

FASHION: BEST OF THE FALL SEASON

THE PREMIER MAGAZINE OF THE WEST

COWBOYS & INDIANS

OCTOBER 2004

REMEMBERING MCQUEEN

- TONY HILLERMAN'S MYSTERIOUS WEST
- 100-MILE RIDE: JACKSON TO CODY
- GREAT ESCAPES FOR FALL

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THE PREMIER MAGAZINE OF THE WEST
COWBOYS & INDIANS
 OCTOBER 2004 VOLUME 12, NUMBER 7



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Tony Hillerman

THE RENOWNED SOUTHWESTERN MYSTERY WRITER LETS LOOSE ABOUT HOW MUCH HE LOSES AT POKER, THE NAVAJO MYSTIQUE, AND WHAT MAKES A GOOD MYSTERY.

COWBOYS

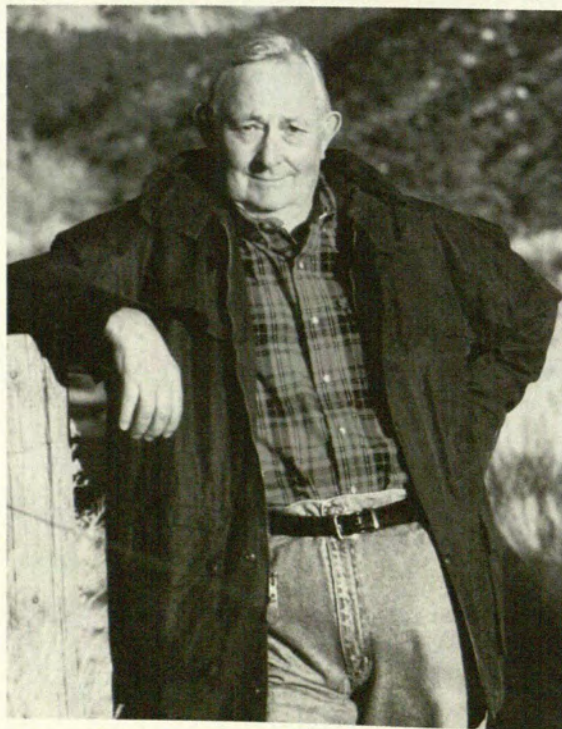
INDIANS



by Wolf Schneider

He's just a country boy from Oklahoma who still shops at Wal-Mart and shuffles off to a weekly poker game, yet he's the distinguished king of Southwestern mysteries who's written 30 books, most of them bestsellers that have made him a millionaire. He lives in one of Albuquerque's poshest neighborhoods, in a rambling hacienda near the Rio Grande. In his home office, there's a AAA map of Indian Country nailed up just above his computer. In point of fact, without Tony Hillerman there might not even be an Indian Country map. Because the 79-year-old author, who has not a smidgen of Indian blood in him, has done more to bring Navajoland — with its earthen hogans, perceptive tribal policemen, and evil skinwalkers — into contemporary awareness than any other single individual.

Born in tiny Sacred Heart, Oklahoma, where his pals included the Potawatomi and Seminole farm boys who were his



neighbors, Hillerman survived action that nearly blinded him during World War II to marry Marie Unzner and raise six children (five of whom were adopted), undertake a lengthy career as a newspaperman for the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, serve as a professor at the University of

New Mexico, and publish, in 1971, the first of what would become a string of best-selling Navajo mysteries that would bring him multiple awards as well as an official Special Friend citation from the Navajo in recognition of his accurate portrayals of Indian life. Despite two bouts with cancer, three heart surgeries, and rheumatic arthritis that is sometimes crippling, Hillerman is still pounding away at the keyboard.

C&I met with Hillerman one summer evening at his Albuquerque home. In his office — amid plenty of books; a current edition of the upscale *Robb Report* that he's using as research for a greedy character in his next Joe Leaphorn-Jim Chee mystery; and a rack of cassettes from Neil Young, Bob Dylan, Judy Collins, and Joan Baez — Hillerman explained the Navajo mystique, confided which of the PBS movies made from his books he likes best, and told us about his November writers conference.

C&I: Do you still live like a country boy or like a best-selling mystery writer?

Hillerman: I'm a product of the Great American Depression and the great American Dust Bowl. I grew up on a red dirt farm in a tiny little village where everybody was poor, and so you never saw anybody that wasn't.

C&I: Now you're living in a spacious hacienda in a ritzy Albuquerque neighborhood, Los Ranchos. Are you still shopping at Sears?

Hillerman: I shop at Wal-Mart. These shoes? They were on sale. With tax, I paid nine-something. I get no satisfaction out of wasting money.

C&I: Although you do drop some change at your weekly poker night . . .

Hillerman: Yeah. It's not a big game that we play. We're die-hard Republicans and liberal Democrats and herpetologists and archaeologists and lawyers and a minister and all kinds of people. I bring whatever is in my billfold. It's not a big game. Oh, in one game you probably could lose as much as \$200.

C&I: Do you do Indian casinos, too?

Hillerman: I have. They're kinda fun.

C&I: You were raised in rural Sacred Heart,

New York Times Bestselling Author

TONY HILLERMAN

SKELETON MAN



Oklahoma. You've said that you weren't good at anything as a kid: substitute football player, substitute baseball player, the guy who when something needed fixing, got the hammer instead of actually fixing the thing.

Hillerman: That's still pretty much the case.

C&I: When did you get the notion that you were going to be a best-selling writer?

Hillerman: I still don't really believe it. My mother loved poetry. Farm girl. She homesteaded in Oklahoma when it wasn't even a state — built her sod hut. They lived up there a year and lived on food they brought along in the wagon. Can you imagine an 18-year-old girl doing this?

C&I: No! Can you imagine yourself doing this?

Hillerman: Yeah, I could. Actually, I could. And she recognized it in me. I would have done it. Yeah, golly sure. But I was bored as a farmer.

C&I: You have absolutely no Indian blood in you, correct?

Hillerman: Not to my knowledge. I'm a typical mongrel American.

C&I: You went to St. Mary's Academy, a boarding school for Indian girls that also enrolled local farm boys like yourself?

Hillerman: Indians were our neighbors. They lived all around us. They were a citizen band of Potawatomi.

TONY HILLERMAN WRITERS CONFERENCE

Mystery writers, aspiring writers, and suspense fans are invited to gather with Tony Hillerman, Michael McGarrity, Judith Van Gieson, and other luminaries of the mystery genre at the Albuquerque Hilton, November 4-7 for the Tony Hillerman Writers Conference. Early registration: \$395. Late registration: \$425. One-day registration possible. The program includes workshops, breakout sessions, panel discussions, keynote banquet dinner, book signings, and time to talk with the writers. FYI: www.sfworkshops.com or 505.471.1565.

MYSTERY WRITING CONTEST

Calling all mystery writers. Enter the first annual Tony Hillerman Mystery Contest, sponsored by *Cowboys & Indians* and Wordharvest. Mystery short stories should have a Western or Southwestern setting and at least one cowboy or Native American character. Your story must be previously unpublished and must not exceed 2,500 words. Manuscripts should be typewritten, single-sided, and double-spaced. Your cover page should include your name and contact information: mailing address, phone number, and e-mail; subsequent pages should each include story title and page number. Entries must be postmarked by October 15, 2004. Send your \$5 processing/entry fee (check or money order payable to Wordharvest) and story to Tony Hillerman Mystery Contest, c/o *Cowboys & Indians*, 128 Grant Ave., Santa Fe, NM 87501. The winning entry will be announced at the 2004 Tony Hillerman Writers Conference November 4-7 in Albuquerque and published in an upcoming issue of *Cowboys & Indians*. The winner will also receive two tickets to the conference's keynote banquet, a signed copy of a Hillerman book, and a fine writing instrument. For more information and a downloadable entry form, visit www.sfworkshops.com.

C&I: How did they strike you?

Hillerman: Just good old boys. My kind of people, the Potawatomi kids. Played cowboys and Indians with them.

C&I: Then you went off to World War II, where you got pretty banged up — stepped on a landmine, broke your leg, foot, ankle; temporary blindness and an eye injury you still have. You got on a wrong train coming home from the war. And you witnessed the Enemy Way curing ceremony for two Navajo Marines.

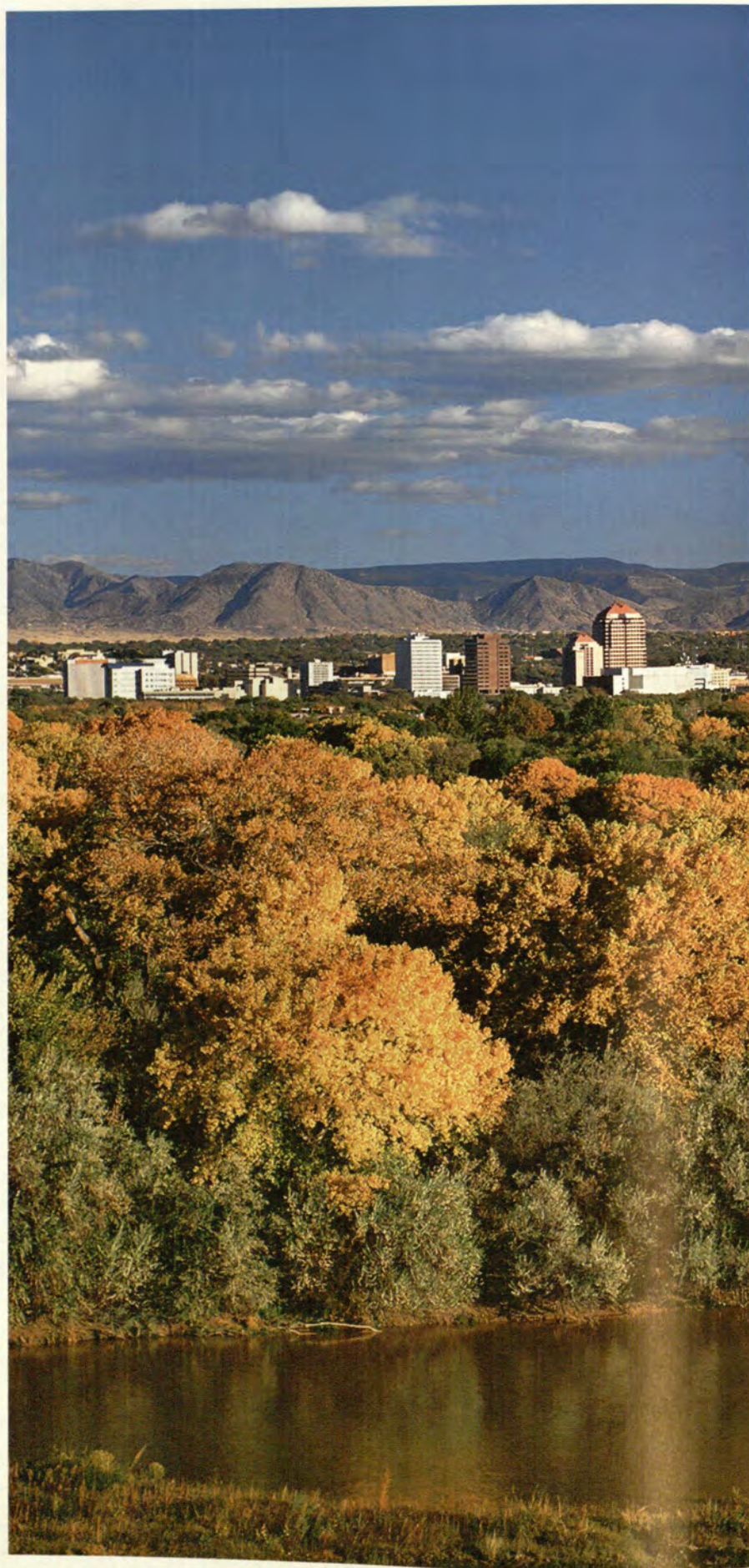
Hillerman: The wrong train story is fun. We're all in a hospital in Long Island. The Army is sorting us out. There's a military hospital in Oklahoma, which is pretty close to where I lived. And there's a big military hospital at El Paso. So they put all the Texas guys in one hospital car, and they put all the Oklahoma guys in one hospital car, and they hitch them up to a freight train and there they go. And of course, the Texans end up in Oklahoma, and the Oklahomans end up in Texas. Typical Army. Anyhow, eventually I got a truck-driving job, going to north of Crownpoint, New Mexico, to shut down oil wells. And that's where I saw them, the Navajos. I was intrigued. They were nothing like Seminoles or Potatomis. They were like movie Indians.

C&I: How's that?

Hillerman: Well, the first ones I saw were the stick carriers bringing the ceremonial — what we call a scalp — to the Enemy Way ceremony. It's a ceremony that goes back to the dawn of time, for a cleansing when people are affected by other cultures. They're all on horses, and they're dressed up. I liked the way these people brought their boys home from the war. And I thought, This is a nice way to do it. I like this civilization better than mine. This is the way it should be.

*C&I: Though you worked as a journalist for years afterward, that ceremony eventually became the catalyst for your first book, *The Blessing Way*, published in 1971.*

Hillerman: Which should have been called *The Enemy Way*. I called it *The Enemy Way*, but when you're a first-time novelist, you have no clout. They liked *The Blessing Way* better.



C&I: So the *Blessing Way*, the *Enemy Way* — these ceremonies really do happen?

Hillerman: Any one I write about, I've seen.

C&I: How many curing ceremonies do the Navajo have?

Hillerman: Not as many as they used to have. I dunno — 20 or 30. They're running out of people who know how to do them.

C&I: Why have you chosen to write mainly about the Navajo and not so much about neighboring tribes like the Hopi, the Ute, the Zuni?

Hillerman: Good question. Basically because the Hopis notably, but all of the groups that derived from the Anasazi, or the Pueblo people, have a religious tradition in which the power of the prayer or the ceremony is diluted if too many uninitiated people know it.



C&I: So they're more secretive.

Hillerman: Very much more secretive. Well understand, I know more of the Navajo than I do other cultures. Here's the way they're different from a lot of people. Most important: Traditionally they hold greed, acquisition of things, as evil. If you have more than you need, and you don't share it with others, it's a symbol of evil and it's a symbol that you might be a witch. Basically the reason the Navajo don't run their trading posts is because of this attitude: "Okay, here I am at a trading post and I've got all my shelves filled with canned stuff — with flour, with salt, food of all kinds — and I'm surrounded by hungry people. What am I doing with all this stuff that's hanging on my shelves? I should be giving it to people. I'm evil."

C&I: Speaking of witches, you brought the term skinwalkers into the national vocabulary.

Hillerman: It's an Anglo word of course.

C&I: Have you ever met a skinwalker?

Hillerman: No. One of my good friends actually saw one one time. He heard his mother yell something and he ran out. She told him to get the .22, and he ran out and there was a skinwalker bothering her sheep. He was like a man, but the man

TRAIL GUIDE

TONY HILLERMAN'S ALBUQUERQUE

The great mystery writer offers an insider's guide to the town he calls home.

Best place to spot locals: JB's Family Restaurant. "Locals go in there and drink their coffee and they're talking business and they're talking politics."

Best meal with a view: Prairie Star, a steakhouse (at the Santa Ana Golf Club). "I remember sitting there, my wife Marie and I, by the window and nobody bothering us. There's no telephones anywhere near, and the view out the window is absolutely beautiful and it was almost sundown and the shadows were climbing up the Sandia Mountains."

Best of the outdoors: Rio Grande Nature Center State Park. "It's right down the Rio Grande and it's got a place where you can watch the migrating birds come in and land."

Favorite traditional New Mexican dining: El Pinto.

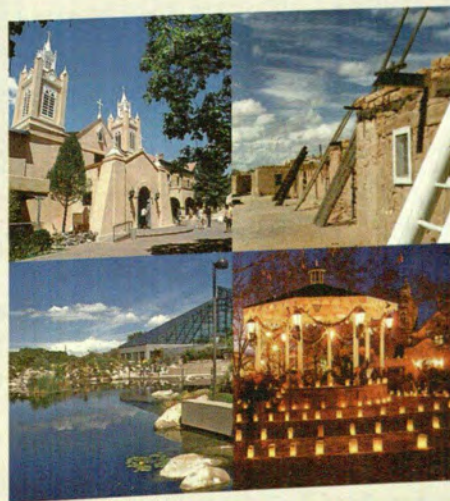
Favorite hotel: Sheraton Old Town Albuquerque.

Favorite resort: Hyatt Regency Tamaya. "It's a handsome place."

Best shopping: Drive to Crownpoint, New Mexico. "The best place to buy anything Native American is at the Crownpoint rug auction. It's just once a month."

Favorite Indian casino: Sandia Casino. "Sandia's got everything you want. It's got a nice place to eat and a wonderful view out back. Take the Tramway exit."

Favorite museums: The Albuquerque Museum. National Atomic Museum.





looked like he had buffalo fur or something, you know, with a traditional wolf's head. So my friend shoots at this guy and the guy runs off. Or did he run off? No, I believe he flew off. And another guy told about driving his truck up a long hill at Navajo National Monument. He had a heavy load and was slowing down. And then, he sees somebody running alongside the truck. Fortunately, he never stopped. It looked like a normal-looking guy, but he was driving at least 20 miles an hour. He's 50 miles from nowhere. And he can't drive away from him because he's going uphill. When he gets to the top of the hill, he speeds up to about 50, and the guy is still running alongside the truck yelling at him to stop. He finally gets away from him.

C&I: So are most of the beings that have supernatural powers evil? Skinwalkers are all evil, right?

Hillerman: The Navajos have a general belief in kind of a unified cosmos. They have a much more sophisticated notion of what's good and what's evil than we do. They have a word for it that's hard to pronounce, but you can spell it something like *h-o-z-h-o*. It kind of means harmony, acceptance, peace. So evil is something that disrupts.

C&I: When you go to Navajoland, where do you stay?

Hillerman: I sleep in my car or my pickup truck. I've stayed at the Best Western in Gallup.

C&I: You grew up in Oklahoma and worked as a journalist in Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico, but you made Albuquerque your home . . .

Hillerman: I've never found a better place to live than Albuquerque. It's quiet. You don't have the Hollywood types. You don't have the self-anointed artists. You don't have the elite people. You have them, but you don't have many of them. They're flooded out by the plain people, just the blue-collar-type people. Then you've got a big university full of interesting faculty that's not tainted and stained and spoiled by this Ivy League elitism, snobbism, this kind of stuff.

C&I: Are you still intending to write a book called *Leaphorn's Last Case*?

Hillerman: I'm writing it right now. I might call it that, but I'm not sure.

C&I: That kind of closes the door.

Hillerman: Yeah, I thought that, too. I'm gonna be 79 in about three days. But I don't feel 79, really, and I don't feel like I want to quit writing. I don't know what in the hell you do when you quit writing.

C&I: There's an Indian Country map by AAA on your wall. Are the places you write about real?

Hillerman: Yeah. Believe it or not, there is a Goldtooth! And not only that, I take great pride in always being there before I write about it, see.

C&I: Navajoland sounds exotic in your books, but the truth is that it's fairly grim out there, with about 70 percent unemployment.

Hillerman: I was on the Santa Fe Chief once, riding on the train, and we get to the top, the whole world opens up — there are these huge monsoon clouds, you see the Zuni Buttes and Mount Taylor, you see the expanse of buttes and mountains and every color in the world except green because not that much is growing there. This businessman says, "My God, why would anybody live out here?" And I'm thinking, Oh my God, why would anybody live anywhere else? I love it. That empty space. All your troubles fall away. I'm not trying to make a living on it. Who likes poverty? But I would much rather be poor in Navajoland than in the Bronx.

C&I: Three of your books have been made into PBS mystery movies. Which is your favorite?

Hillerman: *Coyote Waits*, the second one. Although *Thief of Time* is pretty good, too.

C&I: What makes a great mystery?

Hillerman: What makes any kind of fiction I like is that you want to have characters you care about. The kind of stuff I do with most of my mysteries is I want to legitimately follow the plot and to solve the mystery, and I want to drag them through a healing ceremony or something about Navajo culture.

C&I: Who are your favorite writers?

Hillerman: Hemingway. Raymond Chandler. Keats. Charles Langdon. Joan Didion: *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* is a classic. One of the great books is *The Way to Rainy Mountain* by Scott Momaday. Michael McGarrity. Fred Harris.

C&I: You've got a mystery conference coming up in November. What secrets will you reveal of the writing trade?

Hillerman: One secret. Here's how you spell *writer's block*: *l-a-z-y*. I asked Elmore Leonard the secret to great writing. He said, "Leave out the stuff the reader skips." [Laughs]

C&I: You once said, "Everyone wants to be a cowboy. Even Indians want to be cowboys." What's the eternal appeal of the cowboy?

Hillerman: There's the notion that you're free out there. But hell, it's hard work. Horses are fine animals, though.