

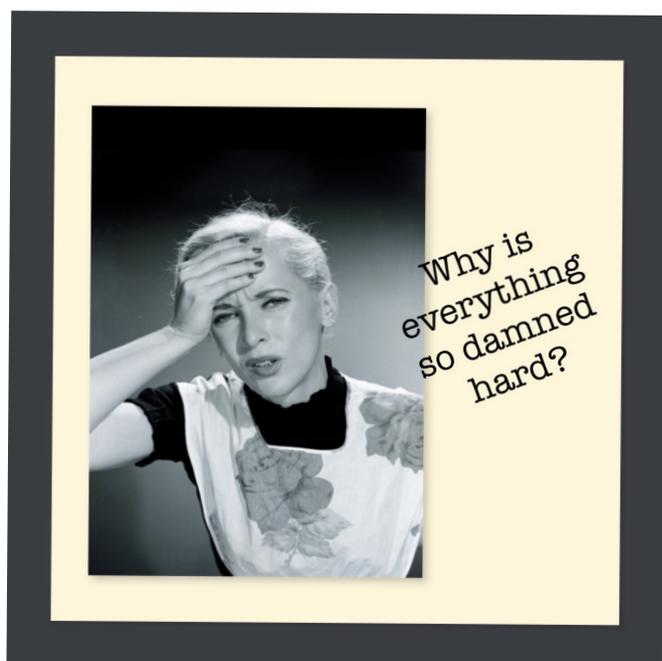


When Christ went into the wilderness, it was to be tempted. When Siddharta went, it was to meditate and seek truth. I, on the other hand, have spent vast stretches of my life in solitude because I did not want to take my uncivilised, ill-mannered little blighters out in public. No, the family home (or modern-day hermitage, as I now call it) is not a place of meditation and deep meaningful thought. The most profound question to enter my head during my first five years of motherhood was “How did I manage to get athlete’s foot when I haven’t done anything remotely athletic for the last decade?”

There are, I have discovered, several problems with taking small children out of the house and these become most apparent when you try to go shopping. One thing that they do not mention in pregnancy and baby books is that, once your child is born, you can kiss the golden

days of shopping good-bye. Oh, you can try. You can pack up a rucksack full of nappies, wipes, nappy sacks, barrier cream, milk, snacks, a change of clothes, a sippy cup for the toddler, a set of reins, a travel pack of tissues, black-and-white-bunny, your wallet, mobile and car-keys. And you will still feel as though you've forgotten something. You can load them all into their various car seats and heft the pram, pram toys, foot cosy, blanket, rain cover, umbrellas and coats into the boot. And you can strike off.

Already, you will be frazzled. The mere act of getting from the front door to the car has taken all the organisation and work of maintaining the supply lines for the Allied landing at Normandy. You collapse into the driver's seat, sweaty with your hair starting to frizz and your make-up smudged. It is then that you smell it. The baby has filled his nappy. So you get both children out of their seats and into the house. You heft the baby up to his room to discover that the nappy has leaked. You now have to change his vest and trousers and fight (as he furiously kicks you in the head) to get his little shoes back on. You put him in his cot (an act which prompts wailing fit to wake the dead) and head back to the car to see if the leaking nappy has actually soiled the car seat cover. It has. You fetch the detergent, sponge and paper towels to clean it. Once done, with the children strapped back in their seats and you behind the wheel, the elder child announces, "I need the



toilet.” After yet another five minute delay, you are finally on the road. You are taking deep, meditative breaths so that you do not, in your frustration, mow down pedestrians. Frankly, it would have been easier to take the One Ring to Mordor than it was getting the kids in the friggin car.

You make it to the car park, but typically all of the parent/child spaces are taken. So you must squeeze into a space the size of a postage stamp. Now comes the unloading process. You get the pram out of the boot and attach the rain cover (you put it on the wrong way around at first, swear, and then attach it correctly). You put the baby in the pram, the foot cosy on the baby, the umbrellas in the pram storage net, the coats on your bodies, the reins on the toddler, the rucksack on your back and off you go.

All I wanted was to buy a pair of jeans for my new “fuller” figure. I went into the first shop. Their clothes were sized to fit supermodels. Already tired, hot and bothered, I now feel like Shamoo the whale. I then opt for a safe bet – good, old Marks and Spencers and lo, they have jeans that I may be able to zip. But do I get to browse, maybe compare styles and prices? No. Because the whinging has already begun. “Mommy, I’m borrrrrred. Mommy, I want to goooooooooo hoooooooooome.” My eldest is tugging on the back of my shirt causing my collar to constrict my windpipe.

With my blood pressure climbing steadily, I grab the first thing I see and head for the fitting rooms. I will try these on, because I do not want to get them home, discover that they are not right and have to go through all this again. The fitting room is the size of a phone booth. It is into this minuscule space that I must cram: the pram, the toddler and my new “fuller” figure. After feats of agility commonly associated with

circus performers and hitting my head on the partition wall twice, I finally manage to try on the jeans, get dressed and head toward the till.

I am breathing easier. This is the home stretch. And then she spots them: the novelty lollypops by the cash register.

“Mommy, I want one.”

“No, you’ve had enough sugar today.”



The tantrum that ensues can only be described in one way. Do you remember the movie, Dr. Strangelove, which ends with a series of nuclear explosions? There you go. I try discreetly to quiet her, but it is under the withering glare of bystanders whose very auras exude “Can’t you control your child?”

On the subject of tantrums, I have come to realise that they actually do serve a purpose: they remind us of how very, very much we love our children. We love them desperately, with all that is in us, and never is that more apparent than when they really piss us off. Honestly without a love of such magnitude, I think the human race would have died out a long time ago. Think about the last time your child had a temper tantrum and ask yourself, "Would Cro-Magnon man have put up with this shit?"

I can see it now, he returns to his cave after a long day of fighting off sabre-toothed tigers and there is Cro-Magnon junior throwing a hissy-fit because he doesn't want to eat his nuts and berries; he wants mammoth nuggets and chips. The cave man looks at the child, looks at

the blood-stained club in his hand and considers his options. Now what is to keep him from opening up a 43,000-year-old can of prehistoric whoop-ass? Love, I tell you. That love has saved my own children's lives on many occasions.

But I digress, back in modern day Marks and Spencers, I pay for the jeans and drag my little mushroom cloud back to the car which needs to be loaded up with our gear – this time while not being able to open the side doors more than two inches. I arrive home tired, shaking from physical exhaustion and determined to do all my shopping online forevermore.

Now here's the good news: this too shall pass. The days of prams and diaper bags full of gear will dwindle and disappear. Your children will become easier to travel with and -- GET THIS!!! -- they will reach an age when you can go out without them! The first time I experienced this was on a simple dog-walk with my husband. I was so overjoyed at the sudden feeling of regained independence that I wanted to kick off my shoes and run barefoot through the daisies.

It is the same with all the trials and tribulations of parenting. It passes. My kids no longer have tantrums or whinge at me in shops. I can nip out for bread and milk without it turning into a logistical nightmare. And while the next stage will pose its own challenges, we'll deal with those too. Because that's what we do. We're parents.

