

FOUR QUESTIONS FOR SAM HILLIARD – June 5, 2010

By Amanda Goossen - *LitFest Magazine*

http://www.litfestmagazine.com/Site/New_Authors.html

1. Where did Mike Brody come from? Is he modeled after anyone?

Mike Brody came from a point in my life where I really needed something to believe in. Three days after my honeymoon, I got fired. Between the freelance work and looking for a stable source of income, I had a lot of free time and not too many reasons to feel good about my situation.

So I started on a forerunner to *The Last Track*.

That was a number of jobs and years ago. But from the moment Mike first surfaced on the page, documenting his exploits held most of my attention and energy, much to the dismay of the women I've been involved with since then—except the current one.

When things got really bad, cue the divorce and resulting money pressures, the material was all the encouragement I needed to continue. Mike may have given me some reasons to keep pressing ahead, but it was my responsibility to get him a book deal.

As for a possible model, Mike Brody is wholly the product of imagination, personal experience and research.

2. What type of research went into developing Mike's experience as a Special Forces operative?

I'm glad you asked that question, because research is one of the most thankless jobs. When it's done right, people generally don't notice it all.

Mike Brody's military background took him through both the Rangers and Special Forces, of which he is equally proud. Obviously for security reasons, the US Army closely guards the workings of the 75th Ranger Regiment, as well as the various Special Forces Groups, so researching specific points about either is very difficult (as it should be). However, the trick to credible characterization is not in the minutia; it's unraveling a character's motivation. Once a writer truly understands what drives a character, imagination gears up and starts making its own suggestions. Specific details can be adjusted as needed.

Tom Clancy wrote a book on the Special Forces which corrected some of these creative misconceptions. Also I had access to a former SF operative, long since retired. He was quite pointed when it came to questions of motivation.

3. You work at an All GIRLS school, I can imagine the drama is great for your work? Have the girls inspired any stories?

It's funny, because I forget how crazy it can be working at a boarding school until the school year ends. But being surrounded by it does help my writing; I have to try and top what I see everyday!

To be fair, any high school comes preloaded with a certain degree of drama. The fact that the school educates teenage girls, and is a residential community to boot, just cranks the average drama levels found in traditional learning environments up to eleven. Over the course of the past five years, I have come to believe that the most incredible situations happen with the staff—often eclipsing whatever havoc the students might unleash.

While some might find that revelation surprising, there's more. See, the real advantage of working at a boarding school is the community and the incredible bonds experienced between its members. From those relationships, we bring out the best in the students and each other. I'm proud to work with such dedicated teachers and administrators.

Ultimately the system functions like a large family. In fact, I have called my boss (the CFO) Dad now and again, and not wholly in jest. I mean, don't sons ask their father for money for goodies? The only difference: In this case the goodies are Cisco switches or servers. He hasn't fired me, so I guess it's OK.

4. What can the literary world expect from Sam Hilliard next?

I can't account for any expectations except my own, but this is what's going on at present. I'm working through a virtual tour from now until August 1, a sequel to *The Last Track* slated for the Holidays 2011, and another novel with no clear deadline. Long term, besides the Mike Brody series and writing screenplays, I want to start a writing institute for undiscovered writers.

I want to find the best and the brightest and lead writers to a place where they realize the only wall standing between what they want from their writing, and where they are right now, is their willingness to prove how bad they really want what's on the other side.

In short, I want my own Special Forces.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SAM GO TO <http://www.samhilliard.com/wordpress/>