

Wookie Is Not His Real Name

Q&A with Author Laura Lieff

INTERVIEW BY LEXI REICH

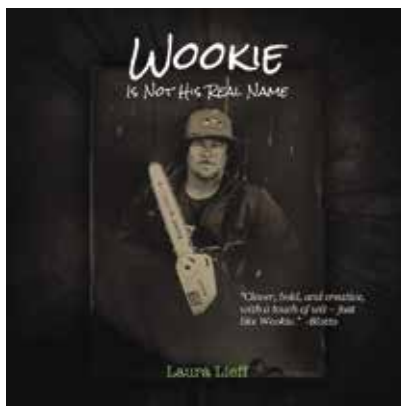
The journey to writing *Wookie Is Not His Real Name* was a labor of love that began in 2014. Author Laura Lieff is a writer by nature, having served the roles of reporter, editor, all the way to business owner over the years. But, sharing the story of professional snowboarder and longtime Vail Valley local Brian 'Wookie' Fleming was no easy feat. For one thing, Wookie is her husband, and she wanted to make sure the book held nothing back reliving how a local snowboard kid became a local legend. But after Wookie's season pass was suspended for organizing an unauthorized event on Beaver Creek and seeing the community's uproar over it, Lieff knew she had to document his story.

Wookie Is Not His Real Name was published in 2021 as an inside account of the life and struggle of a truly unique individual. "Writing and publishing this book was the second hardest thing I've ever done (the first was giving birth to our son, Fleet), but it is also one of my most significant professional accomplishments," Lieff shares. "Although parts of *Wookie Is Not His Real Name* were tough for him to read and relive, Wookie sat down with me repeatedly to make sure all the facts and storylines were accurately portrayed. I'm so glad we took the time to finish what we started. Wookie's story is my story, is Fleet's story."

Covered Bridge asked Lieff to share more about the creation of *Wookie Is Not His Real Name* and its support across the Valley.

Tell us about the journey to writing *Wookie Is Not His Real Name*. Why did you feel the story was important to share?

Most people know Brian 'Wookie' Fleming as a professional snowboarder and longtime Vail Valley local who created the most notorious invite-only snowboard event in Colorado history — Log Masters. I started writing *Wookie Is Not His Real Name* in 2014, because I was



inspired by what people did for Wookie when his season pass was suspended for organizing an unauthorized event on Beaver Creek. It was exciting to see our community, along with people from all over the country, extend to him such abundant and unwavering support after he was there for them for so many years in a variety of capacities.

But, there is much more to his story, and I wanted to tell it. Following a career-ending injury, after which he was told he would never walk again, Wookie endured brutal physical, mental and emotional lows that changed the trajectory of his life. Exemplifying his abundance of strength and determination, he pushed through to make it back on his feet and back on a snowboard.

Although I've known Wookie for 20 years — he's my husband, co-wrangler of our pups and the father of our 4-year-old son, Fleet — I approached this book from a journalistic standpoint. When I initially discussed the idea of writing it with Wookie, I said that I was only doing it if we held nothing back. He agreed, and I went to work.

Over the course of six years, I spent countless hours interviewing 21 people (who serve as the book's "cast of characters"), tracking down photos (slides, actual prints and digital images) and magazine articles. Next, I had to organize

the chapters and make sure my writing would be both understood and appreciated by those outside of the snowboard industry. That's where Carly Fields (aka my second set of eyes) came in. Every writer needs an editor, and this book would not have happened without her. Following the editing process, I needed help with the publishing process, and I was lucky to have former Bookworm owner Nicole Magistro as my book consultant. The other integral person was Jena Skinner — my friend and graphic designer who sat with me for innumerable hours going over layout and photos.

My hope is that those who graciously take the time to read *Wookie Is Not His Real Name* enjoy gaining insight into the local guy who continues to make an impact on everyone he comes in contact with, who became the unofficial ambassador of Beaver Creek and who changed my life.

What does "abundance" mean to you?

Abundance means having so much of something it's undeniable. Wookie exudes abundance in a variety of ways, including his ability to get along with people from all types of backgrounds, his athletic prowess, creativity and going out of his way for others. He's a friend, a son, a brother, a significant other and a father. He brings an abundance of courage, love and strength to every aspect of his life. I've had a front row seat for the last two decades and still find it remarkable. ✦

Where to find *Wookie Is Not His Real Name* in Eagle County:

ArtSpace Workshop + Gallery

The Bookworm of Edwards

Buzz's Boards

Colorado Snowsports Museum

Fancy Pansy and R Farmers Market

The Scarab

Transition Sports