

Open Mind

Wookie Is Not His Real Name

Words Merrideth McDowell

IN 1998, a routine afternoon hitting jumps in Breckenridge, CO, quickly turned into a defining day for aspiring pro Brian “Wookie” Fleming. Slush moguls in the landing of a kicker led to a broken femur and career-ending injury. In her book, *Wookie Is Not His Real Name*, Vail-based writer Laura Liefv details the trauma of this harrowing, life-changing event.

Not only had Wookie snapped the strongest bone in the body, but broken too was his chance at competing and filming, or perhaps snowboarding at all. He’d rearranged his entire life, even dropping out of college, to pursue snowboarding, which had been upended instantaneously by his injury. Though undergoing such severe physical trauma threw Wookie into an equally challenging and deteriorating mental state, Laura illustrates how this pinnacle period ultimately fuels Wookie’s subsequent success.

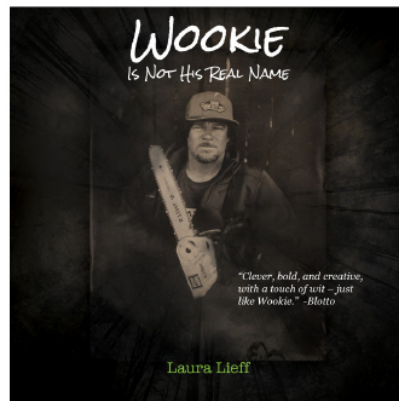
Throughout the run of her 99-page book, Laura takes readers through Wookie’s intriguing life chapters—some as humorous as the legend’s nickname would suggest. The book traces Wookie’s history from humble SoCal beginnings to college in Arizona before his eventual move to Colorado, to the early 2000s when he and his friend, Mark Jero, created an event at Colorado’s Beaver Creek called Log Masters. The freestyle-focused gathering went on for 13 years and served as one of Wookie’s defining contributions to the Colorado snowboarding community. The illegal nature of the Log Masters event also led to Wookie being barred from purchasing a pass by Vail Resorts, which the snowboarding community took personally. Local uproar went full bore to ensure that he could get back on the lifts.

Countless people come into the story to lend their insight to Wookie’s legend, from his miscreant freerider days to his status as a beloved community staple cheered for his

practiced persistence, effortless passion and especially for his dedication to and love of the mountains and people around him. Among them is Burton Snowboards’ principal photographer and original member of the Arizona Posse, Dean “Blotto” Gray, who took in Wookie when he moved to Flagstaff. Known for sporting an unruly hair and beard combo, it was during his time living with Blotto that Brian was given the nickname “Wookie,” in reference to the furry humanoids featured in the Star Wars saga. In Laura’s book, Blotto says, “It’s wise to keep an open mind and that’s what I saw in Brian. Plus, I could tell he was a great dude on the inside, so that formed a proper and prosperous friendship over the course of two decades and counting. If your friend embraces the nickname ‘Wookie,’ then he must be a cool cat, which he is. That’s why we have always loved ‘The Wook’—he’s just cool and down for a good time.”

Whether it be through snowboarding, taxi driving, fishing, or mountain biking (the dude really gets around), it’s apparent Wookie has left his mark on many realms in the mountain community. While abundant anecdotes make the book a fun page-turner, it’s Wookie’s triumph over physical and mental turmoil, and seeing him use his passions to find solace in the aftermath of such a life-altering injury, that makes *Wookie Is Not His Real Name* worth reading. It illustrates the power of the human spirit, the healing power of snowboarding and the magic that’s made when the two are combined. It goes to show how every person in our community can make positive, longstanding impacts, no matter how funny their nickname may be. ▲

A paperback copy of Wookie Is Not His Real Name retails for \$14.95 at various outlets. See lauraliefv.com for a list of independent bookstores currently carrying copies.



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Photo: Miriah Clarke

