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(54) **COMPRESSIBLE AND STORABLE BAGS AND ITEMS**

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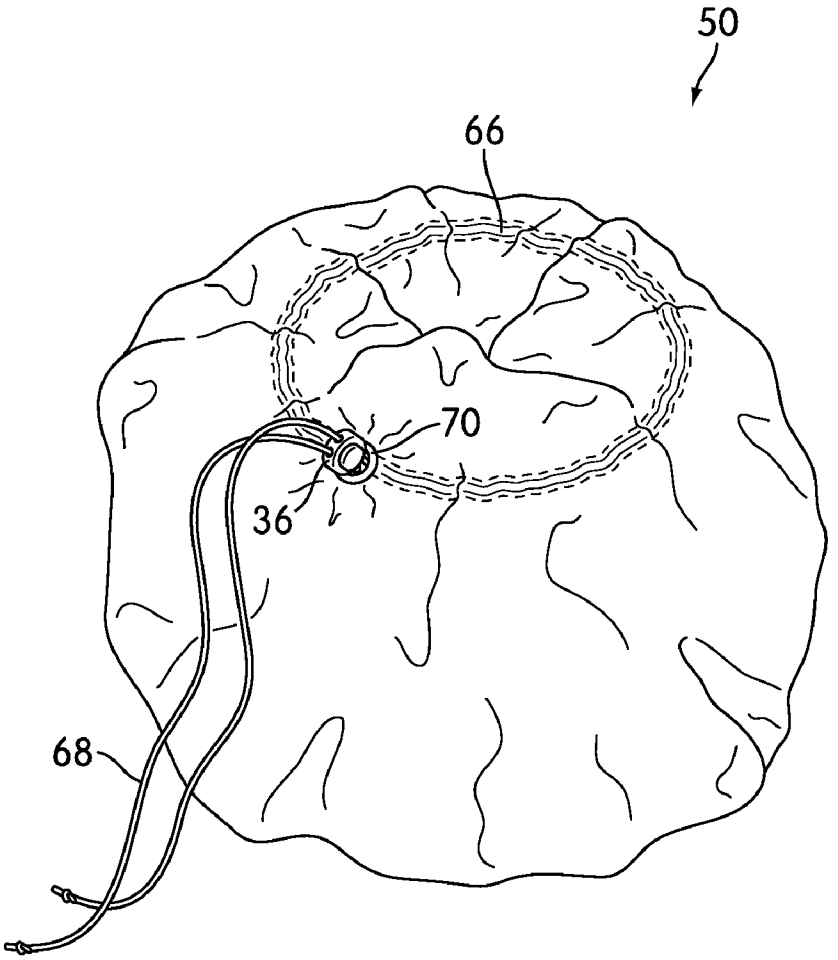
(57) **ABSTRACT**

Compressible bags, towels, blankets, and apparel are disclosed. In one embodiment, a compressible bag includes a generally circular channel on one sidewall. A flexible, elongate member or drawstring extends through the channel and protrudes from an opening in it. The bag can be compressed by folding toward the area defined by the channel and pulling the drawstring, causing the area defined by the channel to be drawn up and around the bag, thereby compressing and encapsulating it. In an alternate embodiment, a channel with a drawstring may extend around the circumference of the bag. Towels, blankets, and apparel according to embodiments of the invention also have a generally circular channel on at least one wall with a flexible, elongate member therein.



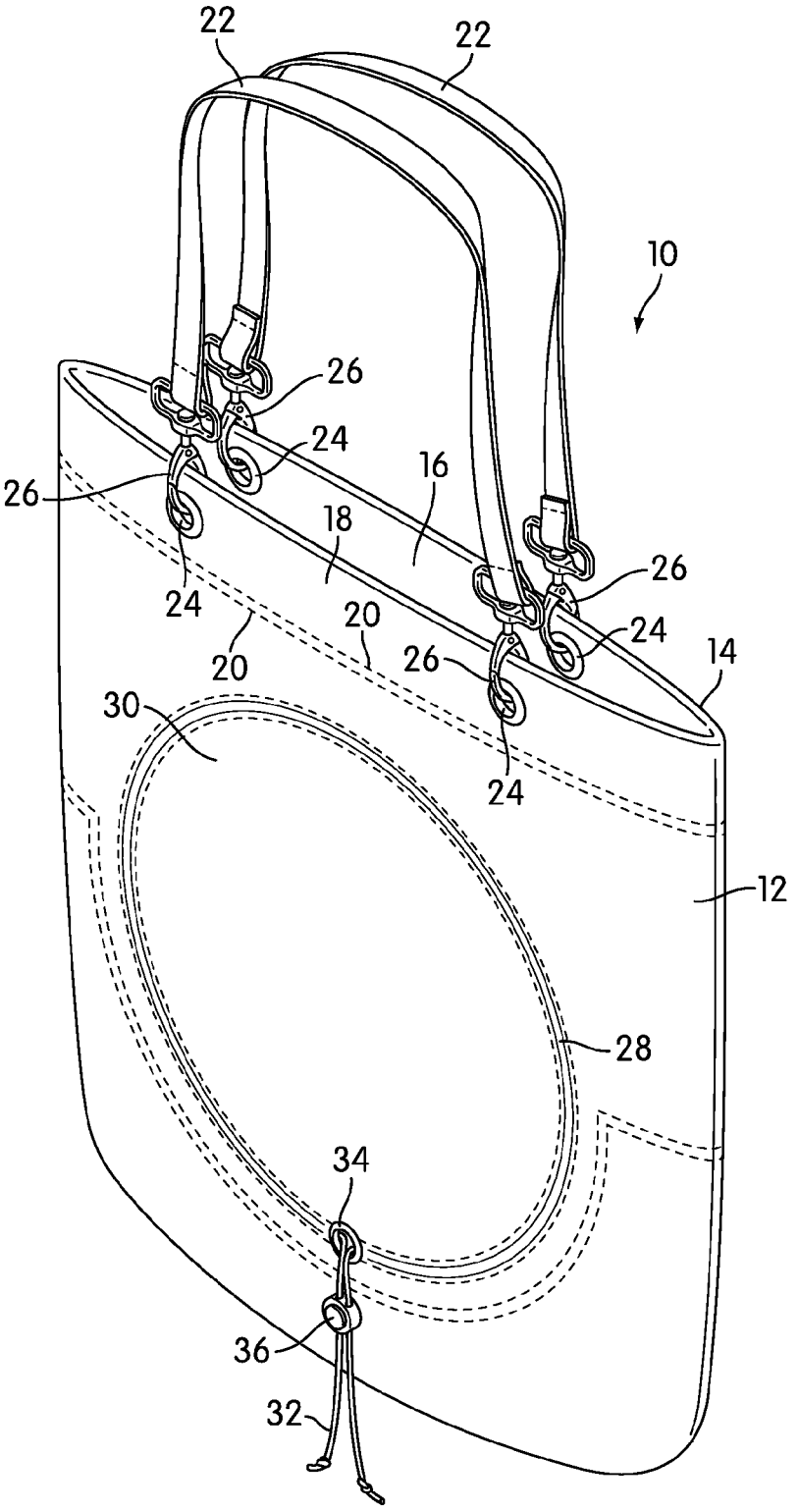


FIG. 1

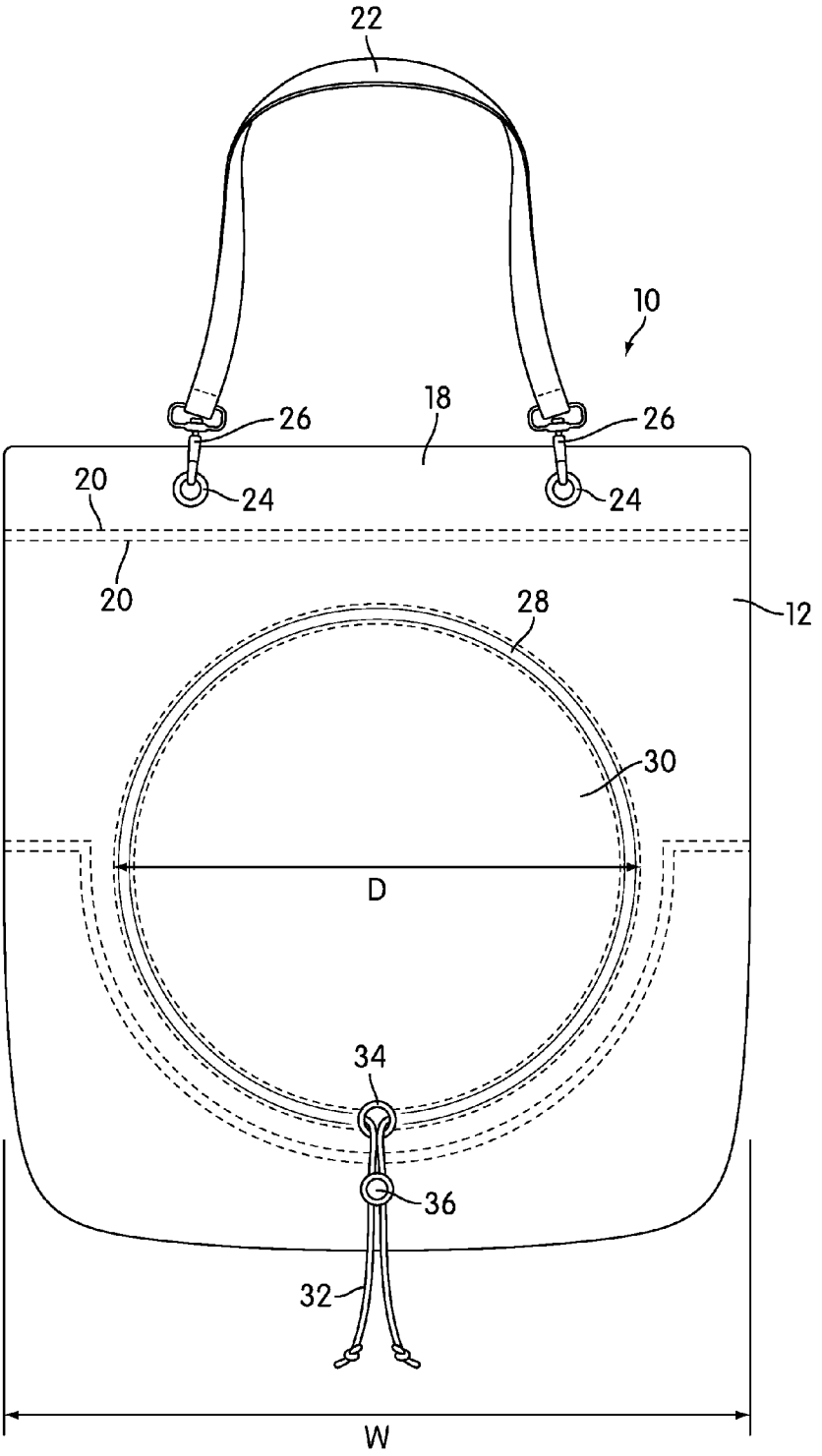


FIG. 2

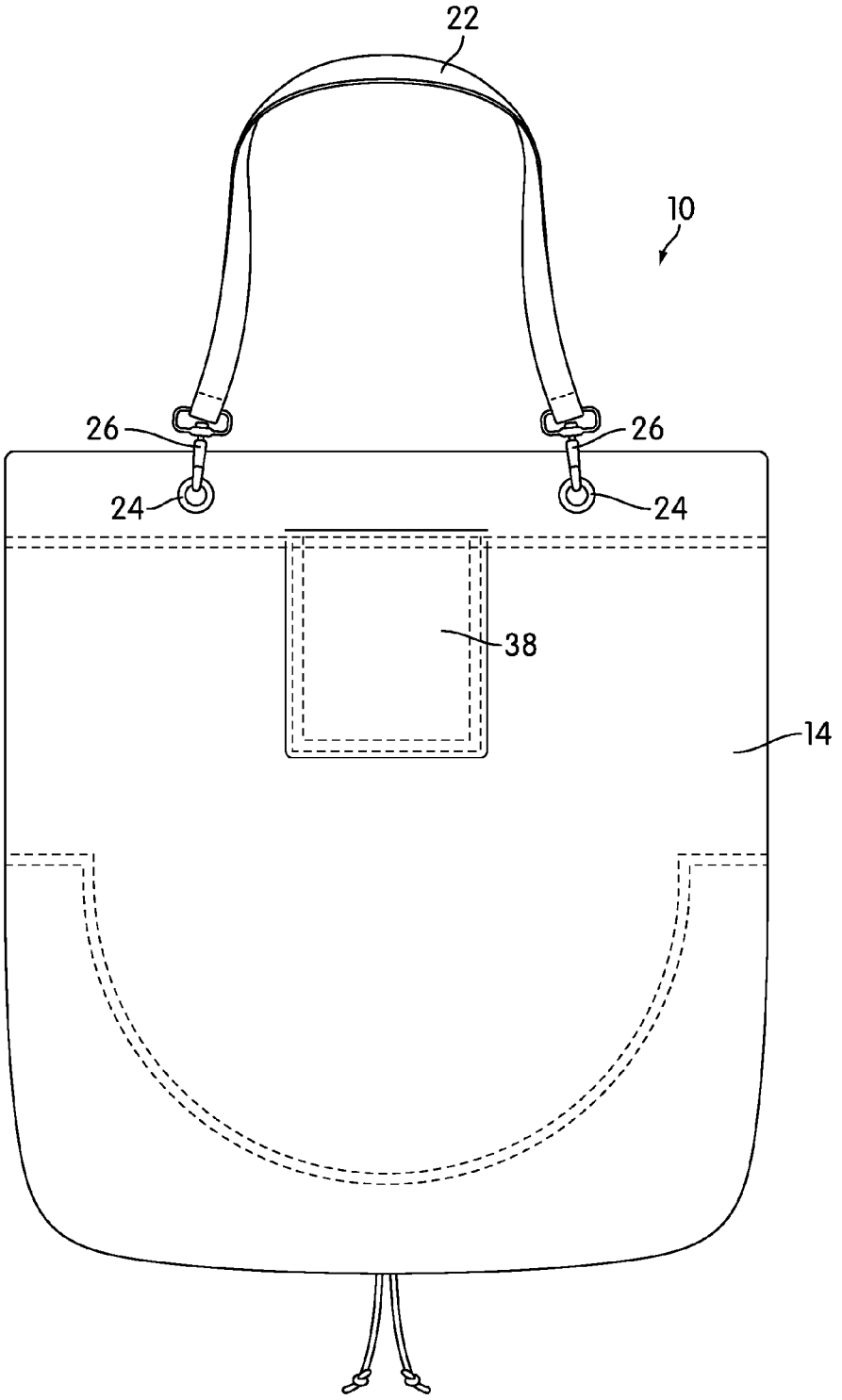


FIG. 3

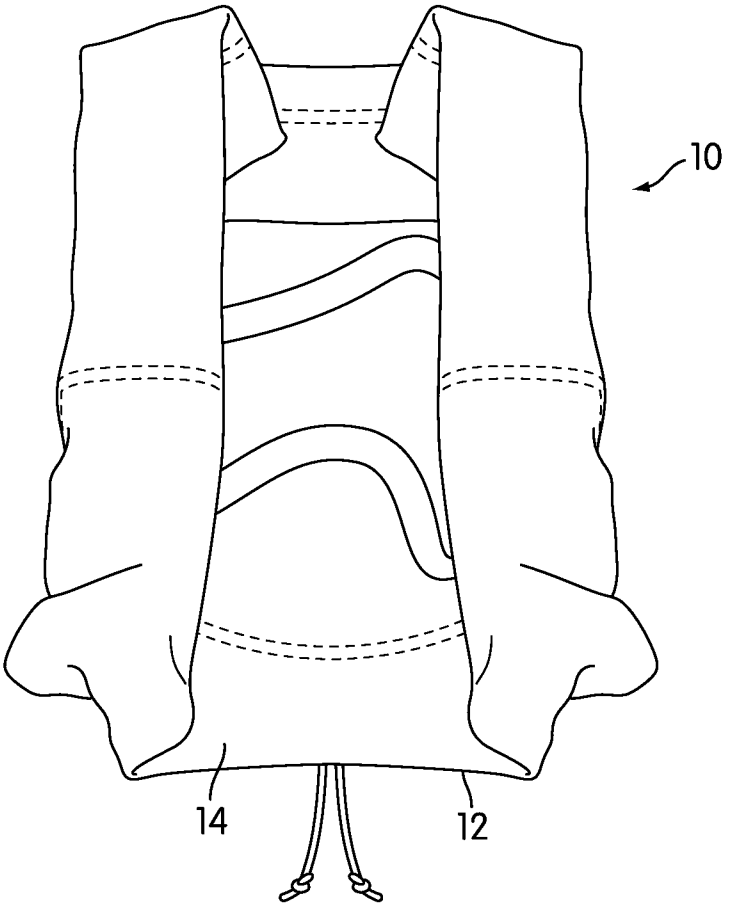


FIG. 4

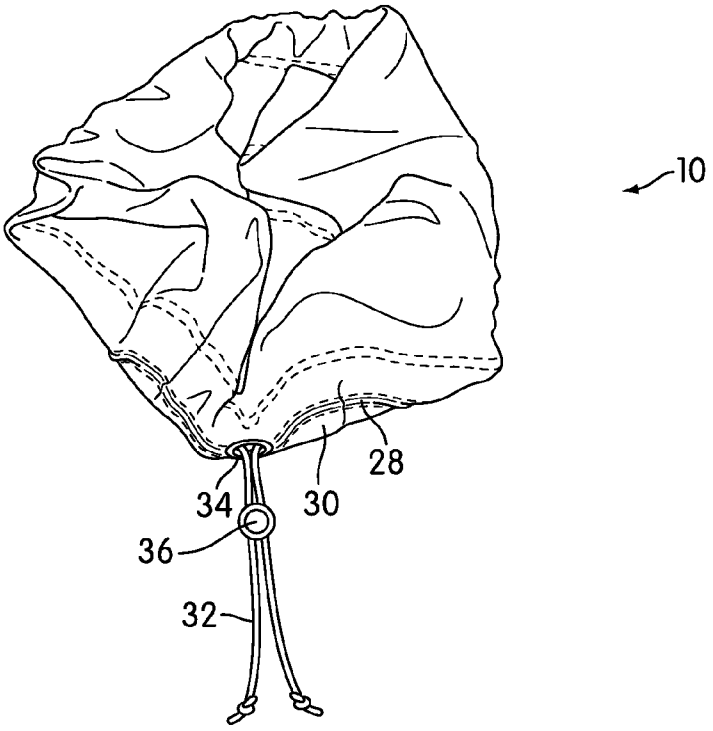


FIG. 5

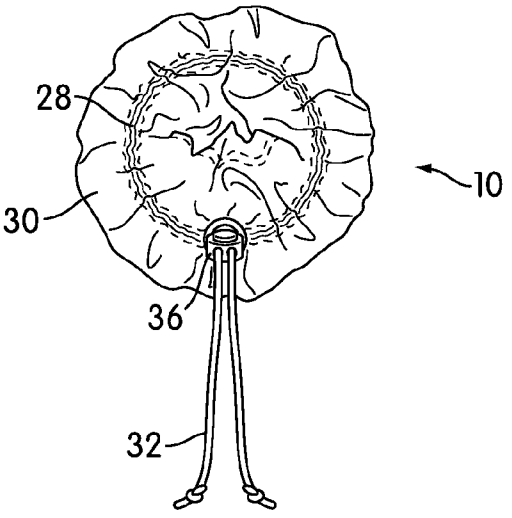


FIG. 6

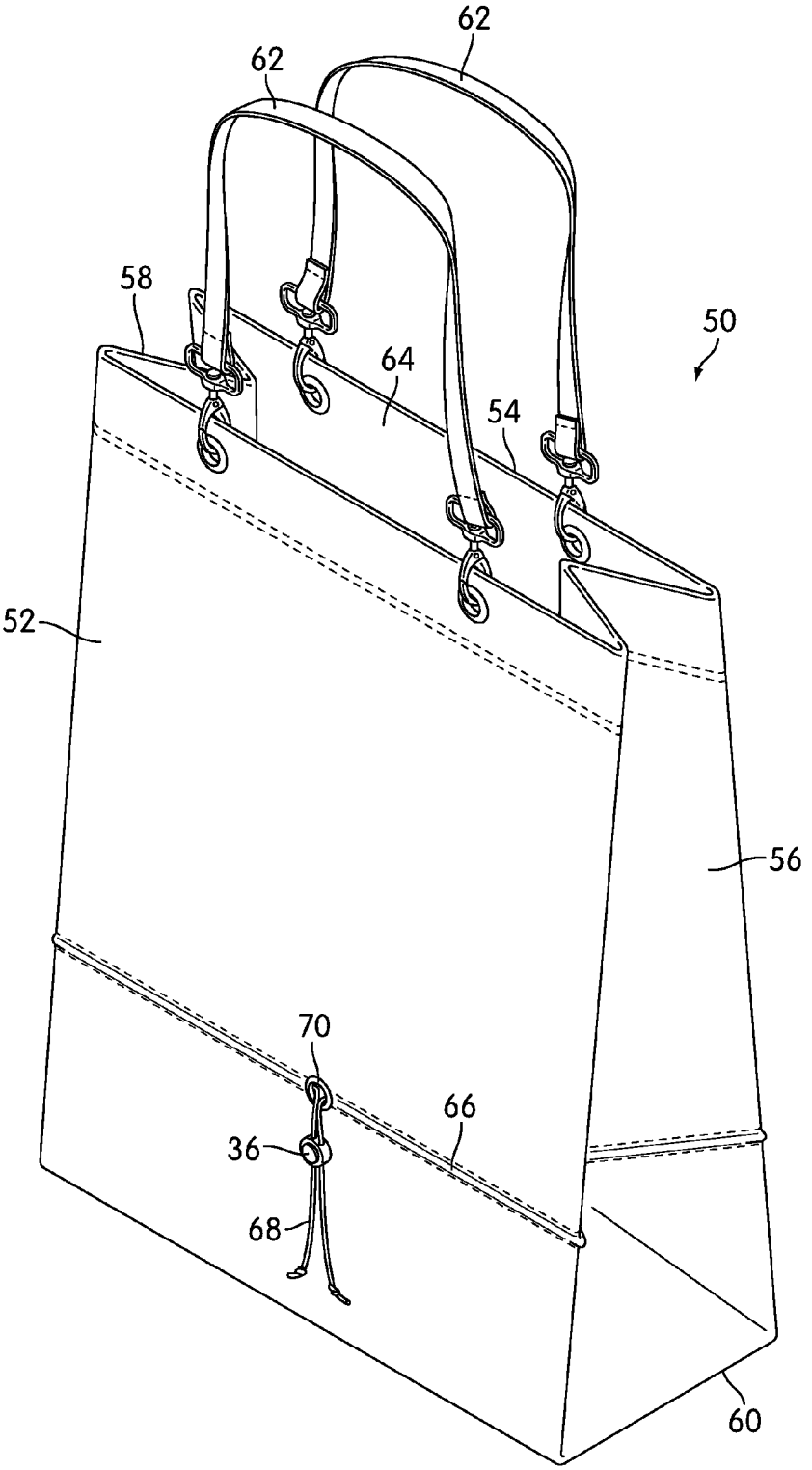


FIG. 7

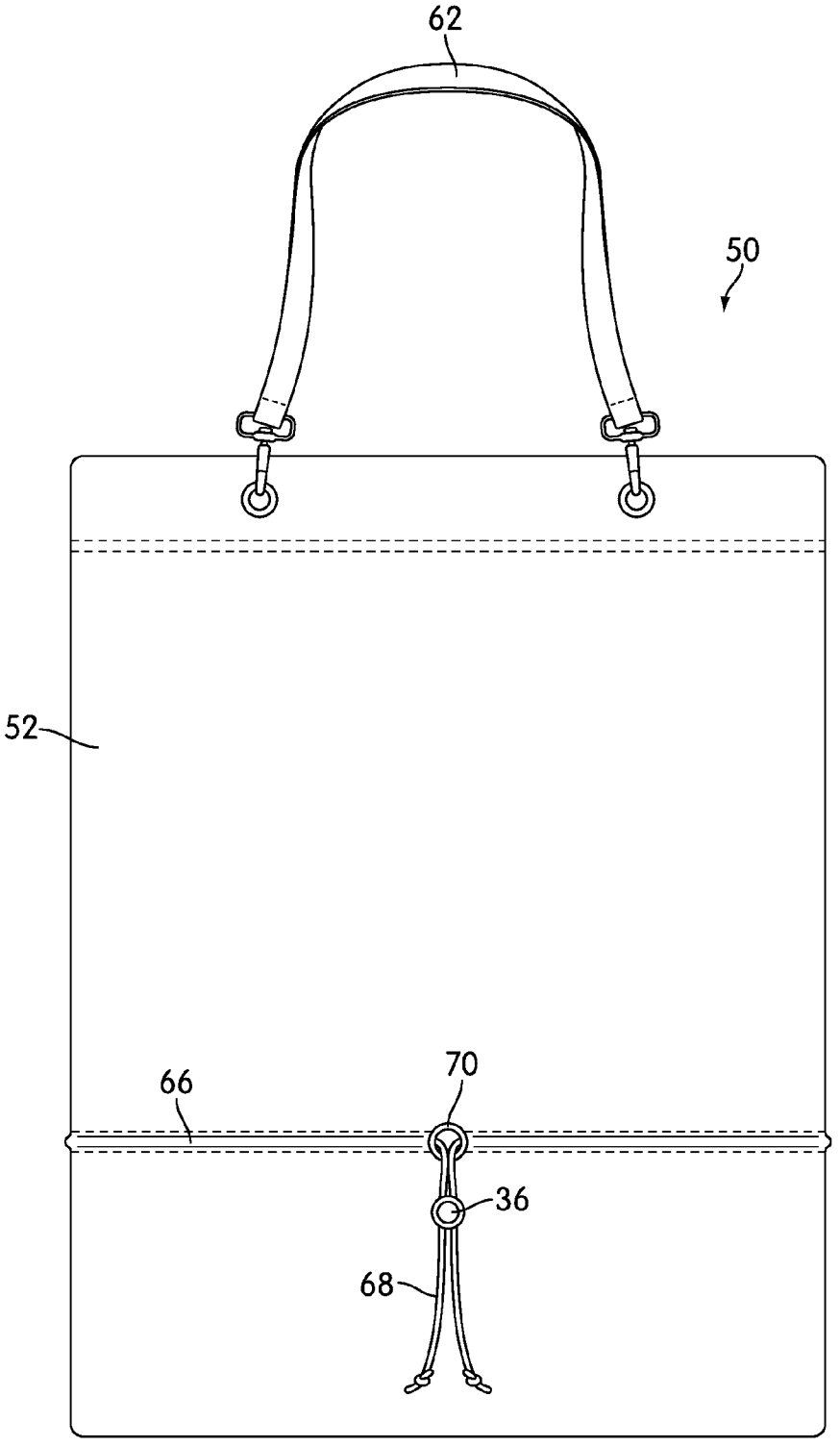


FIG. 8

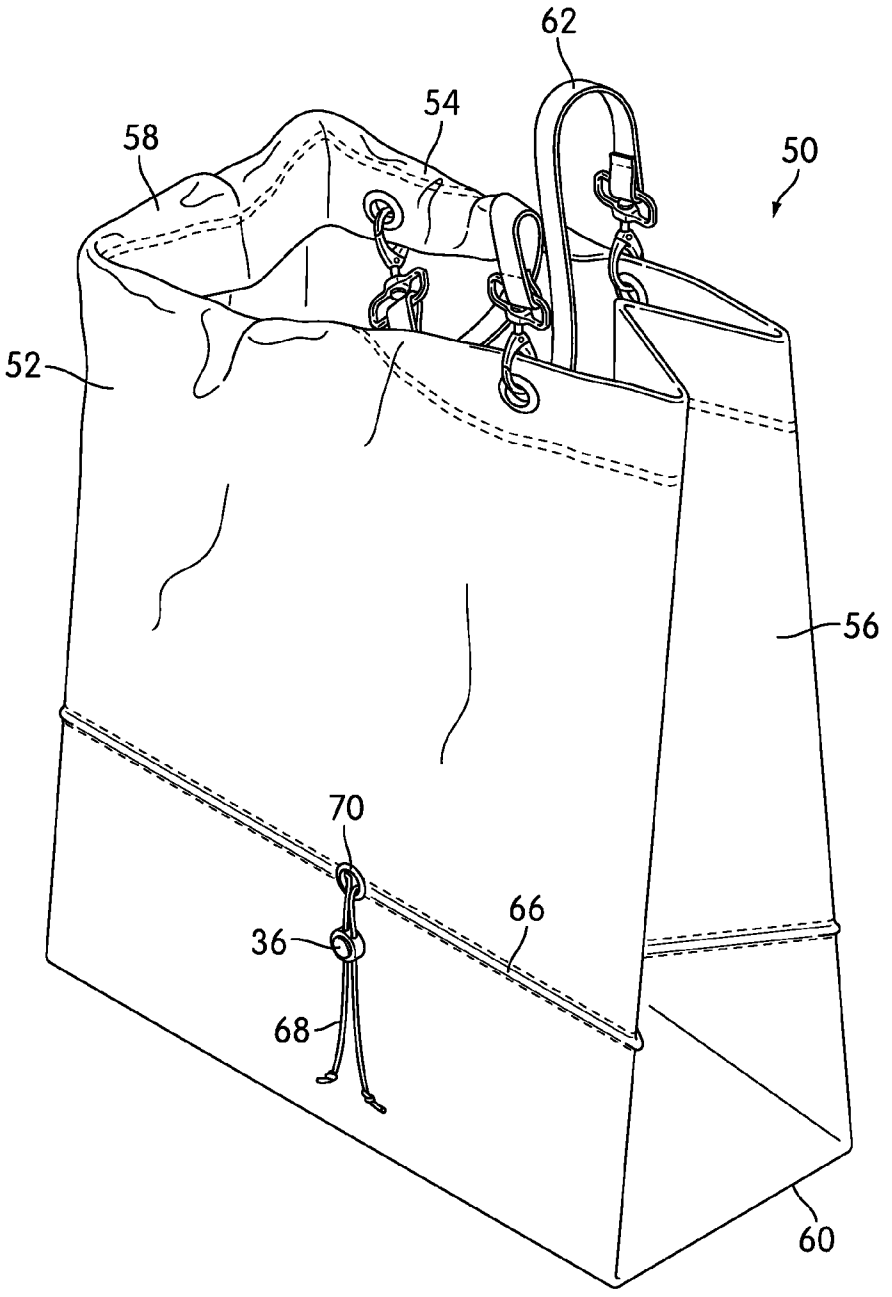


FIG. 9

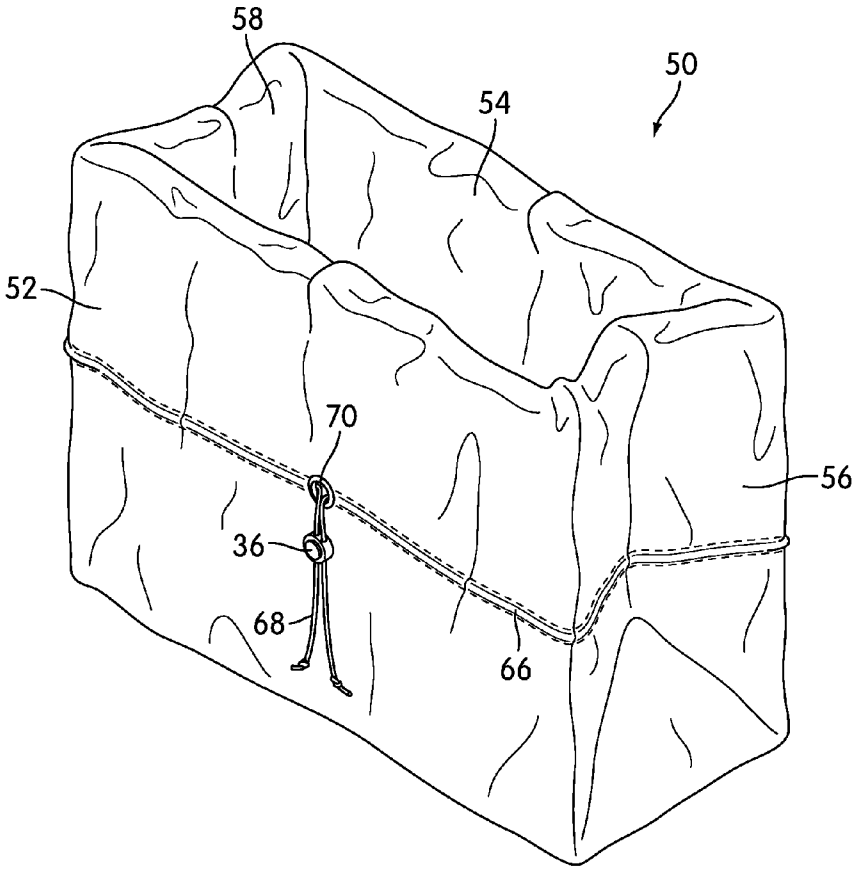


FIG. 10

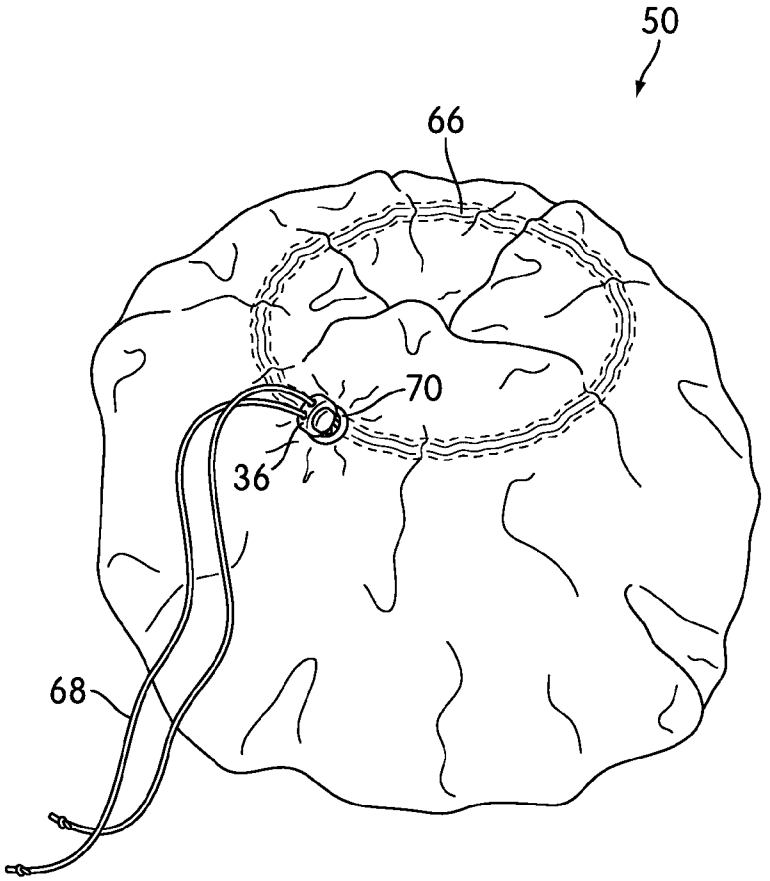


FIG. 11

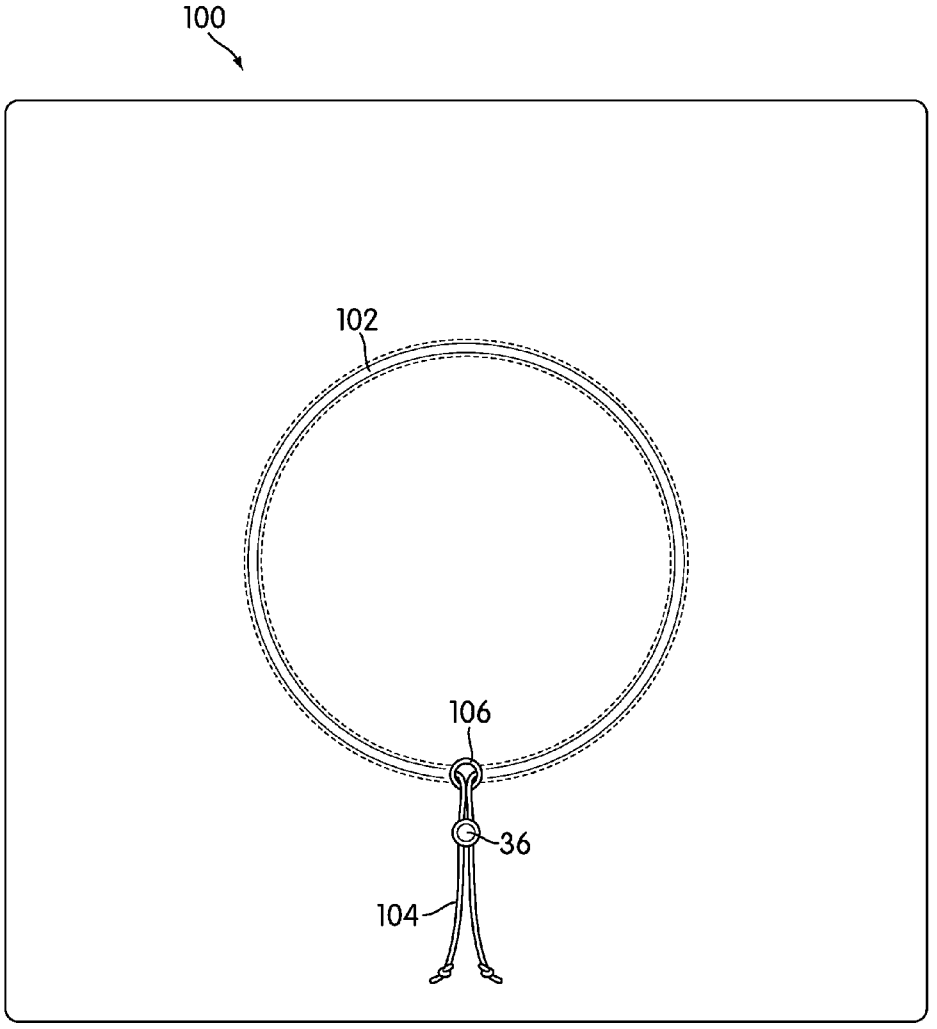


FIG. 12

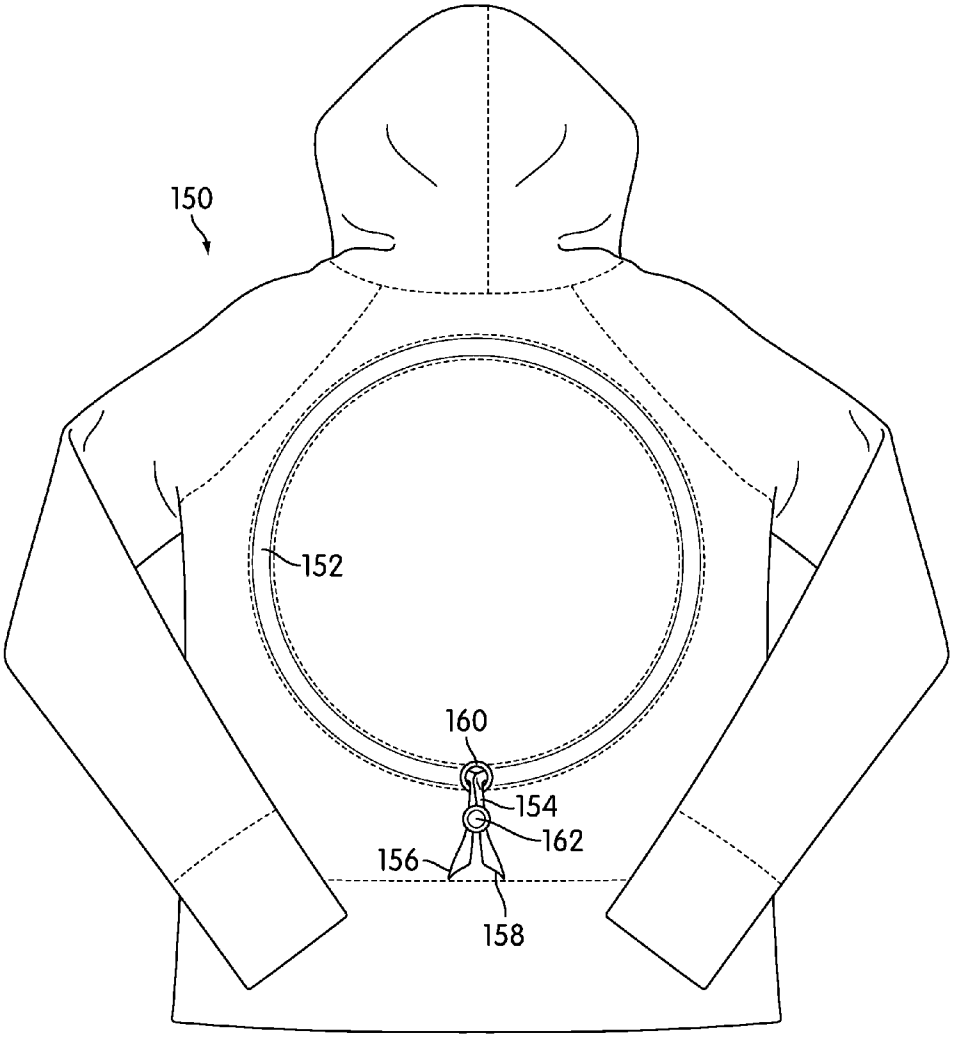


FIG. 13

COMPRESSIBLE AND STORABLE BAGS AND ITEMS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a divisional of U.S. application Ser. No. 12/685,811, filed on Jan. 12, 2010. That application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/144,531, filed Jan. 14, 2009. The contents of both of those applications are incorporated by reference herein in their entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] 1. Field of the Invention

[0003] The invention relates to bags and other items that are compressible and storable.

[0004] 2. Description of Related Art

[0005] Bags of one sort or another are ubiquitous in most cultures. At some point, nearly everyone needs to carry something, protect an item, or carry several things together, and a wide variety of bags have evolved to meet those different needs. Available bags range from utilitarian paper and plastic grocery sacks costing a few cents each to designer purses and satchels costing many hundreds of dollars each.

[0006] Most bags present a conundrum: the larger the bag, the more objects it can hold and the more potentially useful it may be; however, large bags can be cumbersome to carry around, and most people need a large bag for only a short time, for example, after a shopping trip. The typical solution to this conundrum is to fold or stuff a larger bag into a smaller bag until it is needed. Unfortunately, many large bags take up a considerable amount of space even when folded. Additionally, a large bag may become wrinkled from storage in a smaller bag. Wrinkling may be acceptable when the bags are utilitarian grocery sacks, but is generally unacceptable with more valuable bags, which are hard to unwrinkle and may be permanently damaged.

[0007] Similar problems often occur with other carry-along items, such as blankets, towels, sweatshirts, and other types of apparel. These items are sometimes needed only for short periods of time, yet often need to be carried on an entire outing so that they are available when needed. Some apparel items, such as light jackets, are sold with "stuff sacks" or other forms of storage container that make it easier to carry them when not in use, but those storage containers become yet another item that must be carried and can easily be lost or forgotten.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] One aspect of the invention relates to a compressible bag. The bag includes a sidewall having a generally circular channel that defines an area. A flexible, elongate member or drawstring extends around the circumference of the channel and protrudes from an opening therein. The channel and bag are constructed and arranged such that if the bag is folded toward the area defined by the channel and the drawstring is drawn, the area defined by the channel will be drawn up around the rest of the bag, compressing and encapsulating it.

[0009] Another aspect of the invention relates to a bag having a channel with a drawstring that extends across one or more sidewalls of the bag. For example, the channel may extend circumferentially around the bag. When the bag is folded into a volume of space defined between the bottom of the bag and the drawstring and the drawstring is drawn, the bag is compressed.

[0010] A further aspect of the invention relates to compressible blankets, towels, fabric panels, apparel, and other items. The blankets, fabric panels, and other items have a generally circular channel that defines an area. A flexible, elongate member or drawstring extends around the circumference of the channel and protrudes from an opening therein. The channel and blanket or fabric panel are constructed and arranged such that if the blanket or panel is folded toward the area defined by the channel and the drawstring is drawn, the area defined by the channel will be drawn up around the rest of the blanket or panel, compressing and encapsulating it.

[0011] In particularly advantageous embodiments of the invention, compressible bags and other items are made of low-friction materials, such as satins. Alternatively, items may be lined or selectively with these materials. In some embodiments, the flexible elongate member may be a flat satin ribbon.

[0012] Yet another aspect of the invention relates to a garment. The garment has one or more pieces of fabric joined together to define a covering for an upper portion of a human body. The covering has a torso portion, two arm portions connected to the torso portion, and a head opening. A generally circular channel is provided in the torso portion. The generally circular channel defines an area on the torso portion and has an exterior channel opening and a size defined in proportion to the dimensions of the garment. A flexible, elongate member is positioned within the generally circular channel and extends through substantially the entirety of the circumference of the channel such that at least an exposed portion of the elongate member protrudes from the opening of the channel. The channel is proportioned and arranged such that if the garment is folded inwardly toward the area defined by the channel with the channel facing outwardly and the exposed portion of the flexible, elongate member is pulled, the area defined by the channel is drawn out of plane as the channel contracts, causing the garment to be releasably compressed within an enclosure having the area defined by the generally circular channel as an outer surface.

[0013] Other aspects, features, and advantages of the invention will be set forth in the description that follows.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] The invention will be described with respect to the following drawing figures, in which like numerals represent like elements throughout the figures, and in which:

[0015] FIG. **1** is a perspective view of a bag according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0016] FIG. **2** is a front view of the bag of FIG. **1**;

[0017] FIG. **3** is a back view of the bag of FIG. **1**;

[0018] FIGS. **4-6** are perspective views illustrating the process of collapsing the bag of FIG. **1**;

[0019] FIG. **7** is a perspective view of a bag according to another embodiment of the invention;

[0020] FIG. **8** is a front view of the bag of FIG. **7**;

[0021] FIGS. **9-11** are perspective views illustrating the process of collapsing the bag of FIG. **7**;

[0022] FIG. **12** is a front view of a panel of a collapsible blanket or towel according to another embodiment of the present invention; and

[0023] FIG. **13** is a rear view of a hooded sweatshirt according to another embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0024] FIG. **1** is a perspective view of a bag, generally indicated at **10**, according to one embodiment of the invention, and FIG. **2** is a front view of the bag **10**. The bag **10** of the illustrated embodiment has first and second sidewalls **12**, **14** that are joined together along three edges to define a storage volume with an opening **16** at the top. The two sidewalls **12**, **14** may be joined together directly or indirectly. For example, along the bottom edge of the bag **10**, gusset material may provided between the two sidewalls **12**, **14**, creating a bottom that can expand, for example, about 5-6 inches. In other embodiments, the bag may have gusset material between the sidewalls **12**, **14** at their left and right edges, or the bag may have four distinct sidewalls.

[0025] At the top edge **18** of the bag **10**, proximate to the opening **16**, the edges of the sidewalls **12**, **14** may be hemmed or otherwise finished, as shown in FIG. **1**. The stitch lines **20** used for the hemming may or may not serve as decorative or ornamental elements, depending on the embodiment. Additionally, a handle **22** is attached to each sidewall **12**, **14** near the opening. The handles **22** may be of any type or style, and they may be attached by any method, including sewing and adhesive bonding. As shown, openings with grommets **24** are provided in the top edge **18**, and the handles **22** terminate in clips **26** that are releasably secured within the grommeted openings **24**. However, as those of skill in the art will realize, FIG. **1** illustrates only one way in which handles may attach to the bag **10**. In other embodiments, handles may attach to the bag in different positions, and there may be one handle or several handles.

[0026] Preferably, the sidewalls **12**, **14** and other elements of the bag **10** are made of a flexible material, such as fabric, although sheets of plastic and other materials may be used in some embodiments. Each sidewall **12**, **14** may be comprised of multiple layers of material; for example, each sidewall **12**, **14** may include an inner lining layer of material that is sewn, bonded, or otherwise connected to an outer layer made of the same or a different material. Particular considerations in materials selection will be described in more detail below.

[0027] As shown in FIGS. **1-2**, one of the sidewalls **12** includes a generally circular channel **28** that defines and encloses a generally circular area **30** of the sidewall **12**. The channel **28** may be defined in the sidewall **12** by stitching together the inner and outer layers of sidewall material, if the sidewall **12** is comprised of two or more layers of material, or it may be defined by sewing, bonding, or otherwise securing an annulus of fabric or other flexible material to the exterior of the sidewall **12**. A flexible, elongate member or drawstring **32** is positioned within the channel **28** and extends around substantially the entirety of the channel **28** such that at least a portion of it protrudes from an exterior opening **34** in the channel **28**. As shown in FIG. **1**, the ends of the drawstring **32** extend from the opening **34** and pass through a cinching device **36**. The drawstring **32** should generally be of a thickness and material that allow it to slide relatively easily within the channel **28**, as will be described below in more detail.

[0028] The channel **28** in the sidewall **12** of the bag **10** allows the bag to be compressed into a smaller volume of space for storage. This process is illustrated in FIGS. **4-6**, which are perspective views of the bag **10**. As shown in FIG. **4**, the first step in compressing the bag is to place the bag channel-side down (or alternatively, channel side out) and fold portions of the bag inwardly, toward the central area **30** defined by the channel **28**. Once all of the material of the bag **10** is folded in with the channel **28** facing out, as shown in FIG. **5**, the user then pulls the drawstring **32**. As the drawstring **32** is pulled out of the opening **34**, the channel **28** contracts and the material of the defined area **30** is drawn out-of-plane and up around the rest of the folded bag **10**, encapsulating and compressing it with defined area **30** of the sidewall **12** acting as the outer surface of the bag **10** in its compressed state. To maintain the compressed configuration shown in FIG. **6**, the user slides the cinching device **36** along the drawstring **32** until it bears against the opening **34**. The bag **10** can be returned to the configuration of FIGS. **1-2** by pulling the cinching device **36** away from the opening **34**, opening the channel **28** to its original diameter, and unfolding the bag **10**.

[0029] The diameter of the channel **28** and the total area defined by it may vary from embodiment to embodiment, and will depend on the size of the bag **10**, the type of fabric used, the number of layers of fabric material, the nature and size of any hardware fittings that may be present on the bag **10** (such as grommets **24** and clips **26**), and other factors. As those of skill in the art will appreciate, the diameter of the channel **28** should be large enough so that the rest of the bag **10** can be successfully compressed into it when the drawstring is pulled.

[0030] Typically, the diameter of the channel **28** is in some defined proportion to a dimension of one of the sidewalls **12**, **14** of the bag. In one embodiment, for example, the channel **28** may have a diameter, shown as D in FIG. **2**, of approximately 10 inches in a bag **10** with a bottom width W of approximately 14 inches. In general, the area enclosed by the channel **28** may range from about 23% to about 35% (alternatively, about one-fourth to about one-third) of the surface area of the panel on which the channel **28** is placed.

[0031] In at least some embodiments, the fabric used for the bag **10** is preferably of a type conducive to the kind of compression shown in FIGS. **4-7**, and more preferably, does not wrinkle significantly after being compressed and then released. Satin-type fabrics have been found to be particularly advantageous. One specific example of the fabrics that may be used is given below in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Fabrics.		
	Outer Sidewall Layer	Inner Sidewall Layer
Material	Satin	Satin
Composition	Polyester	190T Polyester
Density	254/76	111/82
Yarn	75D × 300D	75D × 75D

[0032] If the bag **10** is not made entirely of the materials above, or other similar, low friction, non-wrinkling materials, the bag **10** may be selectively or fully lined with those materials, at least in the area that will serve as the sidewalls of the bag **10** in the compressed configuration shown in FIG. **6**. If low friction materials are used in portions of the bag **10** that will become its interior sidewall in the compressed configuration, then it may be easier to release the bag **10** from its compressed configuration, particularly if the materials of which the majority of the bag **10** is made are not low friction or particularly smooth. For example, a bag **10** with sidewall panels primarily made of canvas could be lined with one of the satin materials provided above, so that the interior side-

wall of the bag **10** in its compressed configuration is low friction. Any linings that are provided for this purpose may be hidden from exterior view.

[0033] Generally speaking, reducing friction in the bag **10** and between its various components is helpful, as that may allow the bag **10** to expand more readily from the compressed state and to return more easily to its usable, uncompressed state. If it is not possible or desirable to make the bag **10** from low-friction materials, or to line the bag **10** with such materials, making the drawstring **32** from such materials may be advantageous. For example, instead of using braided nylon cord with a round cross-section as the drawstring **32**, the drawstring **32** could be made from a flat satin ribbon. In that case, the width of the channel **28** may also be increased, for example, so that the channel **28** is between about three-quarters to about seven-eighths of an inch wide. The flat satin ribbon that serves as a drawstring may itself be from about one-half inch to about three-quarters of an inch wide.

[0034] In addition to the features described above, the bag **10** may have any other conventional features. For example, as shown in FIG. **3**, a rear view of the bag **10**, the bag includes a sewn exterior pocket **38**. Additionally, the ends of the drawstring may be knotted together or otherwise made contiguous so as to form a loop, so that the bag **10** may be hung easily in its compressed state.

[0035] Thus, in the embodiment of FIGS. **1-6**, a generally circular channel **28** and drawstring **32** are provided in a sidewall panel of the bag **10**, positioned so that they are not proximate to the main opening of the bag **10**. Using the drawstring **32**, the fabric area **30** defined and enclosed by the channel **28** can be drawn up around the rest of the bag **10** to encapsulate and compress the bag **10**.

[0036] In some embodiments, both sidewalls **12**, **14** could include a channel **28** and a drawstring **32**, and the user could use whichever one is desired to compress the bag. Moreover, the channel **28** need not be perfectly circular; rather, in some embodiments, it may be slightly eccentric or oval-shaped, and the phrase "generally circular" should be construed to cover those embodiments.

[0037] In other embodiments, a drawstring may extend around more than one panel of the bag. FIG. **7** is a perspective view of another embodiment of a bag, generally indicated at **50**, and FIG. **8** is a front view of the bag **50**. The bag **50** includes first and second sidewalls **52**, **54** that are joined together by left and right folding sidewalls **56**, **58** that increase the overall volume of the bag **50**. The bag **50** also includes a rectangular bottom **60** that joins all four sidewalls **52**, **54**, **56**, **58** at their bottom edges, and handles **62** that attach to the bag **50** proximate to its opening **64**. Although FIGS. **7** and **8** illustrate the bag **50** with handles **62** and attachment hardware similar to those of the bag **10** of the previous embodiment, essentially any type of handles and any type of attachment may be used.

[0038] A bag like the bag **50** of FIGS. **7-8** may have a generally circular channel with a drawstring on one sidewall, like the bag **10** of the previous embodiment. However, as shown in FIGS. **7-8**, the bag **50** includes a channel **66** that extends essentially circumferentially around all four sidewalls **52**, **54**, **56**, **58** of the bag **50**. The channel **66** may be formed in essentially the same ways as the channel **28**—either by joining two layers of sidewall material, or by securing additional fabric externally or internally to the sidewall. Like the channel **28**, the channel **66** of the bag **50** carries a flexible elongate member or drawstring **68** that extends around substantially the entirety of the channel **66** and protrudes from an opening **70** in the channel **66**. A cinching device **36** is carried on the drawstring **68**.

[0039] Like the bag **10**, the bag **50** can be compressed. The process of compressing the bag **50** is shown in the perspective views of FIG. **9-11**. As shown in those figures, the bag **50** is folded or collapsed down into the volume of space defined by the bag **50** between the bottom **60** and the position of the channel **66**. Once the bag is within that volume of space, the user pulls the drawstring **68** to contract the channel **66** and compress the bag **50**. Following that, the user would slide the cinching device **36** upwardly along the drawstring **68** until it bears against the opening **70** to retain the bag **50** in the compressed position, as shown in FIG. **11**. The bag **50** can be uncompressed by reversing the sequence shown in FIGS. **9-11**.

[0040] Although the bag **50** is shown as having four sidewalls and a rectangular bottom, a generally circumferentially-extending channel and drawstring could be used in a bag of any configuration, including the bag **10** of FIGS. **1-6**.

[0041] In the embodiments described above, bags are provided with channels and drawstrings allowing them to be compressed. However, embodiments of the present invention need not be limited to bags; rather, a drawstring and channel may be added to any panel of flexible material to allow that material to be compressed within itself.

[0042] For example, FIG. **12** is a front elevational view of a panel of material, generally indicated at **100**. The panel of material **100** may, for example, be a blanket or throw, such as a fleece blanket, or it may be a towel. Alternatively, the panel of material **100** may be one panel of a larger item. The panel of material **100** includes a generally circular channel **102**. A flexible, elongate member or drawstring **104** extends around substantially the entirety of the circumference of the channel and protrudes from an exterior opening **106** in the channel **102**. The ends of the drawstring **104** pass through a cinching device **36**.

[0043] With the arrangement of FIG. **12**, the material **100** may be compressed in essentially the same way as the bag **10** of FIGS. **1-6**: with the side of the material **100** having the channel **102** facing outwardly, the material **100** is folded inwardly, toward the area defined by the channel **102**. When the drawstring **104** is pulled, the channel **102** contracts and the area defined by it is drawn up to encapsulate the rest of the material **100**.

[0044] With a single panel or ply of material, like the material **100** of FIG. **12**, the proportion of the channel **102** relative to the material **100** may be different than the proportions of the channel **28** in the bag **10**, which includes two thicknesses of material plus associated hardware. The diameter of the channel **102** will generally depend on the type and thickness of the material **100**. For example, if the material is 60 inches by 60 inches, the diameter of the channel may be on the order of 20 inches. Moreover, although a square sheet of material **100** is shown in FIG. **12**, the material **100** need not be square or rectangular. Instead, round blankets, towels, and other items may be made according to embodiments of the invention.

[0045] In the description above, compressible and storable bags and blankets were shown. However, many items that are made of flexible material may be made compressible and storable in essentially the same ways as illustrated above. Examples of other items that may be made compressible in

the same way as the bag **10** and material **100** include apparel (sweatshirts, jackets, baby items, etc.), sheets, and towels.

[0046] As one example of an apparel item that may be made compressible and storable according to the principles of the present invention, FIG. **13** is a rear view of a hooded, long-sleeved sweatshirt, generally indicated at **150**. The hooded sweatshirt **150** may be made, for example, from such materials as cotton and fleece, and has a generally circular channel **152** sewn into the torso portion of its back panel. Positioned within the channel **152** is a drawstring **154**.

[0047] However, as can be seen in FIG. **13**, the channel **152** and drawstring **154** are different from the channel **28** and drawstring **32** of the bag **10** described above. Specifically, because the sweatshirt **150** is not made of low-friction materials, and because a hard, round drawstring **32** might cause some wearer discomfort, the drawstring **154** of the sweatshirt **150** is a wide, flat ribbon, preferably made of satin or another low-friction material, as described above. The channel **152** is also wider. The two ends **156**, **158** of the drawstring **154** that protrude from the opening **160** in the channel **152** are held using a standard cinching device **162**. The opening **160** may be grommeted or, alternatively, reinforced with fabric and/or stitching. The sweatshirt **150** may be compressed in essentially the same way as the bag **10**, following the steps shown in FIGS. **4-6**.

[0048] The arrangement of FIG. **13** may be used with any garment having sufficient size to accommodate a channel appropriate for the garment. These garments need not be limited merely to upper-body garments. Rather, sundresses, beach wear and one-piece garments may also include channels and may thus be made compressible in some embodiments of the invention.

[0049] While the invention has been described with respect to certain embodiments, the embodiments are intended to be exemplary, rather than limiting. Modifications and changes may be made within the scope of the invention, which is defined by the claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A bag, comprising:

first and second side panels, the first and second side panels being directly or indirectly joined together to define a storage space with an opening, each of the first and second side panels being made of a flexible material;

a generally circular channel in one of the first or second side panels and defining an area therein, the generally circular channel having a diameter in a defined proportion to a dimension of the first and second side panels and including at least one channel opening therein; and

a flexible, elongate member positioned within the generally circular channel and extending through substantially the entirety of the circumference of the generally circular channel such that at least an exposed portion of the elongate member protrudes from the at least one channel opening;

wherein the generally circular channel is proportioned and arranged such that if the bag is folded inwardly toward the area defined by the generally circular channel with the generally circular channel facing outwardly and the exposed portion of the flexible, elongate member is pulled, the area defined by the generally circular channel is drawn out of plane as the generally circular channel contracts, causing the bag to be releasably compressed within an enclosure having the area defined by the generally circular channel as an outer surface.

2. The bag of claim **1**, wherein the flexible material of which the first and second side panels are made comprises fabric.

3. The bag of claim **2**, wherein the first and second side panels comprise an outer layer of fabric and an inner lining layer of fabric.

4. The bag of claim **3**, wherein the generally circular channel is defined between the outer layer of fabric and the inner lining layer of fabric and the at least one opening is in the outer layer of fabric.

5. The bag of claim **2**, wherein the generally circular channel is defined by an annular piece of fabric sewn to an outer surface of the first or second side panel.

6. The bag of claim **1**, wherein the generally circular channel encloses an area of about 23% to about 35% of an area of one of the first or second side panels.

7. The bag of claim **1**, wherein the flexible material of which the first and second side panels are made comprises a fabric having a thickness, weight and density allowing the bag to be compressed into the area defined by the generally circular channel.

8. The bag of claim **1**, wherein the first and second sidewalls are indirectly joined together along their bottom edges by a bottom that is interposed therebetween.

9. The bag of claim **1**, wherein the first and second sidewalls are indirectly joined together along their left and right edges by left and right sidewalls, respectively, that are interposed therebetween.

10. The bag of claim **1**, wherein the flexible elongate member comprises an essentially flat satin ribbon.

11. The bag of claim **10**, wherein the flat satin ribbon is from about one-half inch to about two-thirds of an inch wide.

12. A bag, comprising:

first and second side panels, the first and second side panels being directly or indirectly joined together to define a storage space with an opening, each of the first and second side panels being made of a flexible material;

a channel extending around and defining a closed area in one or more of the first and second side panels, the generally circular channel being removed in location from the opening of the bag and including at least one opening therein; and

a flexible, elongate member positioned within the generally circular channel and extending through substantially the entirety of the circumference of the channel such that at least an exposed portion of the elongate member protrudes from the at least one opening of the channel;

wherein the channel is proportioned and arranged such that if the bag is folded toward the area defined by the channel and the exposed portion of the flexible, elongate member is pulled, the bag is releasably compressed within itself.

13. A compressible and storable item, comprising:

at least one sheet of flexible material;

a generally circular channel in the sheet of flexible material, the generally circular channel defining an area substantially centered on a side of the sheet of material and having an exterior channel opening, the generally circular channel having a size in defined proportion to one or more dimensions of the sheet of flexible material; and

a flexible, elongate member positioned within the generally circular channel and extending through substantially the entirety of the circumference of the channel

such that at least an exposed portion of the elongate member protrudes from the opening of the channel;

wherein the generally circular channel is proportioned and arranged such that if the sheet is folded inwardly toward the area defined by the generally circular channel with the generally circular channel facing outwardly and the exposed portion of the flexible, elongate member is pulled, the area defined by the generally circular channel is drawn out of plane as the generally circular channel contracts, causing the sheet to be releasably compressed within an enclosure having the area defined by the generally circular channel as an outer surface.

14. The compressible and storable item of claim **13**, wherein the item is a blanket.

15. The compressible and storable item of claim **13**, wherein the item is a towel.

16. The compressible and storable item of claim **13**, wherein the at least one sheet of flexible material is substantially round.

17. The compressible and storable item of claim **13**, wherein the item is a bag.

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