

April 30, 2010 – Q&A with the Cajun Book Lady and Sam Hilliard

<http://thecajunbooklady.blogspot.com/2010/04/blogmania-is-here-welcome-to-blog-83.html>

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

For starters, I can tell you that I'm delighted to be interviewed by the Cajun Book Lady! Thanks to review blogs like yours, not only do readers have a means to find new voices, they have the power to influence other readers in ways never before possible. Kudos to you for being at the forefront.

But to your question. The short version is by day I work at a private all-girls boarding school as the head of technology so I know world class drama first-hand. When I'm not getting roughed up by students who want the Internet turned back on *now*, I'm writing late into the night.

The long version involves a childhood spent moving around a lot. At some point in college I discovered I liked to write. I promptly drank some more beer and forgot about that for several more years. I graduated. I worked a bunch of jobs, got married and divorced. Now I live outside of NYC with my girlfriend and four cats, which is one feline under the legal limit. To relax I study Krav Maga, and at some point, I'll finish my skydiving license.

Have you always been a "writer" or was 'The Last Track' an idea that just came to you and you knew you wanted to write?

Lots of people can write, and many of them are really good at it, but what makes them *writers* is finishing the manuscripts they start and then doing whatever is necessary to get those manuscripts to readers. I always liked to write, it just took hitting a real low to get me to do something about it.

The idea for *The Last Track* began during a hike many years before the first word hit the page. Something about being among miles of pines got me thinking about how easy it would be to disappear. And for some reason the possibility of it seemed really intriguing, and I said something like, "I'm going to write books about a guy who finds missing people in the woods." Even though I had the insight to consider it important, I lacked the motivation and time to do anything about it.

Flash ahead to three days after my honeymoon. My employer at the time decided he was tired of ripping the keyboard out of my hand. I also decided I was tired of him ripping the keyboard out of my hand. Suddenly I had some free time and lots of reasons to drink gin. That's when Mike Brody found his way onto the page.

Can you tell us a little about how it was working on this one...writer's block? What kept you inspired?

The hard part was the rewriting. The seemingly never ending struggle to recognize and polish what worked, and discard what did not. That meant lots of drafts. I had to balance a lot of different voices in addition to the ones in my head, and resolve what I wanted to do with what was actually on the page. It meant several go-rounds with reader groups. Eventually the revisions meant bringing in two professionals—an editor and a copyeditor—who took the pages down to the woodshed and beat the manuscript within an inch of its life. Somehow the pages survived.

Along the way, what kept me inspired was the project itself. I think what I always liked about Mike Brody, even from the earliest drafts, was that no matter how bad the odds looked, he just kept going.

I have a question about Mike Brody! Do you consider his ability more of a paranormal thing or more of a psychic ability?

Interesting! Usually the question is whether his ability is paranormal or the product of training, in which case my answer is that it's both. Being able to see what other people might overlook at a crime scene isn't necessarily paranormal, but knowing whether a missing person is still alive definitely is. Navigating through dense woods for days on end with very little gear when the clock is ticking, takes a certain amount of training and discipline, and will certainly help make a good tracker a better one—but it can be practiced and more importantly, explained.

Not everything can be explained about some exceptional abilities, including Mike Brody's.

For instance, I've seen a seventy-three year old man, who walks with great difficulty, strike an opponent twice his size and half his age and send his opponent six feet from the point of impact with a movement that looks no more intense than a waiter presenting a bill to a customer.

So this is why I liken Mike Brody's ability to that of a classic martial artist. Real mastery in the martial arts takes decades, even a lifetime. The greats often begin training as children. Among the true grand masters, there is a certain flow and emotion to their movements that defy any conventional explanation. But for those of us who have witnessed the effects, there's no denying its existence.

Yes, SERE training and Ranger School and all the experiences in the military he had made Mike Brody a better tracker. But Mike can do more than what his training would explain. He can tap into the emotional charge that people leave in their tracks and channel it in ways that allow him to find the missing when no one else can. He has always had this gift; it's the reason he survived his own abduction as a boy, the circumstances of which haunt him to this day.

Will we be seeing more 'Mike Brody' novels anytime soon?

The publisher strongly suggested I have the next Mike Brody book done by June 2011. Given their lean structure and no nonsense tactics, if I make that deadline, they will have the book ready in time for the 2011 holiday season.

Last but Not Least....Where can we keep up with you and your work? Twitter? Web Sites? Fan Pages?

I post at three places pretty regularly:

Website: <http://samhilliard.com>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/samhilliard>

Facebook: <http://facebook.com/thelasttrack>

You can see the book trailer on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQDFWmJOtIE>