



Lea Blair  
Whitcher

# mama LOVE



Hi there,

Congratulations on successfully completing your training program on how to overcome the patriarchy. In this little book, you will find some of the stories I couldn't fit into the show, but I think you might enjoy...

... You were such a wonderful audience! I miss you already. Maybe we can meet sometime for a cup of tea and Haferflöckli-Guezli? Or maybe you will come with me to Care City? The purple catamaran-ferry is leaving soon. You can find more infos here: [www.carecity.world](http://www.carecity.world)

I would love to have you on board.

Good night and  
lots of mama love

Lea Blair Witcher

p.s. you can download a fully english version  
of this booklet on [www.mamalove.show](http://www.mamalove.show)



«Love is when your boyfriend holds your hand while you're crying on the toilet and pulling out the pieces of poop one by one to prevent your asshole from tearing open again.»



First Chapter of  
**Care City**

by Lea Blair Witcher

*I open my window. It's a beautiful day. I look out onto the streets and see people enjoying the sunshine, some old folks chatting with each other, some teenagers, some kids running around, and adults sitting on benches drinking their morning coffee. It's warm, and I let the sun sink into my face. I take a deep breath. Today is the first day of a new chapter of my life. Today I get to start a job I've been working towards for so long. I had to compete against so many people, I had to prove myself over and over and over again. But it is going to be so worth it. I was filled with a sense of purpose. I knew this was my path.*

*I look onto the street to see if I can find Bukana. I gave birth to Bukana four years ago. I spot Bukana digging a hole in the earth, planting some little green bushy things. I wave, Bukana waves back and smiles at me. Harry is there too, guiding Bukana gently, showing Bukana how to pat down the earth so the roots have the support they need to grow and flourish. Harry is the most beautiful and competent person I know, and one of the most accomplished mamas I've ever met. Harry has been my role model all these years, my hero. Bukana and Harry finish patting down the earth, Bukana takes Harry's hand and walks over to some adults sitting on the bench, and listen to their conversation. They turn around and wave at me, both smiling a sweet smile that grabs my heart and makes it leap.*

*I passed my last and final empathy exam two weeks ago. I had prepared for it for months. I knew it wasn't something that*

came to me naturally. The sustainable kind of empathy, the one where you don't lose yourself, the one where you don't burn yourself. I was pretty good at guessing what other people needed and making sure they got the appropriate support. But I was a slow learner in checking in with myself and making sure I was well in stock with the resources I was about to provide. The last three tests I had failed because of that, kept making the same mistake over and over again, forcing me to keep my job as a doctor, diagnosing diseases and prescribing medication day in and day out, eating my lunch with the other doctors, all of us pretending that we liked sitting with each other and pretending not to notice how we all were sneaking longing peeks over to the nurses table. It was all we wanted: Finally pass our nurse exam, which means we proved ourselves trustworthy to the great responsibility of actually making human connection with the patients, making sure they felt comfortable and secure, nourishing they're souls, helping them heal, giving them consolation in times of sadness, all the things which created meaning in a job, all the things we weren't aloud to do before we hadn't passed our final empathy exams.

I unpacked the nurse uniform that a doctor had brought to me the day before. It was made of beautiful soft material and hand made from local designers. I left the appartement and stepped onto the street, a new sense of pride in my step. I was radiating, people were turning their heads. I hopped on a bike and rode to the hospital, the wind blowing through my hair. I got off the bike and walked into the building. The doctor at reception smiled at me. «Lea! This is your first day as a nurse, am I right?» I nodded. «Congratulations. I hope I can join you soon»... and handed me my badge.

I worked with different patients all day long. I loved every second of it. I was glad for the rigorous training, listening to my

body for signals of drain, taking long breaks to regain energy to give all that care to my patients. After a morning of cancer patients and a lunch break at the nurses table I got to spend the afternoon at the maternity ward. I was a little nervous, but confident that I would do a good job. After all, Parenting-Mama-Empathy-Training was even more rigorous than Nurse-Empathy-Training. No wonder being a Parenting-Mama was the highest paid job in all of Care City. The training was rigorous. You had to start really young.

I walked into the room and walked up to the first family. The Parenting-Mama, the Pregnancy-Mama, the two Mama-Assistants and the two DNA-Mamas were all lying on the four meter long bed. The Pregnancy-Mama gently took the baby off her nipple and handed it over to the Parenting-Mama who latched the baby to their own nipple expertly.

I immediately had a flashback to the time when I was a Pregnancy-Mama and had given birth to Bukana. Harry and I had lain there together, on our backs, skin to skin, Bukana between us, we rolled Bukana back and forth ever so gently, feeding from Harry's nipple, then mine.

I smiled and opened my eyes. There were days when I regretted that I hadn't been more ambitious in high school, and hadn't started focusing on a Parenting-Mama-Career in my early years. But those days were over. This was my place. I was a nurse. My salary was incredible. The food was amazing. I walked towards the new family in front of me. I had some good years ahead of me, here in Care City.







## Test question

Since when has  
maternity leave  
aka motherhood  
vacation been  
available in Switzerland?



I gave birth to my child in 2019. That was 133 years after the first partially successful demand for an adequate relief for mothers before and after childbirth - and also 15 years after the introduction of maternity leave in Switzerland. It took almost 20 attempts on the federal level from the time the bill was proposed in 1945 for the necessary legal basis to be established for it to come into effect. I was the first in a series of 5 generations of mothers to get 14 weeks of paid „motherhood vacation“.

Ironically, Switzerland was the first European country to provide pregnant women and mothers with legal protection for the weeks following childbirth. And it did so as early as 1877, nineteen years before my great-great-grandmother gave birth.

However, this protection did not come with compensation. There was simply a ban on work. The question of how families were to support newborns was left up to them, which meant that poorer women often had to work illegally until their „protection period“ was over. The key question that accompanied these political discussions, which is still relevant today, was to what extent childbearing and family were a private matter or to what extent society should contribute to covering the financial risks and burdens associated with motherhood and starting a family. Old age and illness were already recognized as risks of societal concern, but the risks of childbirth and family are still controversial today.

My great-grandmother was eight years old when the first petition for maternity insurance was submitted in 1904 by the Federation of Swiss Women's Associations with the support of various workers' associations. The women's organizations demanded from the Federal Council, among other things, wage compensation for the duration of the ban on maternity work. The petition remained without result.

**1919, the Swiss delegation** to the first conference of the International Labor Organization in Washington approved the draft of a „Convention concerning the Employment of Women before and after Childbirth“. It provided for a six-week ban on employment after childbirth, the possibility of absence from work with a doctor's certificate for up to six weeks before childbirth, protection against dismissal during the entire period of absence, entitlement to adequate compensation, free treatment by a doctor or midwife, financed through public funds or an insurance.

**In 1921, accession** to the agreement was rejected by Parliament. The reasons were, on the one hand, the costs involved and, on the other, the argument that childbirth was a natural process that did not require special social protection. An argument that was brought forth exclusively by male bourgeois politicians.

After that, nothing happened for almost three decades until, of all people, Catholic conservative circles gave a new push towards Swiss maternity insurance. In the period between the world wars, in the face of falling birth rates and growing divorce figures, debates had intensified about the extent to which the state and society should assume responsibility for the upbringing of children and the protection of the family. In the expansion of social insurance, maternity insurance stood for an individualistic approach that placed the individual woman at the center. In contrast, there were social policy models that emphasized the collective needs of the family community and sought to expand family protection through, for example, family allowances. In the latter, the focus was on supporting the traditional family model with the man in the breadwinner role.

In 1927, the Maternity Protection Act was created in Germany.

In 1930, my grandmother was born. Fifteen years later, the mandate to create maternity insurance was included in the Federal Constitution. After the withdrawal of the popular initiative „For the Family“ launched by the Catholic Conservatives in 1941, the Federal Council's counter-proposal for a family protection article was adopted in November 1945. Afterwards, however, the government linked the proposal to the revision of the Health and Accident Insurance Act, which led to a further delay. This was because the 1964 revision of the KUVG only extended maternity protection for insured women, and further reforms were stalled as a result of the double no vote on the 1974 realignment of health insurance.

In 1946, women in France were granted 14 weeks of maternity protection and 50% compensation for loss of earnings.

In 1952, a new maternity protection law was enacted in Germany that guaranteed compensation for loss of earnings.

In 1963, mothers in Sweden received 6 months of maternity protection leave. Fathers received the same entitlement starting in 1974.

In 1975, the UK introduced its first maternity leave legislation through the Employment Protection Act. Female employees were entitled to maternity leave and pay only if they had worked continuously for two years full time or five years part time for the same employer preceding the 11th week before the expected week of childbirth.



**My mother was 17 years old** when the popular initiative „For better protection of maternity“ was submitted in 1980. It demanded a maternity leave of 16 weeks with full wage replacement for employed persons or appropriate daily allowance for non-employed persons, a parental leave of at least 9 months with protection against dismissal and income-related insurance benefits, and finally coverage of all medical, nursing and hospital costs. The initiative is rejected in 1984 with 84% of votes against it. Not a single canton voted in favor.

**In 1987, I was born.** In that year, The Voters rejected a maternity benefit for all women for 16 weeks based on the model of the income replacement scheme with a 71% No vote.

Four years later, the women's strike of 1991 and the arrival of the new Minister of the Interior, Ruth Dreifuss (SP/GE), in 1993 brought new momentum to the issue.

**In 1994, the „Petition for Paid Maternity Leave“** of at least 16 weeks for working women is submitted with 27,000 signatures by various women's groups.

**In 1995, the Federal Council agrees** in principle to the establishment of maternity insurance and instructs the Federal Department of Home Affairs to draw up a proposal on its structure and financing. At the national rally on November 25, the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Family Protection Article of 1945 in the Federal Constitution, hundreds of people in Bern demand the immediate introduction of maternity insurance.

**In 1998, parliament approves** the federal law on maternity insurance in December. It provides for a 14-week maternity leave for working women with an income replacement of 80% as well as a one-time basic benefit for mothers in modest finan-

cial circumstances. It was to be financed by a 0.25 percentage point increase in value-added tax. The bill failed in the 1999 referendum.

After this defeat, the cantons of Geneva and Jura independently implemented projects for cantonal maternity insurance, and the four parliamentarians Jacqueline Fehr (SP), Thérèse Meyer (CVP), Ursula Haller (SVP) and the initiator Pierre Triponez (FDP) joined forces and submitted a bill to the Federal Council and Parliament that provided for financing through the income replacement scheme. This bill ultimately helped maternity compensation achieve a breakthrough. 55.5 percent voted in favor of the bill on September 26, 2004. The revision came into force on July 1, 2005.



Since then, working mothers have been entitled to 14 weeks' paid leave after the birth of their child. During this time, they are entitled to 80% of the salary they earned before the birth. If mothers have worked less than 5 months during their pregnancy, the entitlement lapses. During the first 8 weeks after the birth, maternity leave is subject to an absolute ban on employment. Mothers are not allowed to work during this period, even if you want to - and not for a single day. It's supposed to be a vacation, after all.

In 2017, the Swiss Federal Council rejected the popular initiative „For a reasonable paternity leave - for the benefit of the whole family“. It called for 4 weeks of income replacement for fathers after childbirth.

In January 2021, the statutory entitlement to paternity leave in Switzerland will be increased from just one day to two weeks.

Since 2016, up to four people have been allowed to register as legal parents in Ontario, Canada.



**Sources:** <https://www.parlament.ch/blog/Pages/unendliche-geschichte-der-mutterschaftsversicherung.aspx> // <https://www.geschichtedersozialensicherheit.ch/risikogeschichte/familie-mutter-und-vaterschaft> // <https://www.swissinfo.ch/ger/mutterschaftsurlaub-wird-reality/4215830> // <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutterschaftsgeld#Schweiz> // <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/42853/ontario-passes-law-ensuring-equal-recognition-for-all-parents-and-children> // <https://www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/medienmitteilungen.msg-id-68457.html> // <https://www.striking-women.org/module/workplace-issues-past-and-present/maternity-and-paternity-leave-and-pay#History%20of%20the%20struggle%20for%20maternity%20leave%20and%20pay> <https://splash-db.eu/policydocument/employment-protection-act-1975/>

## 10 Reasons why anyone who hasn't given birth but identifies as a parent\* could take the lead in childcare for the first year after birth.

1. They are not weakened from childbirth
2. They are less hormonally vulnerable
3. They have a greater chance of having an intact anus
4. If they are men, they may have more muscles and thus less back pain
5. They can catch up on physical bonding; the person giving birth had a massive head start due to pregnancy!
6. They don't need time to do the postpartum workout
7. They allow the person who gave birth to refocus and recover
8. They can get to know this new human
9. They can form parenting gangs
10. They advance equality

\*in the heteronormative family setup of today, that would be „fathers“

«I'm Sam (they/them) and Lea's cousin. I'm trans fem which means I was assigned male as my gender by society at birth but actually am something much different.

It's only part of my story, but it's relevant for this pamphlet. Society makes it difficult for me to be a parent - a mother. I live as far outside of the heteropatriarchy as I can. It's much safer that way. But it's also much more beautiful. I have a close friend Jae (they/them) with whom I will be a platonic co-parent. We want different things from our coparenting relationship than we want from our romantic relationships with others. Jae has a uterus and our embryos were conceived with sperm I froze before I medically transitioned. It's pretty cool - most queer families don't get to have all the parents be biologically related. We will both breastfeed (you don't need a uterus for that) and will share the labor and the joy of parenting with our chosen family. What we are doing is hard, but it isn't harder than dealing with all of the expectations of nuclear family living. It's just different hard.»

The program is published in the context of the one-woman-show „Mama Love“, the first project of the new theater formation Blair Witcher Projects under the direction of Lea Witcher.

Brimming with sardonic humor, “Mama Love” is a one-woman show in which performer Lea Witcher plays with the absurdities of the idealized and toxic images of motherhood in which she finds herself enmeshed. Against the backdrop of the 2020 Swiss vote on granting new fathers two weeks’ paternity leave, she feels the urgent need to go public with an unembellished account of her first fortnight as a mother. Using the persona “Lea Blair Witcher”, she links lived experience with current discourses on motherhood and sketches out quizzical utopian models of life in a society beyond the bounds of patriarchy. Using the tools of stand-up comedy, and a large dose of wicked wit, Witcher thrashes out a path through a jungle of everyday situations and social clichés while reflecting on what we find funny and why.

Opening night: 10.12.2021, Fabriktheater, Rote Fabrik  
Zurich, Switzerland

Concept / Text / Performance Lea Witcher / Dramaturgy: Kathrin Vesper // Oeil Exterieur: Fabienne Hadorn // Production Management: Kathrin Walde // Music: Marena Witcher; Max Witcher // Costume: Lydia Sonderegger // Graphics: Tabea Guhl // Oeil Exterieur for stage and lighting: Lukas Sander // Technical: Silvana Castelberg // Co-Production Fabriktheater Rote Fabrik

Graphics/Picture: Tabea Guhl, Moorea Derradj // Photos: Yoshiko Kusano, Tabea Guhl, Florian Butsch, Leni O., Pia Grimbühler

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# Literature, Reading List, Inspirations

**Alexis Pauline Gumbs**, China Martens,  
Mai`a Williams, *Revolutionary Mothering*  
- *Love on the Front Lines*, PM Press 2016

**Sophie Lewis**, *Full Surrogacy Now - Feminism against Family*, Verso Books 2019

**Silvia Federici**, *Wages Against Housework*, 1975

**Rahel Cusk**, *Lebenswerk - Über das Mutterwerden*, Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin 2019

**Paula-Irene Villa Braslavsky** im Interview mit Ulrike Wagener «Unsere Körper passieren uns» - *Die Soziologin Paula-Irene Villa Braslavsky über die natürliche Geburt, Leaky Bodies und Lebendigkeit*, Neues Deutschland, 20.12.2019

**Maggie Nelson**, *The Argonauts*, Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota 2015

**Orna Donath**, *Regretting Motherhood, Wenn Mütter bereuen*, Knaus-Verlag, Köln 2016

**Antonia Baum**, *Stilleben*, Piper-Verlag, München 2019

**Sheila Heti**, *Mother Hood*, Vintage, London 2018

**Liv Strömquist**, *Der Ursprung der Liebe*, avant-Verlag, Berlin 2010

**Liv Strömquist**, *Der Ursprung der Welt*, avant-Verlag, Berlin 2017

**Svenja Gräfen**, *Radikale Selbstfürsorge Jetzt! - Eine Feministische Perspektive*, Eden Books Hamburg 2021

**Sarah Diehl**, *Die Uhr die nicht tickt*, Arche Literatur Verlag 2018

**Carolyn Wiedemann**, *Zart und frei - Vom Sturz des Patriarchats*, Matthes und Seitz Berlin 2021

**Ingeborg Stadelmann**, *Hebammen-Sprechstunde*, Ingeborg Stadelmann-Eigenverlag Kempten 1994

**Remo H. Largo**, *Babyjahre*, Carlsen-Verlag, Hamburg 1993

**Mali Lazell & Julia Haenni**, *Ich will alles!* Streikportraits, edition clandestin 2021

**Anke Stelling**, *Fürsorge, Verbrecher* Verlag Berlin 2017

**Fabriktheater** Rein-  
Fabrik  
Zürich

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 **Stadt Zürich**  
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**Kanton Zürich**  
Fachstelle Kultur

Elisabeth  
Weber  
Stiftung

Albert Huber-Stiftung

Thank you

**Silvie**, who kept nudging me to finally do my own project.

**The team of Premio Switzerland**, through which „Mama Love“ 2021 could win the second place.

**The performance group „The Agency“** for extensive research on motherhood on the Telegram group Stretch Marks - we loved using the material.

**All the accomplices** who came to the try-outs and gave empowering and critical feedback.

**My friends** for the conversations and the baby-sitting.

**Laura** for the pumping machine, which was not only used to supply my child with milk: its sounds form the musical basis for the show and can be heard in almost every piece of music.

**Johannes** for the „borrowed“ horse t-shirt

**My mom**, who gave birth to me; my mom and dad, who parented me and support me to this day, in everything I do.

**Rahel**, who is my Mama Role Model and Mama Mentor

**Flo**, who always has my back ❤️  
and **Jimmy Lou**.



[www.mamalove.show](http://www.mamalove.show)  
#mamalove\_show

«HÄTTE ICH DIESE SHOW  
FRÜHER GESEHEN,  
ICH HÄTTE AUF MEHR  
WOCHEN BESTANDEN!»



INITIANT VATERSCHAFTSURLAUB 2020

«WIR BAUEN SOFORT  
NOCHMAL UM!  
WIR BEZAHLEN DAS  
SELBER!»



ARCHITEKTEN DES NEUEN TRIEMLI-  
SPITALGEBÄUDES

«ICH WILL  
NACH  
HAUSE!»



REDAKTEUR  
NZZ AM SONNTAG



**mama  
LOVE**

Ich bin nicht mehr dicht