

Who's going to clean the bin?

A new guide for frazzled mums facing meltdown offers a specialist for every chore. Judith Woods breathes a sigh of relief

The term "multi-tasking" was first coined in 1966 to describe computers running several programs concurrently, but these days, it usually refers to a woman running herself ragged.

Recent research has revealed that we've become a generation of so-called motor-mums, hurtling about the place as if on castors. If we're not frantically staunching the tide of domestic chaos, we're sluicing down the children's gym kits, styling our beautiful homes and staying up-to-date with the latest fashion diktats.

It comes as no surprise to learn, then, that the average mother barely scrapes together 10 minutes of "me-time" a day. So what to do with those precious 600 seconds? You could go down the tried-and-tested route of a bar of chocolate followed by a wave of self-loathing. Or, more profitably, you could leaf through a copy of *Secret Services: Your Very Own Pocket Concierge*, a new book that promises to deliver the only known antidote to multi-tasking meltdown – systematic outsourcing.

If you've ever dreamed of hiring an A-list chef to cook your next dinner party (and someone to wash up), having your oven cleaned while revelling in an aromatherapy massage upstairs, or hiring someone to wrap your Christmas presents, this chic little *vade mecum* is the guide you've been waiting for.

Written by Cary Whitley, a mother, former stand-up comedian and one-woman publishing outfit, *Secret Services* provides information on everything from where to get your cashmere woollies darned after the moths have feasted on them all summer (Cashmere Clinic), which airline offers a free Norland Nanny to entertain your children while you take a much-deserved long-haul nap (Gulf Air), and who will scour the country to find a replacement for that broken antique dinner plate (www.matchingchina.com).

"Life is often very stressful and it can be difficult to find time for all those jobs you've been meaning to do for months," says Whitley, 46. "Discovering there's someone out there who will do it for you can come as a tremendous relief."

Aimed squarely at the cash-rich, time-poor contingent, *Secret Services* features lots of luxurious treats along the lines of commissioning your own personalised fairy cakes, or hiring a designer handbag for a day, a week or a month (www.be-a-fashionista.co.uk). But there are also quite a few ingenious solutions to rather more mundane sources of aggravation. It all takes money, of course, but this is for those who think time is a far more precious commodity.

So why not just bite the bullet and phone up a lady who will sort out your photograph albums (Jeanetta Rowan Hamilton: 020 7584 3030) or a company that will scrub down



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Task masterer: hire a helping hand

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Cartridge SOS

In the middle of a crucial piece of work and the printer runs out of ink? These chaps will whizz it over to you within 90 minutes in west and south-west London. Other areas in London three hours. A £5 charge on orders under £20. www.cartridgesos.co.uk

First Luggage

This firm will take the hassle out of holidaying by picking up your cases from home and sending them on to your destination so they're waiting when you arrive. Prices vary: London to Madrid, £69. www.firstluggage.com

Party Bus

If children's parties fill you with horror, get the Party Bus to park outside your house. The kids will be entertained without the need to spend half a day vacuuming crisps from the carpet. From £185. www.kidspartybus.com

Ten UK

Give a loved one the services of a lifestyle manager for three months, six months or year. The recipient can delegate as many tasks as they like. Better still, buy it for yourself. £200 per month. www.tenuk.co.uk

your smelly wheelie bin (www.wheeliebin.co.uk)? And instead of wrestling with that Ikea flatpack chest of drawers, life would be so much simpler if you drafted in the services of Screwdriver (www.screwdriver-flatpack.co.uk), the firm that specialises in assembling furniture. Admittedly, the final bill might come to more than you shelled out in the first place, but it chimes perfectly with the central ethos of effective outsourcing; no matter how much it costs, it's a small price to pay for sanity.

◆ *'Secret Services' by Cary Whitley, £12.99, is available from Fab Publishing. Visit www.fabpublishing.co.uk or call 0870 443 0035*