





by anne bokma

illustration by jon flaming

it's in the **bag**  
... at least I hope it is!

MOMS CARRY QUITE A LOAD ON THEIR SHOULDERS. I'm not talking about the Herculean effort of balancing a quality family life with a fulfilling work life, or the after-school dash of dinner preparation, homework supervision and car pooling to the skating rink. No, this is a load we carry, quite literally, on our backs and shoulders throughout the early years of our children's lives.

**The diaper bag:** that growth that miraculously sprouts from our being when we give birth and remains affixed to our trunk until our youngest is out of diapers. Our tummy may deflate after labour, but the hump simply gets redistributed—we get a new pouch to lug around. Mine is a plain green canvas knapsack, the kind you see high-school kids lugging home from school. Purchased for less than \$20, it has four zippered pouches, the smallest of which neatly carries two baby bottles, and the largest of which could



diapers



carry, well, a baby. Despite regular cleanings, it still emits a slightly pungent odour from the time I let a long-forgotten leaky black banana stew within its depths.

There are as many different types of diaper bags as there are shades of playdough. I chose a knapsack because it leaves both hands free and because my husband wasn't as averse to carrying it as he was to a more traditional pink or blue diaper bag. My friend, Mel, uses a small gym bag to lug around stuff for her three kids. An office colleague sports a trendy black leather

knapsack for her minimalist baby gear. And then, just the other day, I saw a magazine ad for zebra-print diaper bags, also available in cheetah (to match those angora baby blankets and velvet bibs, I suppose).

It seems the more items you carry in your diaper bag, the more of a type A personality you are, prone to hyperparenting and over-responding to your kids' needs. I confess: I fall into this category. One-upping the Boy Scouts, I take pride in being overprepared. In fact, I suffer from diaper bag anxiety—the fear that even though I've packed half my household into the bag, I will one day find myself without the pin that holds the universe together: my baby's soother.

I typically lug around more than 40 items in my bag for my two girls, aged three and six months. Here's an inventory: five diapers, one fully loaded pack of wipes (hey, if my kid is packing, I'd better be too), two bibs, two baby bottles filled with water, one can of formula, two soothers, three plastic bags (for tucking away stinky diapers), diaper ointment, baby powder, two complete changes of clothing (socks, shirts and pants), two juice boxes, a diaper changing pad, a plastic container of assorted treats, another with baby cereal, a couple of rattles, a teething ring, two Farley's Biscuits, a mini jigsaw



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puzzle, and a pencil case with crayons, blank paper and sunscreen.

Hauling all this on my back leaves me free to carry the baby and hold my preschooler's hand. The only place I'd have left to hang a purse is my neck—and you think those cords on window blinds can be dangerous? So, I no longer carry a purse and the diaper bag has become the repository of my personal effects, namely a wallet, comb, cheque book, and two tubes of lipstick.

Come to think of it, isn't the diaper bag really an evolution

of the purse? Both provide the means to get you out of tricky jams. With a purse, you could extract a hairpin to fix a car engine if you're stranded; with a diaper bag you could lay enough rail track to get to the nearest emergency department in a flash. As my husband likes to say, never threaten a woman with a diaper bag—you never know what she might be carrying.

One of the unexplained mysteries of diaper bags is that the amount of stuff you carry seems to be in inverse proportion to the number of kids you have. My neighbour Lori has three kids under five but manages to zip out the door with just a couple of diapers tucked in a back pocket and a baby bottle in her purse. I admire her breezy approach.

Before I had kids, getting out of the house fast was a snap. Now there's not only laces, zippers and the ritual foraging for hats and mitts to contend with, but also the compulsive checking and restocking of the diaper bag. Sometimes I wistfully yearn for a time a few years hence when the kids will fly out the door without me, coats open to the wind, and I'll be watching, free of all this baby gear.

I know my days of being so encumbered are numbered. Maybe that's why it's a load I gladly carry. ■