

[The Last Track Interview with author Sam Hilliard](http://rebecca2007.wordpress.com/2010/06/02/the-last-track-interview-with-author-sam-hilliard/)

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Sam Hilliard, author of mystery thriller novel, “The Last Track” joins us for day 2 of his first virtual book tour at Paperback Writer, with a Q&A session. Keep reading and find out how Sam came up with the idea for this book, if he knows the end of the book before he begins writing and so much more. The Last Track is filled with Intrigue, Suspense and Murder and so much more. Make sure you subscribe to this blog so you can enjoy all the authors that visit Paperback Writer.

About the Book

Imagine if being late meant a child disappeared forever. That is the fear that drives Mike Brody—the man you want when the one you love is missing.

In *The Last Track*, a police detective recruits Mike to help find an asthmatic boy lost in the dense woods surrounding a dude ranch in Montana. An unwitting murder witness, the boy burrows ever deeper into the rugged terrain, fearful of being found. As Mike and a local officer search for the boy, the killer follows them.

While the investigation expands, Mike’s ex-wife, a well-connected journalist, uses her contacts to unravel the truth behind the murder.

Her discoveries threaten to snare them all in a treacherous conspiracy . . .

Hi Sam Hilliard. Welcome to Paperback Writer

Q: Will you share with us how you came up with the idea for this book?

Three days after my honeymoon, I was fired. Suddenly I had some free time on my hands between freelance gigs. I had long since fallen away from writing regularly and I had always enjoyed being in the woods. The fact that someone could disappear completely really haunted me. I loved the idea of a character who could find the missing when no one else could. Put those seemingly unrelated situations together and out came *The Last Track*.

Q: Do you plan your stories first with an outline or does it come to you as write it?

I work from a very high level outline, but it's less of a shooting script and more of a map. Once the commitment to finish the story takes hold, how the story gets from point A to B is negotiable.

Q: Do you know the end of the story at the beginning?

Yes and no. By the time I get to the end, the scene generally materializes differently than originally planned, and the more time I spend thinking about it afterward, the more that final scene will evolve. I truly believe the ending should surprise the reader. I tinkered with the ending of *The Last Track* right up until the last possible moment. I think it almost drove my publisher over the edge when I called the day before the final files were to go to press to tell them that I wanted to change the ending.

Q: Do you have a process for developing your characters?

Trial and error, plus the interviewing technique. Writing is like working a jig saw puzzle. You have to trust that when you snap two matching pieces together, sooner or later you will see how the new larger piece fits into the bigger picture. Snippets might go anywhere, and not necessarily where you initially thought. In the meantime, set them aside and move forward. That's the trial and error part.

Whenever I get stuck, I ask the character what they would think or do in a given situation, and then answer in their voice. These "explorations" usually ensure I get left alone when writing. By the way, I borrowed this technique from Charles Dickens.

Q: It is said that authors write themselves into their characters. Is there any part of you in your characters and what they would be?

Writers absorb everything they come in contact with to some degree, and then repurpose those experiences or images that are (hopefully) most relevant to the story they are writing. I'm the product of every conversation, relationship, experience and thing I have read. So, yes there are parts of me in Mike Brody.

There are also attributes of Mike's that I wish were mine. If I had to pick just one it would be the ability to keep trying even when everything is going badly and no one else believes it's worth continuing.

Q: What is your most favorite part about this book?

The fact that I'm done writing it! I do think the order of the scenes really works to build the suspense and I am proud of the ending.

Q: When in the process of writing your book did you begin to look for a publisher?

Not until the manuscript was complete and I felt it was my best effort (although there is always room for improvement). At that point the book had already gone through many drafts and been bounced off a lot of test readers. More than 95 percent of that manuscript eventually appeared in the final book.

Q: What struggles have you had on the road to being published?

In all, I queried 122 literary agents about *The Last Track*. I invested a lot of time trying to find representation, and while I did get some really good feedback, this strategy did not get the manuscript in print—not directly, anyway. But the process did prompt me to look at how I was pitching the project and consider other avenues.

Around that time book trailers became the new buzzword, right after blogs and before podcasts. Now it is apps, I guess. So I worked with a director and put together a live action book trailer. Then I burned the trailer on a DVD and mailed it with a new round of query letters, but this time I sent them directly to publishers. It finally landed on the right desk.

Q: What has been the best part about being published?

There's no equal to the closure and satisfaction that comes with following an idea to completion.

Q: What do you want readers to remember and carry with them after reading your novel?

I'd like them to want to know more about Mike, Jessica and Andy and to find themselves thinking that the only thing that could be better than reading *The Last Track*, would be seeing it on the big screen.

Q: Do you have plans to write another book?

Yes. The publisher wants the next book in the series by June 2011. That date will allow them enough time for a holiday 2011 release. So the writing process continues.

Q: Would you care to share with us how the virtual book tour experience with Pump Up Your Book Promotion has been for you?

Loving it so far! I like answering questions from the comfort of a fortified bunker whilst wearing shorts and a T-shirt.

Q: Where can readers find a copy of your book?

Readers can find it on Amazon.com and BN.com or they can order it at their local bookstore. ISBN 9780984203512 Trade Paperback.

The book is also available in kindle format on Amazon. ISBN 9780984203529.

Do you have a website for readers to go to?

My site: <http://www.samhilliard.com/wordpress/>

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

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

Publisher's site: <http://www.buddhapussink.com>

Thank you, Sam for sharing your book and characters with us today. It has been a pleasure and I hope you have a successful virtual book tour.