



Michelle Parker in Retallack, British Columbia, where it was well below the ideal temperature for composting.

ALEX O'BRIEN, HANK DE VRE (RIGHT)

THE TRUTH

MICHELLE PARKER

On Shane McConkey, compost, and recovering from two knee injuries.
As told to Megan Michelson



Lake Tahoe-based skier Michelle Parker got her start by following pros Scott Gaffney, J.T. Holmes, and the late Shane McConkey around Squaw Valley, California. A racer until age 15, she ventured into the park and, at 16, competed in her first U.S. Freeskiing Open. Since then, she's taken her tricks into the backcountry and attended a heli-guide school in Haines, Alaska. Now 22, Parker appears in this year's Matchstick Productions movie, *In Deep*, and is recovering from her second knee injury.

When I blew my ACL the first time, I thought it was the worst thing ever. But now I know there's no point in being negative. Visualize recovery. Don't have expectations. Especially when it comes to injuries. Then you won't be disappointed if you don't meet them.

When I was a racer, my coaches told me to train, don't go in the park, don't ski with boys. They said the older guys I was hanging out with were a bad influence on my skiing. Turns out, those boys taught me everything I know in the park.

Growing up, I remember being on the chair behind Shane, Gaffney, and J.T. Holmes. I would follow them and try to stay on their tails. I would go as fast as I could. I just wanted to see where they were skiing. I was their peanut gallery.

When I competed in my first U.S. Open, I didn't even know how to do a 360. I came home and learned how to do tricks. The next year, I went back and got third.

Competitions are too much for me sometimes. They make me lose my connection to the mountains.

I graduated high school and started skiing full-time. I kept saying I was just going to put off college for a year. That turned into five years. But I'm going back to school now, studying environmental science. I spend way more time on my homework than the students who've been going for a while.

When I was barely 18, I did my first portrait shoot. It was for *Freeskier Magazine*, and they wanted me to wear a bikini in a hot tub. People talked a lot of shit about it. I don't care about people talking shit.

I'm into slow food as opposed to fast food. I do all my shopping at farmers' markets. I think eating locally is more important than eating organic.

I'm building a compost pile at my house. You can't have one outdoors in Tahoe, because of the bears and the cold. Did you know composting works best above 55 degrees?

I turned 21 at the Pioneer Bar in Haines, Alaska. I went into the bar, and the bartenders were like, "What the hell? You've been drinking here already." I rang the bell and bought everyone a round of drinks.

I was on my way to get knee surgery when I found out Shane died. My surgeon was also Shane's surgeon. He had a photo of Shane in his office. I didn't want to tell him the news.

On a shoot with Matchstick in 2008, Shane told me to hit him in the balls super-hard. I didn't want to, but he insisted. He even hit himself and said it didn't hurt. We did eight takes. He said he'd tucked them away. 🍅

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To read more about Michelle's injury and recovery, go to skiingmag.com/michelleparker.