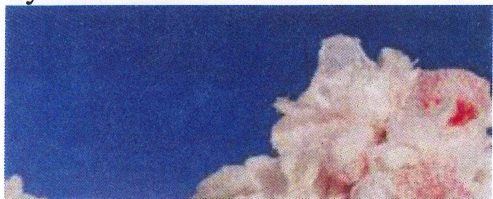


***Bag It* takes an unlikely hero on an odyssey to extract plastic bags from his life.**

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By Dan Linehan



Jeb Berrier and his collaborators quickly discovered petroleum-based bagging was just the beginning of the debate about single-use disposables.

Ice cream, Guinness, and babies don't come in plastic, points out *Bag It's* host Jeb Berrier. But it seems pretty much everything else does.

Though he proclaims he's an average guy, Berrier's comfortable sense of humor, improv and comedic timing propel a story that goes way beyond the simple choice, paper or plastic? Without giving too much away, the answer is... neither.

Bag It returns to Monterey for a special screening after winning best-in-show at the recent Blue Ocean Film Festival, where it outshined films from National Geographic, BBC and Disney.

Starting out as a short documentary about Telluride and Aspen's competition to see which town could reduce their use of plastic bags the most, *Bag It* ballooned into something else entirely. "It's way more than plastic bags," Director Suzan Beraza says. "That's just the tip of our journey, and we really try to structure the film in the same way that our journey happened. We started with plastic bags, and then we kind of went, 'Oh, wait a minute, what about these other plastics and recycling and waste and single use disposables and our oceans and ultimately our health?'"

To cover all this, Beraza felt the film had to be accessible to a wide audience, and Berrier was the answer. "I just wanted somebody who is really a normal person," Beraza says. "Someone that could be your friend. Somebody you'd like to hang out with. I felt Jeb really fit this. He's a really funny guy. He's really easy going and not preachy."

Berrier comes off like a lovable George Costanza, decent and goofy. "I really like some of the bad jokes that always get the audience," Berrier says. "Like the 'nut sack.'"

He's genuinely interested in doing the right thing, and if something sounds fishy, he's not afraid to say so or raise a dramatic eyebrow.

"In the first cut of the movie, Suzan didn't have that line in there. And I was like, 'What about the nut sack?' And she's like, 'Oh, yeah, I forgot that.' If you say something while you're filming and everybody who's filming laughs – and they might have even had to redo it because the camera was shaking – you know that you've got something good."

Berrier may not be the type of guy who would chain himself to a tree to stop a chainsaw. But once on the adventure, he couldn't stop pulling the threads and unraveling the polyester sweater. Little did Berrier know, though, that Beraza worried about whether he could carry the film.

“I was thinking that maybe we should have chosen a pregnant woman to be the host of the film because as we went on, we got into the section about health, and it became really apparent that these chemicals in plastics mainly affect women who are pregnant and their babies in utero,” Beraza says.

On their way to an interview, though, she got a timely surprise. “That morning as we were in the airport, Berrier said, ‘Oh, by the way, Anne and I, we’re going to have a baby.’” Berrier learned about things right there in the film.

“In the supermarket where I’m holding a can saying, ‘You try and do the right thing and buy something in a can and find out that the can is lined in plastic and the plastic contains BPA,’ that was the very first time I’d heard of this chemical. Then when I found out we’re having a baby, the whole thing compounded – ‘Wow, I’m having a baby, and a lot of this stuff is really dangerous for babies especially.’ It took on a whole new level of significance.”

As Berrier seeks answers to why seemingly common sense solutions haven’t been enacted, he finds roadblocks and industrial strength run-arounds. But he never gives up. “We’re hoping that we can inspire people at the end of this film to become more involved,” Beraza says.

Songs by Ed Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros, who recently played at the Henry Miller Library, set the tone for the film’s rousing start and poignant close.

Jeff Lindenthal, the public education and recycling manager for Monterey Regional Waste Management District, watched *Bag It* during Blue Ocean and, despite the fact he deals with many of the concepts on a daily basis, came away refreshed and inspired. “It tied so many issues together well, from the overconsumption, to the low recycling rate, to the single use commodities,” Lindenthal says. “I was really compelled by the questions the students had at the end of the film. I was monitoring their reactions during the film, and it seemed like it really reached them.”

Lindenthal joined forces with Surfrider Foundation, community leaders, and sponsors to organize a program for Berrier to show the film to schools.

This public showing will be followed by Q&A with Berrier. “I hope people will come,” he says. “It’s really exciting to be part of this.”