**About the authors**

**About Alicia K Anderson:**

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**Author Bio**

Alicia K. Anderson has a Ph.D. in Mythological Studies with Emphasis in Depth Psychology. After over twenty years in corporate America, she cycled through about seven years of severe burnout. This burnout impacted her work, home life, and ultimately led both to an autism diagnosis and the onset of chronic illness. The autoimmune arthritis inspired her to move to New Mexico, where she faced the reality of wildfire a mile from her new home. Applying her academic studies to her own navigation and lessons learned through professional and neurodivergent burnout, she offers *Burnout Recovery* as a path to lasting recovery and ongoing resilience.

**Excerpts of the author’s personal story as quoted in the introduction to *Burnout Recovery***

I experienced cycles of professional and personal burnout from 2016 to 2023. I say “cycles” because like many others, I managed to recover from burnout temporarily but found that it was always coming and going to some degree.

In 2016, I began describing my digital marketing career as “soul-killing.” Once satisfying, because it required my pattern-finding and data-analysis skills, the world of content strategy, search engine optimization, and technical website implementations had grown meaningless to me. I felt like nothing I did made a difference. I oversaw my department at work, managing a team and ensuring that several big projects ran smoothly. It was a daily grind of ever-increasing responsibility and stress, with very few tangible rewards and no end in sight. There was no sense that “when this project is over, I will be able to relax”; no clear, finite end to the sprint that was being asked of me. Instead, it was a fast-paced marathon of work. Anyone who has gone for a run knows that’s not sustainable—and an easy way to get injured. I had an ever-increasing workload and number of people relying on me across the website-development, editorial, and marketing teams. When I quit my job, it took five people to handle the various projects I’d been working on. Where had that support been while I was still there, begging for help? Having five more people on my team could have prevented my burnout!

At the same time, I was tackling the bulk of the mental load of housekeeping and homemaking.

I was the breadwinner in our household, which meant that my job wasn’t something I could afford to just step away from. There was no time for hobbies, personal passions, or creative pursuits. No matter how much I asked for help from my boss or my husband at the time, there was no real easing of the pressure.

Although I had signs of a chronic autoimmune condition as early as 1998, I wasn’t diagnosed with one until a debilitating flare of psoriatic arthritis stopped me in my tracks in early 2017. The pain was devastating. I couldn’t dress myself, let alone continue doing the bulk of the work at the office and at home. This chronic illness taught me several lessons about burnout, and hopefully I can pass those lessons on to readers before their bodies provide similarly painful instruction. Avoiding long-term illness is one of the biggest reasons to prioritize the prevention of chronic stress and burnout.

As I sought treatment for chronic illness and began my journey to recovering from burnout, I began working from home instead of the office. This was in 2017, so I had my experiences of cabin fever and work-from-home stress a few years before everyone else did during the “lockdowns” of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, like so many people discovered in 2020, I found that having control over some of the sensory elements of my environment was healing and helpful. This led me down several research paths—straight through to an autism diagnosis in 2020. While I deeply resonated with the descriptions of professional burnout, I discovered that I also had autistic burnout, as well.

In my own autistic burnout, I noticed that work that used to be easy for me no longer came so easily. I needed things to be quieter and darker (and then even quieter and even darker) to function in a space. Autistic meltdowns can look like angry outbursts or like panic attacks, and I had my share of both of those. I also lost a great deal of my ability to “mask,” or to pretend to function gracefully in neurotypical society. Making eye contact grew more uncomfortable—to the point of being intolerable. And my ability to “fake it” with social niceties dropped to nearly nonexistent levels. The layer of autistic burnout on top of my professional burnout made working not just difficult and meaningless, but downright torturous. Unfortunately, many adults must experience the devastation of neurodivergent burnout before it becomes apparent that we may not be neurotypical.

After I started working from home, I also began seriously pursuing a passion project and enrolled in graduate school. In the PhD program for Mythological Studies with Emphasis in Depth Psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute, I was able to learn and grow in new directions, separately from my career. This program focuses a great deal on understanding myths and folktales as metaphors and on using metaphors as psychological road maps for how to function in the world. What I offer in this book is a rich, complex ecological metaphor that helps me to conceptualize burnout, recovery, and prevention in a real and tangible way.

The metaphor that we will explore is that of wildfire. In addition to my lived experience of professional burnout and of physical and autistic burnout, I have also experienced a wildfire. In 2022, the largest wildfire in New Mexico history reached within one and a half miles of my house—a house I had purchased just four months earlier. This was the Hermit’s Peak / Calf Canyon wildfire, and I continue to live in and among its scars. I watched the efforts to contain it, and I pursue an ongoing effort to maintain fire safety on my property and around my home. Climate change has resulted in more frequent and destructive wildfires that burn more acreage and are harder to fight; wildfire is a lived reality for an increasing number of people, and it’s very close to home for me.

**About Linda Buzzell (Author of the Foreward)**

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**Bio:**

Linda Buzzell, MA, LMFT, is a psychotherapist with over 40 years’ experience, who has specialized in ecopsychology and ecotherapy since around 2000. She is adjunct faculty at Pacifica Graduate Institute, in their Depth Psychology / Ecopsychology programs.

In 2009 she co-edited (with Craig Chalquist) the anthology *Ecotherapy: Healing with Nature in Mind*, which is often cited as a foundational text in applied ecopsychology and ecotherapy.