

## **Former educator confronts the hidden legacy of childhood trauma in powerful new memoir**

From afar, Julianna Burmesch's formative years looked perfect: A father with a good, steady job. A stay-at-home mother who loved to read. A spacious yard filled with toys and games for her and her two siblings. Yet for those who looked just a little closer, it was the house on the block that other parents didn't want their kids to visit.

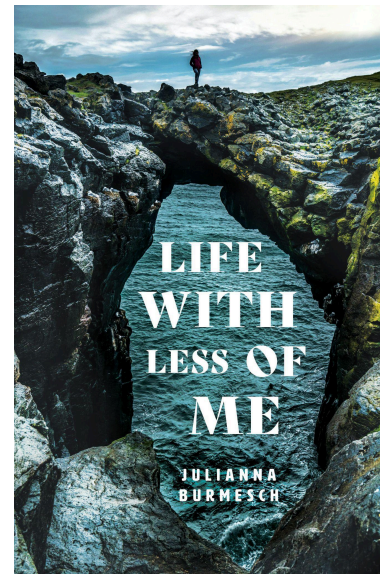
On June 23, 2026, Burmesch releases her memoir, "Life with Less of Me," a candid and deeply reflective account of growing up in a home where the front door hid dysfunction, abuse, alcoholism, neglect and fear.

Inside that seemingly ordinary house, her father's blind selfishness, Jekyll-and-Hyde moods, and fists that left bruises on his wife dominated the home, inflicting daily trauma on the family. Her mother tried her best, but over time, the weight of her husband's abuse led to lethargy and parental neglect, burdening her children with even more hardship as her autonomy was slowly whittled away.

In "Life with Less of Me," Burmesch explores a truth many survivors understand: Abuse doesn't just affect us in the moment. We carry trauma throughout our lives, sometimes even passing it to the next generation. With unflinching honesty, she reflects on how her upbringing shaped her identity, influenced the trajectory of her life and even affected her health as an adult.

Determined not to pass her scars to her own children, Burmesch fought to educate herself, heal from her past and embrace resilience. Through self-examination, professional growth and an unwavering commitment to breaking generational cycles, she became the successful, fulfilled woman she is today.

"Life with Less of Me" offers hope to readers navigating the lingering effects of childhood trauma and serves as a reminder that while we may begin life with less than we deserve, healing and wholeness are still within reach.





## **“Life With Less Of Me”**

Julianna Burmesch | June 23, 2026 | Books Fluent | Memoir

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## **About the Author**



**Julianna Burmesch** is a former school principal, speech pathologist, early brain development trainer, parent educator, and child advocate. In writing her memoir, “Life with Less of Me” (Books Fluent, June 23, 2026), she wants to help people understand the effects of adverse childhood experiences and unresolved trauma on one's long-term physical and mental health. Julianna is a mother, grandmother, potter, and occasional jewelry artist. She lives in Wisconsin with her husband, John, and her beautiful dogs, Bella and Ruby.



## **In an interview, Julianna Burmesch can discuss:**

- The lasting impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- How fear, combined with abuse, creates lasting trauma
- How childhood trauma shapes the body's stress response well into adulthood
- How trauma can influence leadership and parenting
- The concept of “shrinking yourself” for survival
- How trauma can quietly limit a person's life
- The difficult work of self-forgiveness
- The powerful message she would give her younger self
- Breaking cycles of generational trauma
- Practical techniques for managing trauma triggers
- The connection between childhood trauma and long-term health
- How trauma affects a patient's experience within the medical system
- The healing power of compassionate care
- What educators need to understand about trauma-affected students
- Why she blended memoir with science in her book
- Policy changes that could prevent childhood trauma
- Why poverty itself should be recognized as an Adverse Childhood Experience



## An Interview with Julianna Burmesch

### **What are Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and how have they played a role in your life?**

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that occur before the age of 18, including abuse, neglect, and forms of household instability such as divorce or substance use. My ACEs include my own experiences of being physically abused and neglected, and my witnessing domestic partner violence, as well as living with parents with mental health issues and alcoholism. While the accidental shooting of my brother by my grandfather is only mentioned briefly in the book, that was also a significant trauma. The sexual violence I experienced as a young adult doesn't count as an adverse childhood experience, although it added significantly to my accumulation of trauma.

Some people might question whether a single experience with physical abuse counts as an Adverse Childhood Experience. It is the fear that the abuse might happen again that significantly contributes to the accumulation of trauma. When my father almost stabbed me, he kicked me as I covered under the table. My father's unpredictability activated stress hormones throughout my childhood, solidified pathways, and contributed to the activation of my fight/flight response. It still causes me to flinch even when my husband touches me in a way that I am not expecting, such as putting a hand on my knee or touching my head. Loud noises can also activate this response. I spent years of my life seeking silence, and when I work in my pottery studio, I typically do it without music and only the sound of the wheel quietly spinning. Silence means safety.

In my roles as a parent and principal, I have been triggered by my need to protect the people I care about. This, on occasion, has caused me to unleash the dragon inside of me, and respond with anger such as when my son's teacher or an aide verbally attacks a student.

### **As a child, you learned to make yourself "small" for safety. When did you first realize that the idea of shrinking yourself had followed you into adulthood?**



The Ketamine dream brought that into focus. What started as a desire to be safe and not let others see my flaws, depression, or anxiety resulted in a shrinking life similar to that of my mother. She lost parts of herself to please her parents and survive her husband. I lost an important part of myself, my job, and my mission to improve the lives of children, to depression and illness. This book is allowing me to reclaim that part of my life.

**Some of your memories of your parents are warm, even loving, despite the abuse. How did you navigate writing those moments without minimizing the harm they caused?**

My experience with taking care of my dad when I had cancer really brought perspective regarding my mother's neglect. Before I started treatment, I was able to focus all my energy on Dad's needs, and I was able to manage him. However, when the cancer sapped my physical and mental energy, I lost the ability to use my adult mind and became that abused and neglected child again, without the cognitive resources to problem-solve his behavior. I could have dumped all the alcohol out in the house. I could have told him that it was my home or the nursing home. The brain pathways forged by my previous trauma triggered fight, flight, freeze, or fawn initially to protect my childhood self. Unfortunately, those pathways still work to activate fear responses, causing me to "fawn" by putting up with his behavior until I finally unleashed my anger (fight response) by yelling at him. Similarly, my mother, before children, was able to meet my dad's all-encompassing needs. However, after the stress of having children and managing an abuser, she was similarly triggered and likely did not have access to the cognitive resources to respond appropriately.

**One of the most haunting scenes is your mother lying across the railroad tracks while you watched from the car as a child. How has your understanding of that moment changed over time?**

My mom spent much of her adult life on the precipice of a cliff with my dad standing in front of her. Her choice was to stand and suffer his abuse or step backward and be free, but leave her children behind. I see now that her choice to stand was what protected us.

**You've struggled not only to forgive your parents, but to forgive yourself. What was the hardest part of extending compassion inward?**

The hardest part was realizing that all parents are imperfect. Every flaw I saw in myself equaled failure. It wasn't until I was able to see myself as a child, worthy of unconditional



positive regard despite her mistakes, that I was able to heal. It was easy to forgive my mother because I was able to relate to her experience with my father. Forgiving my father is something I have chosen to do. I visualized him as a young child and know that his own childhood experiences or even a genetic fluke likely contributed to his narcissistic behavior. I have learned that carrying anger is a very heavy load and wears both physically and mentally on the bearer of that load. It was time to put it down.

**If you could go back and talk to yourself as a child, what would you say to young Julianna?**

That she is lovable, capable, and that everyone makes mistakes. I would tell her that I love her with unconditional positive regard.

**In your book, you describe the immense guilt you carried when you spanked your daughter, breaking a promise you made to yourself. What did that moment teach you about trauma triggers and generational cycles?**

Trauma activates during stress. Your body remembers traumatic experiences and can act out in a similar way. It is important to process that trauma and recognize the triggers. I was triggering myself with the message that I was a bad parent. Once I learned to recognize those messages and rephrase them, I was able to prevent overreaction and use my adult mind to problem solve the situation thus stopping the generational cycle. It is difficult. I am still working to identify triggers and have learned some strategies to reground myself such as taking a minute to touch and name things in the environment or eating a piece of sour candy. In social environments however, it is more difficult. The key is to recognize a situation that is likely to be a trigger and therapeutically work to process it.

**Your book explores how early experiences shape brain development. Some parents might hear that and worry about all the little mistakes they've made along the way. What would you say to reassure parents who fear they may have already "messed something up?"**

We are all imperfect parents! When I was a young mother, I thought I could be perfect, and when my infant son was injured, I couldn't forgive myself. How could I have allowed that to happen? The truth is, it was an accident, and I didn't become a better parent until I forgave myself. If your child experienced multiple traumatic experiences, the impact of



those experiences can be mitigated by getting professional help for the child (and yourself if needed). Don't wait until you are in your 60s!

**Your book draws a strong connection between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and long-term health outcomes. When did you first begin to see the link between your childhood and your medical crises?**

I recognized the toll my ACEs had on me when I attended the training as an administrator. At that time, I had not experienced a lot of health issues other than losing my appendix and gallbladder and experiencing severe claustrophobia. The ACEs training did help me to connect my elevator accident with the claustrophobia and my issues as a young parent. As I look back today, I wonder whether going untreated for that arm infection and many others as a child, such as ear infections and a dental abscess, contributed to my tendency to get severe infections as an adult as well as some not included in the book. It is difficult to draw a straight line from a traumatic experience in childhood to illnesses as an adult. However, there is a lot of information about the effects of cortisol on the body. Reactivating trauma releases cortisol and that repeated release throughout a person's life eats away at organs causing health issues.

**You survived necrotizing fasciitis, cancer, sepsis and numerous surgeries. How did your trauma history shape the way you experienced medical care, especially moments that felt violating or dismissive?**

For a long time, I told myself that the emergency room doctor abused me because I was seen as a nobody, a poor college student with no family to stand by my side. As a result, I would dress up to go to a doctor appointment and wear expensive jewelry in an effort to say, "I am someone with resources, and you need to respect me."

I still bring John, my husband, along to important appointments. I think the Ketamine experience was so traumatic because I was again alone, without a family member by my side due to COVID.

My trauma has kept me from speaking up when I felt I should. As I have dealt with it, I am more likely now to change doctors and speak up.

When I had necrotizing fasciitis and the doctor removed the gauze from my hip, I again felt abused and mistreated. However, the care of the (mostly male) nurses and their kind



patience with me despite my misery put me in a state where I could forgive the doctor. Treating someone with unconditional positive regard and grace is as healing as the physical care they gave me.

**As someone who worked in schools, what do you hope educators take away from your book?**

Like parenting, teaching is very difficult especially if you yourself have experienced childhood trauma. I encourage teachers to keep an eye on their own mental health and seek assistance if needed. Treating children with unconditional positive regard by forgiving mistakes (while still enforcing logical, fair consequences if needed) can enhance behavior by ensuring a safe and loving environment. School was a safe place for me, and that's why I did everything I could to be there as long as possible each day. I would ask administrators to create an environment of expectations where teachers know they will be supported when they feel triggered by a student. Schools should have networks to ensure that all children are treated with the dignity they deserve.

**In the epilogue, you shift into educator mode and explain the science of early brain development. Why was it important to blend your memoir with research-backed advocacy?**

I wanted this book to be read by a wide audience including parents, grandparents and professionals. I want people to see and feel the real life impact of childhood trauma in daily experiences and on health. It would have been much easier for me to write this book scientifically, but I knew fewer people would read it. Reliving the trauma through writing was difficult but also helpful in my recovery. I wrote the epilogue in order to help people connect my experiences with the science of trauma in a way that is understandable while also offering a plan of action for the future. I hope I have succeeded.

**In your call to action at the end of your book, you advocate for birth support for the first year of life, publicly funded childcare and trauma-informed mental health access. If policymakers read this book, what is the one change you believe could most dramatically alter a child's life trajectory?**

That is a very difficult question. Research shows that intervening during the first year of life to ensure attachment and support child development is extremely effective and can get children off to a great start emotionally, socially and cognitively. However, parental stress is also a factor to consider. If a parent does not have the finances to provide



sufficient food, housing and care for their child, it also has a significant detrimental effect on a child. Living in poverty is an adverse childhood experience.

Imagine, a parent making \$20 an hour (about \$38,000/year) having to pay part of that amount for child care (even with subsidies) also paying for food and housing in today's economy. That financial stress takes a toll not only on the parents but also the children. New Mexico now offers no-cost universal child care to families. Imagine the difference that would make in the experience of a family, or even a family making a lot more with childcare rivaling the annual cost of college tuition. Quality universal child care is an important support for families.