

VIRGINIA BEACH EXAMINER – July 6, 2010

*Dorothy Thompson*

<http://www.examiner.com/x-21649-Virginia-Beach-Publishing-Examiner~y2010m7d5-Interview-with-Sam-Hilliard-on-new-book-The-Last-Track>

Born in Kansas City, MO, near the center of the United States, Sam Hilliard arrived during a very scary period of the 1970s. Since then he has lived on both coasts and quite a few places in between. Currently, Sam resides outside New York City with his girlfriend, and an army of four cats—one feline under the legal limit. His first book, [\*The Last Track: A Mike Brody Novel\*](#), a mystery/thriller, released this Spring. When Sam's not writing, he's the Director of IT at an all-girl boarding school where he gets a chance to observe world-class drama firsthand. It's also the reason he studies Krav Maga and Tai Chi.

**Thank you for this interview, Sam. Can you tell us a little about yourself and how long you've been writing?**

Thanks very much for having me on your site! When I'm not writing, I enjoy reading, watching movies, studying martial arts, playing bass and complaining about the government. Before the age of thirteen I had already lived on both coasts, a good portion of the Midwest, and Utah. Such frequent moves led me to suspect my parents were in the witness protection program. In fact, I probably just blew their cover.

While I've been writing off and on for much of my life, I only began to take it seriously in the last six years.

**Can you tell us briefly what your book is about?**

*The Last Track* is the story of Mike Brody, a tracker who can tap into the memory and emotional state of those he pursues. More than just a master tracker, Mike is a former Special Forces operative, smoke jumper, and now extreme adventure tour guide. He is recruited to find a missing, asthmatic boy (and unwitting murder witness) in the rugged terrain surrounding a dude ranch in Montana where Mike and his family are vacationing.

Fearful of capture, the boy has burrowed deep into the woods. As Mike tracks the boy, the killer pursues them both. Meanwhile, Mike's ex-wife—a well-connected journalist—uses her contacts to unravel the killer's identity. Her discoveries ensnare them all in a treacherous conspiracy

**Who is your intended audience? Have you been able to crossover into other audiences as well?**

My only goal regarding audience, was to write a book that stayed true to the characters. As it happened, *The Last Track* draws from elements found both in mysteries and in thrillers, and thus for ease of categorization the publisher classifies it as a mystery/thriller.

Whether the book reaches beyond the mystery/thriller genre and finds a home with readers who generally prefer say, urban fantasy, horror, or suspense remains to be seen.

That's up to the readers.

**Why did you choose your particular genre?**

The story picked its own genre, rather than me bending it to my whims. Personally, I always liked stories that moved quickly, ones filled with cliff hangers and endless twists, like thrillers, as well stories that had a cerebral who-dun-it feel, more in the vein of mysteries. Honestly, the two genres combined quite organically, with very little intervention on my part. It's just the form the characters chose to tell the story. I guess you can blame it on Mike Brody.

**Do you ever experience self-doubts with your work?**

The longer the gap between writing sessions, the more the doubts begin gathering like dark clouds above the manuscript, until the storm erupts and washes away the essential faith a writer needs to finish a project. It would take far more narcissism than even I can muster to avoid second-guessing a project mid-stream.

In an effort to mitigate these doubts, I try to avoid letting too much time pass between writing sessions.

**Where do you write? Do you have a favorite place?**

I will only write in one place, that's at a desk deep enough to support my forearms from wrist to elbow, keeping them parallel to each other. Carpal tunnel syndrome has plagued far better writers than me, so I never cut this corner.

Any room with the above accommodations will more than suffice.

### **What kind of research did you have to do during the writing process?**

I did a fair amount of research into police procedure and developed a healthy collaboration with an ever expanding network of experts. At present I have access to law enforcement personnel working at various levels inside the US and the Middle East, plus a Senior Officer in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police—loosely the Canadian equivalent of the FBI. In addition, I recently picked up a source at NASA who will figure in a future book.

And the process continues. I'm always open to learning from people who are willing to share what they can with me about a given subject. They allow me to give the reader a glimpse of what it's like on the inside.

At a certain point, though, the writer has to trust their imagination and let the story happen. Technical details can be sorted out later. So that's why I lean on the experts for the gut checks. They can guffaw in private at my flubs and then let me know what needs fixing.

There are times however, when I will deliberately alter a detail to either suit the story or ease my conscience—regardless of what I really know about procedure. I am trying to tell the best story I can by leveraging access to privileged information in a way that makes the story more credible and engaging. I'm not writing a primer on how to frustrate police investigations.

### **Who is your publisher and how did you get accepted by them? Did you pitch your book yourself or go through an agent?**

My publisher, Buddhapuss Ink LLC is a young house based in Edison, NJ. Founded by long-time publishing professionals, they recognized the huge disconnect between what readers today want and expect and what the publishing old guard currently distributes.

I arrived at Buddhapuss Ink LLC after having failed to woo any of the agents I had contacted into representing me. Fortunately, I'm a big believer in Randy Pausch and *The Last Lecture*, especially his point about how obstacles keep everyone else out, but give you a chance to prove exactly how bad you want something. Well after 122 agents, I was staring at that wall. It was time to get creative and prove how bad I wanted this.

At the time, book trailers were drawing the buzz that blogs and podcasts did before them. My idea was to try and translate part of *The Last Track* into a live action trailer, burn it on a DVD and send it out with a sample chapter and query letter, but this time I went directly to publishers.

That did the trick.

### **How are you promoting your book thus far?**

The greatest idea in the world is only worth something when people know about it. Self-promotion never ends. One of the reasons I like my publisher is they spend the lion share of their efforts on promotion versus infrastructure. By running a modest-sized organization, they have more resources for marketing and are willing to spend when it makes sense to do so.

Online, I make the usual pit stops, Goodreads, Facebook and twitter, plus my own site. Offline, I've been asked to present at some writing workshops. I don't expect to sell too many books at these events, but it does get my name and face out there. I'll also be at some book fairs this summer and fall, signing books in the Buddhapuss Ink booth (my publisher), as well as doing some store and library appearances. I'm also available to meet/speak with book groups, locally in person, or long-distance by speaker phone or Skype.

### **If you could give one book promotion tip to new authors, what would that be?**

Start with your circle of friends and family, and then build outward. Go indirect with groups and networks. Offer help before asking for it. Before you know it, assistance and new ideas will start coming your way.

### **What's next for you?**

The sequel to *The Last Track* is slated for Holidays 2011. I have a lot of work to do!

### **Thank you for this interview, Sam. Can you tell us where we can find you on the web?**

Thank you very much as well! It's been a pleasure. Here are all the options for finding me:

Website: <http://www.samhilliard.com>

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

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

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/user/buddhapussinkllc>

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

[Amazon](#) or [Barnes & Noble](#) are the best way to obtain your copies of *The Last Track*, although it will be available to order in most Virginia Beach bookstores.