

The graphic features a pink background with a circular inset on the left showing a bookshelf. At the top left is a cartoon bee logo. The text 'book buzz' is in a large, white, sans-serif font, with the definition '[book(s) + (buzz)ing]' below it. The author's name 'LINDA MCCAULEY FREEMAN' is written in large, bold, brown letters. To the left of the name, it says 'LIVE INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR'. Below the name, the date and time 'SUNDAY SEPT 25, 2022 11AM - 12 PM EST' are listed. At the bottom left, it says 'JOURNAL OF EXPRESSIVE WRITING'. On the right, there is a portrait of Linda McCauley Freeman, a woman with long dark hair, smiling. Below her portrait is a small image of the book cover for 'The Family Plot' by Linda McCauley Freeman, which shows a family sitting on a bench.

Book Review:

[The Family Plot](#) (2022) by Linda McCauley Freeman

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[Journal of Expressive Writing](#)

“From One Generation to the Next: Agency and Dreams”

Linda McCauley Freeman’s new collection of poetry, [The Family Plot](#) (Backroom Window Press, 2022) follows the narrator and her family, knitted together in a cohesive drama, complete with trauma and narrative, a plot, as the title aptly states. This memoir in poetry explores the inevitable losses that come with time and the love that bonds family members.

“(…) but I am a person not a thing/the heart you called home,” writes McCauley Freeman in the poem “I Am.” This persona poem gives voice to the poet’s mother who is suffering from an advanced form of dementia that has rendered her speechless. Throughout the book we come to know this woman well, and in the poem she is asking for recognition that she is still the person we meet in other poems, and not an object to be propped up, talked over, or avoided. That she is, in fact, still a person, albeit trapped somewhere inside.

One common thread running through this plot is the lineage of women, from grandmother to mother to narrator, and the contrast of the lives of these three women through the generations. Compared to her mother and grandmother, the narrator has more agency to choose her life beyond marriage, motherhood and homemaking. In "Locked," the narrator points out that her mother was "(...) locked into a life she wasn't born to live, into the time she was born into." This suggests that the narrator's mother, born in Depression-era America, lacked a certain degree of agency to freely choose her life, including, perhaps, the choice to marry the narrator's father and have the narrator and her siblings. That her mother, the family matriarch, is not there by choice but rather, a sort of passive settling is a recurring thread in this poetry collection, and throughout the book, poems about the narrator's mother's unfulfilled dreams appear.

For example, in "My Parents, Aging Together," the narrator writes, "Her idea of heaven is being the oldest person in the/Ph.D. program at Columbia University and telling/them to stick it up their ass/ if they don't like it." This reveals that the harangued wife and mother as the narrator knew her once had dreams of higher education and a life beyond the family and home. From the narrator's perspective, her mother appeared a certain way: "All we saw was our mother who'd grown/ short, squat and grey with the five of us ("Our Mother Always Told Us She Had Lots of Boyfriends")." This ties back to the idea that a family member is a person and not a thing or an object, but a unique individual beyond the communal family unit. In "Still Life With Chairs," the narrator sees a chair and thinks, "This was the chair that held her dreams (...)" ("Still Life With Chairs"). The narrator shows that she is aware that her mother had dreams beyond what the home and the family offered her, and lived a private inner life separate from the communal family plot.

The narrator's grandmother, too, is portrayed similarly: as a woman of turn-of-the-century America who followed custom of marriage, motherhood and the home, of obedience to cultural norms. "For ninety-two years you followed/ someone else's vision of your life" ("Unspoken"). This poem unfolds to tell a story of an aging matriarch whose chief life creations have been her children and grandchildren, who once bobbed her hair in a 1920s trend to the dismay of her husband. Is the narrator questioning her grandmother's choice to be a part of this family plot? To what extent did this individual choose her fate as wife to a certain man, and a matriarch for the sequel of descendants that form the narrator's complex family?

The lineage of women in the narrator's family is centered on the narrator and her generationally different life as a Generation X American woman who has experienced divorce and non-nuclear family planning. The narrator ponders if she is the apex of what the generations before her were, since she was born at an opportune time in history where she is given the full range of choices to forge her life, through education, career, and egalitarian partnership with a man rather than a marriage forged in economic necessity. The self-actualization that is available to the narrator was not for her mother and grandmother, and the narrator asks if she is the final product of generations of unfulfilled dreams. The narrator sums it up as, "After all, aren't I/ the best parts of her?" in "My Parents, Aging Together."

Beyond this theme of intergeneration agency and self-actualization, the book explores other tangents of the narrator's family, from her disparate relationship to her sister to that with her brothers, her father, her grandfather. These relationships center on the experiences of how human beings can be propelled into a life they never asked for, assigned to family members to live alongside with for life, and what insights and feelings that this arrangement can yield. There is a saying that every moment is a memory, and *The Family Plot* ponders the discrete moments lived alongside family members that, in retrospect have created eternal memories that the narrator has pieced together in this reflective work, ultimately pondering her role as the culmination of her mother and grandmother's dreams come to fruition as a liberated woman of letters.

The book is available on Amazon in both print and Kindle formats. Linda can be reached through www.LindaMcCauleyFreeman.com and you can follow her on Twitter [@LindaMccFreeman](https://twitter.com/LindaMccFreeman) and Facebook [@LindaMccauleyFreeman](https://facebook.com/LindaMccauleyFreeman)