$1 million, the participants, which also include Jennifer Hudson, Ryan Seacrest and Kim and Khloe Kardashian, will be back to tweeting. Visit buylife.org for more information.

Drugs found on Willie Nelson's tour bus

Country singer Willie Nelson was charged with marijuana possession after 6 ounces were found aboard his tour bus in Texas. Nelson was among three people arrested after an officer smelled pot when a bus door was opened at the Sierra Blanca, Texas, checkpoint. The singer was held for a short time on a \$2,500 bond before being released.

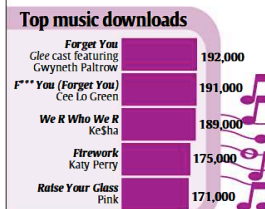
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Today's puzzles
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USA TODAY Snapshots®



Mother of invention: Gordon Dancy's grandchildren pose playfully with his plastic grocery bag and his daughter Kristen Brown, inventor of the My Eco shopping bag system. From left: cousins and siblings Lach Dancy, 12, Peyton Brown, 10, Mary Campbell Dancy, 7, Logan Brown, 12, and Lainie Dancy, 12.

Mama's got a brand-new bag

Her dad patented the plastic grocery bag; she designed a way to do away with it

By Wendy Koch
USA TODAY

Kristen Brown had reusable shopping bags scattered around her house but often forgot to take them with her to the store. One night, she had a better idea.

"I dreamed it in my sleep," Brown says, recalling how she woke up at 3 a.m. and started sketching her four-bags-in-one system. She borrowed a sewing machine and tinkered with various materials before settling on a heavy-duty recycled plastic that she says will last far longer than the thin plastic bags given out at grocery stores.

"I never knew I was going to do this," says Brown, 46, a mother of two school-age children and a consultant for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

What makes her story so intriguing is that her father, Gordon Dancy, popularized the disposable plastic bag in the USA — a mainstay for shoppers that she hopes to replace.

Dancy invented a high-density plastic bag and a dispensing rack in the late 1970s that she helped market as a teen. She says he wanted to save trees at a time when plastic was considered the future. A glimpse into that era is offered in the iconic 1967 movie *The Graduate*, in which the young man played by Dustin Hoffman is advised to remember one word — "plastics."

So in one American family, a nation's shifting cultural mores are writ large. As more local governments ban disposable shopping bags, such as the one her dad patented, she's

Cover story

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'Potter' and 'Tangled' work holiday magic

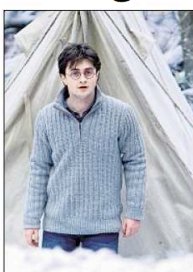
Audiences feasted on family, grown-up fare

By Jim Cheng
USA TODAY

Harry Potter's spell on the box office still lingers. *The Deathly Hallows, Part 1* earned \$50.3 million this weekend to bring its two-week total to \$220.4 million, according to studio estimates.

But *Tangled*, Disney's animated update of the *Rapunzel* fairy tale, was second by a hair, with \$49.1 million for the weekend and \$69 million since opening Wednesday.

Despite big business for the top two movies, receipts fell short of the Thanksgiving record set last year, when *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* and *The Blind Side* were released.



By Saap Buitendijk, Warner Bros. Entertainment
On Hallows ground: Daniel Radcliffe stars in the penultimate *Harry Potter*.

Megamind, Paramount's animated superhero adventure, took third place with \$12.9 million in its fourth week in release. The film, starring Will Ferrell, has earned \$130.5 million.

Burlesque, the glitzy musical starring Cher as a club owner and Christina Aguilera as the small-town girl with the big voice and bigger dreams, opened in fourth place with \$11.8 million for the weekend and a five-day total of \$17.2 million.

"It's clearly a crowd-pleaser," says Rory Bruer, president of worldwide distribution for Sony, which released *Burlesque*. "Our numbers went up as the weekend went on." Bruer is pleased with diversity of the film's audience and noted that exit surveys indicate that *Burlesque* "is truly a movie that people want to see over and over again."

Unstoppable, the runaway-train

thriller starring Denzel Washington and Chris Pine, barely slowed down as it earned \$11.75 million in its third week, good enough for fifth place. Twentieth Century Fox, which released *Unstoppable*, also crashed the kiddie party with the debut of *Love & Other Drugs*. The adult drama, which stars Jake Gyllenhaal and Anne Hathaway, opened at No. 6, making \$9.9 million for the weekend and \$14 million over five days, in line with expectations.

This is a marathon, not a sprint, and we hope audiences will continue to discover the film," says Chris Aronson, Fox's senior vice president of domestic distribution.

The other newcomer of the weekend, *Faster*, starring Dwayne Johnson as a man hellbent on revenge, made its debut in seventh with \$8.6 million. Final figures are due today.

Cover story

Reusable bags raise concerns about lead, bacteria

Continued from 1D

pitching her own "My Eco" bag solution.

Others are, too: The reusable-shopping-bag market is rapidly expanding with dozens of eco-minded entrepreneurs.

"The market has exploded," says Vincent Cobb, founder of ReUselT. He says his Chicago-based company sells 10 times as many reusable bags as it did in 2008. He cautions newbies not to enter the market unless they can stand out.

"It's a very cluttered environment," says Belinda David-Iouze, who lives in Australia and co-founded EnviroSax in 2004. She says her company struggled at first to sell its reusable bags in the USA but then "suddenly green was the new black" and sales took off.

"We've seen an exponential increase in the number of people bringing their own bags to the store," says Sharon Rowe, founder of New York-based Eco-Bag Products, which started selling reusables in 1989.

Reusables pose risks

Yet as concerns persist about disposable plastic bags, which can linger hundreds of years in landfills and drift into waterways, new questions are arising about lead and bacteria in reusable totes, typically made from cloth or heavy-duty plastic.

"Lead in bags is one of the things that can happen when you go cheaper and cheaper," says Cobb, noting that most of the bags found to contain excessive lead levels cost less than a dollar. The lead comes mostly from the paint in the bags' illustrations.

Wegmans, an upscale New York-based grocery chain of 77 stores that has sold 4.5 million reusable bags since March 2007, announced in September that it would no longer sell two designs because of elevated lead levels.

Recent tests commissioned by *The Tampa Tribune* found lead levels above EPA standards in some highly decorated bags sold at Winn-Dixie and Publix, which have since discontinued their sales or offered refunds. They found nearly undetectable levels in relatively plain bags from Tar-



Four bags in one: Kristen Brown, at the Litchfield Piggly Wiggly in Pawleys Island, S.C., shows her My Eco shopping bag system.

get, Walmart and Sweetbay. Hugh Rodrigues, owner of Thornton Laboratories, which tested the 13 bags, told the *Tribune* that the lead appears to be in a form that wouldn't easily rub off on food but could eventually be released if the paint flakes off. Another issue surfaced in June when a joint study by the University of Arizona and Loma Linda University in California found that half of the 84 reusable bags tested had coliform bacteria and 97% of all users never washed or bleached them. "I don't think they (reusables)

are a panacea," says Mark Daniels, a vice president at Hilex Poly, a manufacturer of plastic bags, citing the potential health issues. He says he won't shop behind someone with reusable bags, because he doesn't want a cashier who touched their bags to handle his and risk cross-contamination. "We definitely want people to buy and reuse these bags," says Senja Lander, a senior analyst at the Environmental Working Group. She says consumers can't reliably check a bag on their own but, as the market matures, she expects more suppliers to test.

Many places ban the plastic bag

Single-use plastic bags are outlawed in:

- California: San Francisco, Malibu, Fairfax and Palo Alto
- North Carolina's Outer Banks
- Westport, Conn.
- Bethel, Alaska
- Edmonds, Wash.

Next year, similar bans are set to take effect in:

- Parts of Los Angeles County
- Brownsville, Texas
- American Samoa
- Hawaii's Kauai and Maui counties

D.C. raises money for river:

In January Washington, D.C., began requiring stores to charge a nickel for each disposable grocery bag. The money raised is dedicated for helping to clean up the Anacostia River, which city research shows is littered with plastic bags.

Brown says tests of her own bag system found some lead in the print but at a level far below EPA standards. She says My Eco's recycled plastic is non-porous, so it won't absorb juices from meats and is easy to clean with disinfectant wipes.

Marketing isn't easy

Brown learned early in life how hard it is to pitch a new product. "It's really hard to change behavior," she says, recalling how she tried in 1979 to help sell her dad's plastic bags in their hometown of Middletown, Ohio.

"It was terrible. No one wanted them," she says, noting store managers told the cashiers to ask customers if they wanted "paper or plastic."

"I was 15. I didn't have a license. If I did, I would have driven away," Brown says with a laugh. She says cashiers resisted the plastic bags until her dad, who worked for Sonoco Products, a paper company, came up with a dispensing rack that made them easier to handle.

"He was an innovator in the field," notably for the dispensing rack, but his high-density poly-

ethylene plastic bag followed earlier versions that had been made for years in Europe, says Bill Seator, former president of Mobil Plastics Europe and now owner of Dallas-based Overwraps Packaging.

The popular vest-style disposable plastic bag was invented by Swedish engineer Sten Gustaf Thulin, who worked for Celloplast and got a U.S. patent for it in 1965, writes Chris Smith, editor of *European Plastic News*.

Brown says her father tweaked earlier designs, and his version proved most popular in the USA, prompting competitors such as Mobil to pay royalties to his company, Sonoco.

Brown says she developed My Eco with busy moms like herself in mind. Its four bags, which fold into one, can hold \$300 worth of groceries and fit like a jigsaw puzzle into a shopping cart.

The smallest (black) bag holds glass bottles and jars, while the medium (blue) one has an insulated liner for chilled and frozen goods. The large (green) bag holds produce; the extra large (brown) handles other groceries.

"I wanted it to be super sturdy" so it could last 10 to 20 years, Brown says. She says it's made in China from the same polypropylene or plastic that's used for rice bags and yogurt containers.

Brown says she wanted a U.S. manufacturer, but until she gets enough volume, the cost is too high. Many reusable bags sold in the USA are made in China, India and elsewhere in Asia.

"I like her system, because it's stripped down" and easy to use, says ReUselT's Cobb, who sells his own four-bags-in-one product.

To promote My Eco, she has partnered with New Jersey-based Kings Supermarket to sell them at a \$5 discount (normally \$24.95) to families participating in a statewide School Reuse Challenge. The store donates the \$5 to the schools.

In January, Giant supermarket will offer a similar program using her bag for schools in the Maryland and Washington, D.C., area. My Eco is also sold at supermarket chains in the Southeast, at The Container Store or on her website, getmyeco.com. Brown says children are per-

haps the best stewards of the environment, because they're receptive to change.

"I really want to solve the problem of solid waste in the USA," says Brown, who runs Green Waste Solutions, an environmental consulting firm, from her home in Pawleys Island, S.C. As one solution, she advocates the "Pay-As-You-Throw" approach, in which about 7,000 U.S. cities and towns such as Portland, Ore., charge people for every bag or unit of trash they throw away.

She says tackling disposable plastic bags is another must, arguing they're adding to already crowded landfills. EPA data show the amount of plastic bags and wraps thrown away has jumped threefold since 1980.

Ban plastic or recycle it?

Plastic bags are the world's second-most-common form of marine debris, after cigarette butts, according to a 2009 report by the Ocean Conservancy, an environmental group.

These concerns explain why more U.S. cities ban them.

Daniels, at plastic bag manufacturer Hilex Poly, says bans are not the answer — recycling is. He says many states, notably California in August, have rejected statewide bans and are instead pushing laws to recycle plastic bags.

"It's a tremendous growth area," Daniels says, noting his company will recycle 25 million tons of plastic bags this year.

Indeed, EPA data show that the share of plastic bags and wraps recycled — rather than thrown away — has quadrupled from 2.4% in 1990 to 9.8% in 2008, the most recent year for which figures are available. Still, that recycling rate is far below that for paper bags — 37.6% in 2008.

Brown says her father, who died in January 2007 at age 67, believed plastic bags had become an environmental problem. In his retirement, he founded a company to promote their recycling.

She's confident he's not turning in his grave over how her invention may be scuttling his own. "He would have loved this, as the next evolution," she says. "He believed in change and making things better."

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