

**INTERVIEW WITH GERALD (GERRY) EDDLEMON  
CONDUCTED BY TOM SCOTT  
SATURDAY, AUGUST 17, 2013, KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE  
AND THURSDAY, JANUARY 16, 2014, BY TELEPHONE**



**The Rohe Era Track and XC Association hold legal title and literary property rights, including copyright, to this oral history. It is not to be reproduced without permission of Charles H. Rohe and the co-chairs of the Rohe Era Track and XC Association.**

**Saturday, August 17, 2013**

**TS: We're talking to Gerry Eddlemon. What year did you start at Tennessee?**

**GE: I started classes in the fall of 1964. I asked Coach Rohe if I could join the team as a walk-on in early 1965, but red-shirted that year due to a lingering injury incurred in high-school track.**

**TS: So, your outdoor seasons were 1966 through 1968?**

**GE: Yes, although I continued into 1969, but without much success.**

**TS: Why don't you talk about your career at the University of Tennessee, what you did on the track and so forth?**

**GE: I wanted to continue as a half-miler, but I had a serious injury in during the winter of my senior year of high school, so I could no longer generate that explosive acceleration needed in the half mile and the shorter races. So, I moved up to the mile, two mile, 10K, and longer road races. But the miles**

and miles of quite intense training kept aggravating my old leg injury. I only had one good season, basically, [one] decent season. I managed to letter that year and went to the national championship in cross country. I finished third on our team [behind Bob Barber in 65<sup>th</sup> place and Steve Allison in 98<sup>th</sup>], I think, and like 150<sup>th</sup> overall. [159<sup>th</sup> in 34:20.0 in the November 21, 1966, NCAA championship on the University of Kansas Cross Country Course in Lawrence, Kansas]. I had a single career loss to the great Gerry Lindgren [Washington State University, 1<sup>st</sup> place in 29:01.4] [laughs]!

I did run a 10,000 meter race once in, as I remember, either 31:17 or 32:17 and for the life of me cannot remember which time is correct - I hope it was the former!

I had a little success in KTC [Knoxville Track Club] road racing, running for example a 56:06 in the rather hilly Cades Cove 10-mile race, and an 89:27 in a 15-miler on a somewhat hilly Cherokee Boulevard in a tremendous rain storm in which the road flooded several inches deep in the flat sections. That's a not bad 2:36 marathon pace. Of course one truly amazing but not to be named (until Coach's statute of limitations expires) Vol runner blew everyone away in that race, and reputedly after 16 beers the night before! Just imagine if Coach Rohe had found out! On the other hand, maybe I should've tried 16 beers the night before....

Those few UT and KTC races were my personal high water mark, and then I had more injuries, and ever since I've been trying to improve on what I did back then, because I was never satisfied with my performance which I attributed mostly to all the injuries. Coach Rohe—I've just felt like he's been looking over my shoulder ever since. He didn't know it, but he, along with my disappointment in my performance, was one of the motivations for me getting into competitive hiking, and later, cycling. About three years later while in grad school, I set the record for hiking the length of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park—70 miles and more than 20,000 feet of climbing (and even harder on the knees, 20,000 feet of descending!).

However, I had hoped to break the 24-hour barrier as well but a drove of wild and highly agitated boars with piglets and a big ol' mama bear with cubs who stole my food, drink, flashlights, and spare socks that had been brought up for me at Spence Field, slowed me down considerably. And I made an almost fatal error in trying to get my food and gear back from that mama bear, resulting in what is almost surely the fastest 50-yard dash ever performed over broken ground by a retired track guy who already had slogged for 18 hours or so through 51 very tough miles.

So . . . thirteen years later on my 39<sup>th</sup> birthday I went out and broke my own record, sans bears and boars, and was the first one to do it in less than 24 hours.

An interesting little flashback to 1967— we cross country runners would have a training camp up at Elkmont in the late summer [late August or early September]. Someone [the Spence family, owners of Knoxville's Spence's Shoe Store] would donate their large cabin for a week or so. We would run the trails, swim in the river. It was a wonderful, team bonding experience. But I had always had this idea of going after that record for the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

So, I somehow convinced Bob Barber, and maybe John Ellington, and a couple of other guys to drop me off at Davenport Gap at the east end of the Park on the last day of camp, and to meet me at Newfound Gap, 31 miles later. I wanted to see, is this doable? If I could do the first part, maybe I could do the whole shebang next time with a little more training. It went well for 20 miles or so. The last 10 miles, however, with those old running flats—no support or anything—got to be a real grind, a quite painful grind. But I finished those tough 31 miles in something over seven hours! I remember Bob Barber and company had been waiting on me for at least an hour or so, maybe more. He said, "Well, aren't you going to go the rest of the way?" I said, "I don't think so."

I didn't think it was anything newsworthy. But the next day, the [Knoxville] News-Sentinel—either the Journal or the Sentinel—I don't recall which—ran a big article on two guys who did that same route the same weekend—that 31 miles to Newfound Gap. I had done it in about 7 hours and 20 minutes. They took 9 hours and something, and they did it on . . . horseback. There was this big article with photos and everything. I had done it the same weekend at least two hours faster. I had to laugh that they got so much press coverage

**TS:** You wrote a good story about integrating the dorms. Have you got anything you want to add to that?

**GE:** Nothing, other than it was a moving and wonderful experience. I like to tell people that Audry [Hardy, outdoor track letterman, 1968-71] was possibly the first [Black] athlete in the SEC to participate in a varsity event. Lester McClain on the football team got all the glory because he was on the football team. That's understandable. But we had an early fall [1967] track meet where Audry ran the 400 meters. As I remember it, it was before Lester McClain had his first game. So, I was always proud that I possibly roomed with the first Black athlete in the SEC to participate in a varsity event. We got along very well from my perspective, and I hope he feels the same. I did learn about, you know how a lot of us boys at that time—we

had an exclamation of wonder or excitement or whatever where you say, “Boy! This is just so cool....” I learned the hard way that he took that in a different way.

**TS:** Don’t say “boy.”

**GE:** Yes, he told me, “Don’t say ‘boy.’” I tried to explain that this is not.... But we just decided, I won’t say “boy.”

**TS:** Right. Did you learn anything from him about race relations?

**GE:** Yes. I think for the most part we were just like race wasn’t an issue except for little incidents like that. I remember once—I was extremely shy with girls, and he mentioned all these gorgeous girls he had—not just one, but a whole bunch. I didn’t even know how to approach girls to ask for a date. So I said one day, “Audry, why don’t you fix me up with one of your girls. You’ve got so many of them.” I remember he looked at me and said coolly and firmly, “No way.” And I thought, “So, discrimination works both ways.” Then, I realized that would have been a very dangerous thing at that time for a white guy going out with an African American woman, perhaps even if our date was limited to campus. I’m sure that’s what his motivation was. We didn’t discuss beyond that.

**TS:** Did you ever see him be the victim of discrimination?

**GE:** I don’t recall ever seeing it. That’s not to say it didn’t happen, but I never saw it. He was in a different league from me in terms of both athletic achievement and social skills, i.e., the “coolness factor”, especially with girls, so we did not see a whole lot of each other outside the dorm and track.

**TS:** Well, why don’t we just sum it up with Coach Rohe? What did you learn from him?

**GE:** Well, he reinforced and extended what I had already begun to learn from Coach Ben Martin in Oak Ridge High School about, “You’ve got to train hard; you’ve got to keep on a’ truckin’ when every fiber of your being is screaming for you to give up; you can’t just float through things.”

**TS:** Ben Martin was a nice guy.

**GE:** Oh, he was. Coach Rohe picked up where he left off in character development, i.e., how to be a man; and teaching us how to run through pain and just the importance of hard training—but also one of the most important moral issues of the time—race relations, and integration in particular. Coach was really seminal in getting things moving, I think. I

mentioned earlier the Rattler Relays, which was all Black at that time [please see “Gerry Eddlemon on Integrating Gibbs Hall,” p. 6 of Memories/Stories on Rohetrackera.com].

I feel like, in a way, Coach Rohe has been looking over my shoulder ever since. I’ve been trying to meet his standards in both training and competition, but in a different yet in some ways very similar venue. That carried me to an overall world championship in one of the world’s toughest sports at the tender young age of 65, and to 85 cycling records, several of them international records.

**TS:** Well, Gerry, we will do a longer interview some other time.

**GE:** Well, I certainly enjoyed it.

**TS:** Me too.

Thursday, January 16, 2014

**TS:** Gerry, in the first interview we focused mainly on your time on the track team at the University of Tennessee, but we didn’t have time to talk about much else. In some of the materials that you sent me, it appeared that you were born and grew up in Oak Ridge and had some interesting environmental experiences wandering in a creek at a certain location. Of course, you ran track at one of the best programs in the state at Oak Ridge High School and Coach Ben Martin. Why don’t you talk about that and a little about your background growing up, as well as the injury that hampered your career before you got to the University of Tennessee?

**GE:** I was actually born in Washington, D.C., because my father had just returned from the Pacific war. Both my dad and mother were East Tennessee born and bred.

**TS:** Were you born in 1945 or 1946?

**GE:** In 1945. I’m 68 years old now. I grew up in Oak Ridge. I remember having enjoyed running just for the heck of it. Whenever I went to a meeting of the Boy Scouts or whatever, I often ran there. So it came naturally to me, and I thought that wheezing cough I experienced after every run was perfectly normal for the next 25 years or so (later diagnosed as asthma). That creek that I mentioned—the East Fork of Poplar Creek—is one of the most infamous creeks in the world because of the incredible amount of toxic materials coming out of the Y-12 Nuclear Weapons Plant when I was growing up. It has been intensively studied and many scientific papers have been published about it. I lived just across Illinois Avenue from that creek. Another little fellow and I when we were about seven or eight-years

old would wade back in there and play and explore and had no idea that we were playing in some of the most dangerous elements in the world, probably.

**TS:** I guess nobody talked about it that much back then. I remember growing up under one of those power lines, and those were supposed to be bad for your health too. Somehow or other, it hasn't affected me yet.

**GE:** No, the Russians reported a lot of research on that, and I think the jury is still out. But it's probably best not to actually live real close to it high-voltage power lines.

**TS:** Well, you haven't had any adverse effects to wading through that creek, I gather.

**GE:** Not as far as I know. Who knows? Maybe without all that exposure to mercury and radiation I would have become a world-class runner or Nobel Prize-winning scientist! [laughs]

**TS:** Maybe so.

**GE:** It makes a good excuse for all kinds of possible shortcomings.

**TS:** At least it sounds like from the very beginning you liked to be in the great out-of-doors.

**GE:** I did. I liked to run, and I was in the Boy Scouts. We had a great Scout troop where we specialized not in basket weaving type stuff, but we were outdoors all the time doing something, camping and hiking and everything. Back in the '50s, a 20-mile hike in the mountains in a single day was considered beyond the pale, but not for us scouts of Troop 224.

**TS:** I grew up in Knoxville. We always envied you guys over in Oak Ridge.

**GE:** Oh, really, I remember there were some mighty good teams and individuals in Knoxville. Three I especially remember running against (or more likely, behind) were future Vol teammates Don Pinkston, Mickey Shelton, and Tim Henderlight.

**TS:** I was thinking you had all that federal money pouring into Oak Ridge, and you had a fabulous track. We had a good track at Fulton High School, but I always felt that the track in Oak Ridge was the best around.

**GE:** It was a regular cinder track. One of the worst infections I ever got in my life was from the cinders of that track. After our regular workout one day, I was goofing off doing blind handoffs with the sprinters, not such a good

idea for a distance runner! I was knocked down hard on those cinders. It took a lot of hide off all up and down one of my legs, and I got a terrible staph infection in there. I thought I was going to die at one point. It taught me about doing blind handoffs with sprinters.

**TS:** I guess so. So, you wanted to be a half-miler at that time?

**GE:** That seemed to be my best event. In junior high school I had a tremendous start. I've always had extremely fast reflexes and it seemed like a lot of fast twitch muscle. I could beat almost anybody for 25 yards, and then all the sprinter types would catch me before we got half way down—you know, the 50-yard mark. So, I realized that even though I had fast reflexes, it looked like maybe the half-mile would be ideal for me because I was pretty fast but not fast enough to compete in the shorter races. I liked the idea of a race where there was a slight amount of forgiveness if you made a tactical error. If you stumbled a little, there was a chance to recover. Any race short of that, one mistake and you are out. The half mile was my favorite race of all time. But I got a serious injury in high school, serious from the perspective of being able to run at a fast half-mile pace.

**TS:** What happened?

**GE:** This was another case of goofing off after practice (how many times does a guy have to get hurt before he stops just goofing off?). I was trying to do some high hurdles for the fun of it. I remember there was a snap in my groin. It really hurt, but I thought, well, even back then in Ben Martin's day, we had this idea you just run through pain. I kept trying to train on it, but it got so bad, I couldn't even walk or drive a car. The doctors didn't figure out what it was until I got to UT.

During the summer break, I finally saw a real live orthopedist. He told me the tendon of one of those big muscles on the inside of my thigh had eaten into the bone. It was a vicious circle. The bone would rough up the tendon more. Each made the other worse, especially when I tried to run on it, and basically I have had that nagging me for most of the rest of my life (even now it sometimes hurts during a bike race or long training ride). I only had one good season at UT—good for me—and even then it wasn't that great. They put me on an anti-inflammatory medicine that I hadn't tried before. I had that one good season before it started coming back. And I had long episodes of excruciating shin splints of the type where after a workout you couldn't even walk.

**TS:** So, your career at Tennessee didn't exactly turn out on the track the way you wanted.

**GE:** Not at all, except for the cross country season and part of the winter and spring in 1967 and 1968.

**TS:** That cross country season was 1966 when you all went out to Kansas and ran in the NCAA national championships.

**GE:** I was third on our team, but we didn't have a strong team that year. I think I came back one more year, but it was the same old story. I would get my hopes up, and then a groin injury or shin splints or something. I was not afraid of hard work. I thought I could make up for the injuries by working harder when the pain from injuries subsided. In my case that was really the wrong thing to do.

I recall once there was a temporary, makeshift, single-wire fence just inside the inside lane of Tom Black Track for some reason, probably to protect some maintenance activity in the infield. I was running pretty fast down that track during practice and didn't see that a loop of fence wire was projecting a few inches into the inside lane (I'm blind in my left eye) until my forearm entered perfectly into that loop of wire. It resulted in some kind of summersault hard onto the track, but miraculously suffered no more than some bruises—not even a serious cut from the wire.

**TS:** I didn't realize that you were a zoology major until I was reading your brief biography.

**GE:** I started out in engineering physics. In my junior year I changed to zoology, which was always a first love, and I thought I could do better. But I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do.

**TS:** I got my undergraduate degree in zoology, and then I changed to history. I remember very well taking an ecology class. I heard someone the other day talking about ecology not existing before the 1970s, and I was thinking I was taking a course in it in 1963, so it was around by that time.

**GE:** It's been around a long time, but it may be the word ecology was not used so much except in the discipline itself.

**TS:** Yes, it may be that other people may not have known about it, but I remember us going out to creeks around—there was a Ten Mile Creek or something like that near Knoxville.

**GE:** I think I went to that very creek, and in fact it's only about a mile from where I now live.

**TS:** Probably the same place. I think I put the story on the Rohe era website that right after the SEC meet in Birmingham in 1963 where I probably ran



my best race in the 880—that weekend we had a choice of going on a field trip to the Great Smoky Mountains either Saturday or Sunday, and Saturday was the track meet finals. So I had to beat it back to Knoxville, and got in late on Saturday night, and had to get up early on Sunday morning and spend the whole day going to, I guess, every 1000 feet in the Smokies to see how the ecology changed. I think I wrote that that day in the Smokies, as enjoyable as it was intellectually, was more torture than anything I ever did in our workouts on the track team.

**GE:** I remember doing some fieldwork when I was out at the lab [Oak Ridge National Laboratory], including collecting fish in that same, once highly contaminated creek, only this time with waders and a paycheck! I well remember some of those ordeals, getting up real early in the morning when it was freezing, sometimes snowing, and going out in my leaky waders all day in, say, the upper Nantahala and other cold, high-altitude streams.

**TS:** But I enjoyed that ecology class. If I hadn't been more interested in history, I might have been interested in something like that. It sounds like you went on and had a pretty successful career at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory [as an environmental scientist].

**GE:** I worked out there 30 years and had a very interesting career. It was almost never boring. There were so many interesting and challenging problems in environmental impact assessment and research with trace elements and trace [radioactive and chemical] contaminants in the environment, particularly aquatic ecosystems. It was a pretty good career, but it was real demanding in time, and I didn't get to do as much as I wanted to do, athletically. I did, as I mentioned, break the record for hiking the length of the Smoky Mountains. I think the record was about 16 years old when I broke it.

**TS:** How old were you at that time?

**GE:** The first time was May 6, 1972.

**TS:** So you would have been 26 at that time. I think you said in the first interview that you did 31 miles while you were still an undergraduate, and that whetted your appetite, and you came back a few years later to do the 70 miles. Is that the way it worked out?

**GE:** Yes, when I did that it must have been 1967 because I won the 1000-mile trophy that fall.

**TS:** Oh, the first guy on the track team to do 1000 miles in workouts?

- GE:** Yes, even at home during the summer I kept training and logged that as well. I think I included that run the length of the Smokies as well.
- TS:** I guess you should!
- GE:** I remember Bob Barber up there at Newfound Gap, kind of taunting me, said, “Well, aren’t you going to go the other 40 miles?” I said, “I don’t think so this time.” I remember how fast things started breaking down around 20 miles with the light-weight running shoes. Man, those rocks and roots, after about 20 miles my legs and feet started falling apart. I recall trying to run the last few hundred yards on a fairly smooth section of trail and doing a face-plant for no apparent reason. I slowed way down from there. The crazy thing is the News-Sentinel the next day ran this big article with photos about these two guys on horseback who did it in nine hours and change that same weekend. We didn’t cross paths, but I thought, “My gosh, they think that’s newsworthy? I just did it on foot, and I did it two hours faster.” That was the first time I thought that maybe whenever I do this, I ought to send in a story somewhere.
- TS:** Yeah, probably should have.
- GE:** Both Knoxville papers did nice write-ups, and apparently it went out over the wires because I heard from people at least as far away as Chicago who heard about it. Sports Illustrated got a hold of it somehow and put me in the “Faces in the Crowd” feature. I didn’t even know about it until months later when somebody in the Athletic Department said, “Hey, we’ve got a trophy here waiting for you.” It was this little silver trophy cup that SI gave to people written up in “Faces in the Crowd.” My 15 minutes of fame (or two minutes?! [laughs].
- TS:** So, even in your early days after you left the University of Tennessee you started doing serious hiking, it sounds like. Why don’t you talk about some of the things that you have done? I know you’ve done probably more since you’ve got into your 60s than ever before, but even before then you did some interesting things like climbing Kilimanjaro [2002] and traveling all over the world.
- GE:** The damage to my knee [in the deep descent coming down Kilimanjaro] changed my direction from running and climbing to cycling. I wanted to do some more mountains, as many of the seven summits as I could. I knew I wouldn’t do Everest because, for one thing, you can’t afford it unless you are pretty wealthy person. I did climb Citlaltepetl, also known as Pico de Orizaba in Mexico, the third largest mountain in North America [18,491 feet]. I had some close calls on that beautiful mountain, but coming down Kilimanjaro [19,341 feet] really wrecked my knee. It was the final straw. My

knees had been wearing unevenly since I was a kid, I guess, but I didn't realize it.

**TS:** So mountain climbing is big until 2002, and then you give up mountain climbing and take up bicycling. Is that the way it works?

**GE:** After the surgery because cycling is a lot easier on your knees. I had actually thought of cycling even way back when I was on the Vol track team because I knew I wasn't performing anywhere near the level that I thought I could. I just got hurt so easily, and that one big injury kept coming back on me. So I thought of cycling way back then, but I didn't know a thing about it, and there were no cycling teams that I knew about. So I didn't pick it up until after I retired.

**TS:** What year did you retire?

**GE:** I retired in 2004, and I started casual recreational riding later that year. It wasn't until 2006 that I got serious about racing. I don't know how I made the transition mentally from recreational riding and mountain biking to road biking, which is a lot more dangerous. I somehow convinced myself to try it.

**TS:** So you were about 61 years old maybe?

**GE:** Yes, I did not begin racing until I was about 61.

**TS:** What was the appeal of road biking?

**GE:** I very much liked the idea of going three times as far and up to three times as fast or more for the same effort and energy required for running! The mental and physical conditioning and training that I got from Coach Martin in high school and Coach Rohe in college fit in with my vision for athletic endeavors—I always liked the idea of long journeys, hard journeys. You've heard of the Barkley [Marathons—100 mile race with about 60,000 total feet of hills to go up and down] that they run near Wartburg [Tennessee]. It's a real rugged race, and often no one finishes. Runners come from all over the world. It's hard to qualify for it, and sometimes maybe one guy finishes or none of the [35 each year that are allowed to compete]. I often dreamed up things like that. I was always in the mode of thinking long distances. After I took up cycling I just went online to see what might look interesting. I had heard of the Race across America. I thought maybe organized events like that, but of hundreds rather than thousands of miles, were a way to get my feet wet.

One way I got into it was I kept getting lost on group rides. I would get lost, and I would have to find my way back, and so I would end up riding two or

three times as many miles as the other guys. But it was the kind of thing I thought I would like to try anyway. I was stunned that I was able to do anywhere near a hundred miles. I never expected I could do anything like that, especially considering all the past injuries. I thought if I can do 100 miles, then maybe I can cross the State of Tennessee, north to south, south to north. Tennessee south to north was my first cross state record. Record attempts are solo; you can't ride with anyone else; you have to do it completely by yourself, except for the following vehicle with the officials and crew to make sure you don't cheat or anything. But the very first ultramarathon race I did was the 12-Hours of Sebring, and I did about 197 miles, despite a slow-speed crash and a wrong turn. I won my age class, and turned out I beat all but one under the age of 40. I thought, "Hey, maybe I've got something here."

I looked at it too as a chance to compensate for my disappointments in college and high school track—in high school I wanted to do a sub-two minute 880 (half mile) and got that serious injury before the spring season of my senior year and was hurt so bad I couldn't train at all. But I did tremendous amounts of sit-ups and pull-ups and push-ups and anything I could do that wouldn't hurt that leg to stay in shape. We had a good two-mile relay team that year, and I thought maybe I could run that. My senior year I ran three, and only three, races—the district, the regional, and the state in the two-mile relay with no training at all except push-ups and pull-ups.

As I remember, we won the district and the regional in the two-mile relay, and I think we won the overall team championships too. In the state championship meet I ran the best race I had run in high school, even though I hadn't trained at all. My split was like 2:01, which was a big kick for me because of not having trained that spring and most of the winter. I have to say that was one of my proudest (and dumbest) moments, because I had somehow managed a 2:01 split with no training at all over most of the winter and all of the spring season (other than pull-ups, sit-ups, and push-ups).

But guess what? I wrecked that leg thoroughly. In hindsight (and should have been in foresight, even for a foolish young jock) it was a dumb thing to do. I ran the third leg in that state championship and was way back in third position when I took the baton. I was really inspired. It was night time, when it makes it seem like you are going faster, and I made up 25 or 30 yards on the leaders and blew right by them and handed off in first place. But [one of the Memphis schools] had this guy named Barry Reno, one of the best half-milers in the country. He ran anchor on their two-mile relay team. He won, but he blew himself out, and subsequently lost the half mile. We ended up third in the two-mile relay and second in the overall

team championship by one point). My bad leg was really hurting after that though.

Later, I was a walk-on [at the University of Tennessee]. I asked Coach Rohe if I could join [the team] in the winter of 1965. I trained hard, but couldn't maintain consistent training and for whatever reason I didn't do well except barely for that one year, one [cross-country season].

**TS:** It looks like you found your sport with bicycling, the ultra marathons.

**GE:** Yes, except when you crash. That's the big problem in cycling. It's easier on your body until you crash. Crashes are a lot worse than taking a spill in a footrace. In my brief 8-year cycling career, I've suffered several concussions, shoulder dislocations and separations, bruised and gashed hips, ribs, knees, elbows, and road rash (i.e., leaving quantities of hide on roads all over the country), but, with the exception of microfractures and maybe the ribs, so far no broken bones. Despite those injuries, I've been very fortunate to survive considering how many close calls I've had over the more than 70,000 miles of training and racing in just 8 years, mostly on open roads. Examples: speed wobbles during high-speed descents of mountain passes in Alaska and New Zealand could have easily sent me over the guardrails for one heck of a last wild ride, but I managed to get the bike under control just enough to keep from going down.

**TS:** Well, it looks like you still had some things to prove.

**GE:** I know that part of it was a matter of "unfinished business." I never approached anywhere near to my high school and college goals as a runner. I didn't know it at the time, but I was also suffering from asthma. They kept diagnosing me with acute bronchitis (but, stupidly, I kept running!) until later a physician diagnosed it as asthma. Of course, that was not until my career was over. So I started wearing a face mask for one thing when I was training in cycling to cut down on the pollen and other allergens. I got on one of those ADVAIR [treatments] and that helped. I only take it in the spring when the pollen is really bad.

**TS:** But it sounds like you were still trying to prove things, and also it was a way to be out in nature. It's obvious that you love to be in the out-of-doors.

**GE:** Yes, but I've also seen some of the sorry sides of big cities because in crossing states and countries you often have to ride through them. The rough side of Wilmington, Delaware after midnight; crossing Christchurch, New Zealand, still in recovery from the devastating 2011 earthquake, in rush hour - and on the "wrong" side of the road; changing across six terrifying lanes of high-speed Panamanian traffic by bike. Of course, you are going on secondary roads as much as you can because of the traffic,

so you get to see a lot of rural America that way, and wilderness too, and sometimes some very interesting people. I've got to say I felt like I had been given a second chance after not meeting my goals in college and high school. I thought it was a gift from God, and I thought I'm obligated to see what I can do with it. So that was an important part of my motivation, at least I claim it to be. Sometimes I think it may be pure selfishness, but I try to justify it anyway—might be a rationalization.

**TS:** Well, you've won lots of awards. I think I saw 84 Ultra Marathon Cycling Association state crossing and international time trial records.

**GE:** This past month [December 2013] I set two national and UMCA records for crossing New Zealand.

**TS:** So I guess it's more than 84 now.

**GE:** No, that brought it to 84. I also set three records in the Smoky Mountains. I broke my old record of 24:29 for 70 miles that I set in 1972. I broke it 12 years later on September 16, 1984, on my 39<sup>th</sup> birthday, with a time of 23:38. As a tune-up before that, I did the "over the top" from Gatlinburg to Deep Creek Campground in October 1983. It's only 31 miles, in other words cross the short way. I set that record too [7:11:36]. But in 1984 one of my goals was not only beat my old record, since no one had so far been successful, but I wanted to be the first to do it in less than a 24-hour day. So that was a big goal.

**TS:** So you did 70 miles in under 24 hours?

**GE:** Yes. As you can see from doing the math, it's not really much running. It's mostly walking fast. My time was 23 hours and 38 minutes and 7 seconds. I had always figured way back before I first did it, as a runner that I ought to be able to do it in 17 hours and maybe even 14 hours. It never happened. Both times I ran it I had inflamed Achilles tendons in both tendons, which I genuinely feared would rupture. I prayed they'd hold together and they did, but painfully!

**TS:** Maybe you could do a flat course in that time.

**GE:** Flat would be an entirely different ball game (much faster), but this was like 20,000 cumulative feet of climbing on rough surfaces. Sometimes you couldn't even see the trail. In September when I did it both times, the mountain grasses and weeds would be hanging over the narrow trail. Sometimes, the trail was only a foot wide or less. You couldn't even see it. You have to go by feel, and you can't just run on that kind of stuff, because if you can't see it, you are going to sprain or break an ankle in no time. So I would walk as fast as I could, and the few places where it was fairly level

and fairly smooth, I would run. So, basically, it's more like fast walking than running. But now the record is around, I think, 17 hours. A later Tennessee trackman did it.

**TS:** Maybe your biggest achievement of all time is the 2010 World Cup Championship for ultra marathon cycling because you beat the young guys when you were age 65.

**GE:** Right. I sent you an article [Gerald "Gerry" Eddlemon, "My (Crazy) Championship Year: The Trials and Tribulations of the 2010 World Cup Winner," *Ultra Cycling: The Voice of the Ultra Marathon Cycling Association*, Spring 2011, pp. 17-21] outlining my strategy for taking a shot at it.

**TS:** Why don't you talk about your strategy?

**GE:** One important element of my strategy was to finish every race no matter what the my condition or the race conditions - whether it be cramps, nausea, hallucinations, crashes, violent thunder storms, 100+ degrees or subfreezing temperatures. That's a mantra I had straight from Coach Rohe. In other words, if I start a race, I finish it. To this day I believe I've finished every ultra marathon race and record attempt I've ever tried, even when I was hurt or sick. It was the same for that matter in my track career. That was important because if you don't finish, you get no points toward the championship. If you finish within the overall time limit, you'll get at least something. Most times, of course, I was hoping to do very well and get a lot of points.

I raced in every race that I could and still get enough rest between races. The way you win the world cup is based on your aggregate score of points out of a ten or eleven month season. It's kind of like world cup auto or skiing championships. They have races all over the world. One of the requirements was you had to race on at least two continents—or overseas—because it is the world cup, not just the American cup. I raced in New Zealand that year as well. In fact the last race of the season was a big one, the 800 mile race in New Zealand. I had never even done one that long before.

**TS:** Do you have sponsors, or do you have to pay your own costs to go to all these places?

**GE:** Your own way, and there's not anything in the way of prize money or anything either. It is really an amateur sport, but travel, equipment, and, yes, medical expenses, make it an expensive sport. Some people do have some sponsorships, and I have thought about trying to get some, but I would have to have a manager to do all that stuff. I don't have time to try to

do all that. This year, I just summed up my mileage the other day, and I had 10,500 miles of training and racing in 2013—about 2500 or so of racing and the rest of training. That takes a lot of time and travel, and when you get through, you often don't feel like doing anything else but eat, make love, and sleep.

**TS:** I guess not. Now you just got back from New Zealand, and you were doing 24 hour races over there?

**GE:** Not 24-Hour races per se over there. That 800-miler I did in New Zealand [last World Cup race of the 2010 season] took me just over four days. I was hoping to do it in like three days, but it was just over four days, and I was lucky to finish because my left arm became almost completely paralyzed about 500 miles into the race. I didn't even know it. At the time, I thought there was something wrong with my bike because I was leaning over so far. I finally realized my arm had become almost completely paralyzed. Later, an MRI showed a bruised spinal cord in my neck from the hundreds of miles of pounding on the roads. You know, your neck and head are almost parallel with the road, and that road was chip seal mostly, which [caused] a lot of vibration, and after about 500 miles it just disconnected my arm from the central nervous system. So for the last 300 miles I had to hope my one good arm would hold up and that the old groin injury would not worsen, because it was already hurting.

**TS:** What kind of road did you call it?

**GE:** Chip seal. The chip seal roads were mostly their national highways, actually. Chip seal—we have it here in Tennessee in places. It's where they lay down a thin layer of tar, and then they spread a layer of gravel over it, and then they spread another thin layer of tar. It's better than a gravel road because it's stabilized. The gravel doesn't slip under your wheel. But it's kind of jagged and harsh for an extra harsh ride. You do most of an 800 mile race consisting of that, and it really wears you down.

**TS:** Are you going to be able to continue racing anymore?

**GE:** Oh, yeah. That World Championship win was three years ago. This time (2013) I had to settle for the Grand Masters' Division World Championship, whereas in 2010 it was the overall championship. Also won the 2013 Ultra Cup and the 24-Hour World Championship in my age class and set or broke eight national and state crossing records in three countries. But racing results don't lie—age is catching up with me. In terms of performance, the difference between ages 65 and 68 might be analogous to the difference between, say, a 9-year old and a 12-year old at the other end of the life spectrum.



**TS:** Well, I thought the article was interesting about you cycling 1000 miles across Alaska [Morgan Simmons, “Knoxville Grandfather Makes Record Bicycle Ride across Alaska,” Knoxville News-Sentinel, August 16, 2012]. The photo of the roads makes it obvious it was not what we think of as a paved road that you were going on.

**GE:** That dirt road was just the last 415 miles. The first 575 or so miles are mostly paved and in pretty good shape. From Resurrection Bay on the Pacific Ocean (Seward), north to well past Fairbanks it’s a pretty good paved road except for the caveat is that the highway department has a very narrow window in the summer for repairing the roads from all the winter damage. So there was a lot of construction going on, and you still ended up on some dirt roads for a while, but it was mostly good pavement. The last 415 miles is the infamous Dalton Highway. It’s been featured on the History Channel in those shows about the ice drivers.

**TS:** Oh, “Ice Road Truckers.” That’s one of my wife’s favorite shows.

**GE:** That’s the road, and it’s the only road to the Arctic Ocean. It’s really something. I was doing it in the summer when, instead of ice, you’ve got dirt, gravel, cobble, and mud. Now that was tough. Some of that’s paved now. Probably 50 miles or so of that last 415 miles was paved in short sections where I guess the highway department was experimenting to see if it would hold up under winter conditions. That was such a relief when you would come to a 10 or 15 mile stretch of pavement after [riding] along in mud or rocky trails. Like riding on silk.

**TS:** Well, you’ve got to be in the best shape of any of the Rohe era track guys at this point, I would think.

**GE:** Well, I don’t know. You look like you’re in pretty good shape too. Dave Storey and quite a few others at the reunion a few years ago looked like they were ready for a 20-mile run. And at our age, many of us have chosen other battles to fight, other goals to pursue besides physical fitness, and why not? Athletics or physical fitness are not the be all and end all of life by any means, and are often impossible, especially at our age. Circumstance, convictions, and personal preference determine each man’s battles and goals. But God, family, and friends, trump in importance athletics and all other endeavors.

Despite 10,000 miles per year I still struggle with weight. Amazingly, I can still out eat my exercise. Over the holidays I’ve gained at least five or six pounds just like that.

**TS:** I’m looking at a photo of you in front of your bicycle, and you look pretty skinny in the picture, so there’s no question you are in pretty good shape.

**GE:** I'm not one of those obsessive anorexic types who always think they are overweight no matter what, but I know just from what my weight was when I was working out at the lab, I'm about 14 pounds overweight.

**TS:** I guess you have a lot of support at home to do all this. I read that your wife was a runner and equilibrist and gymnast and such.

**GE:** My wonderful wife Mikki was an outstanding runner for years until she busted both knees in a fall during a 5K (she got up and at age 72 with two busted knees, still beat all other runners including the younger ones). Before her first marriage she was a world-class acrobat and equilibrist, I mean an Olympic-class gymnast. She performed as a professional all over Europe and North America and North Africa from the age of three, so the Olympics were out in that age of amateurism and world war. She didn't start running until she was 40, and in the only two years that she attended the Huntsman World Senior Games she won four gold medals, three silvers, and a bronze. She had, and probably still has, the half-marathon record for two different age categories at the World Senior Games.

**TS:** That's great. Well, why don't we wind it up with you just reflecting on what you learned while you were at UT from Chuck Rohe and from the other guys that you were running with that maybe sustained you throughout your career?

**GE:** Well, I'll tell you, part of it was just the camaraderie of training with a bunch of elite athletes who were great guys, even though I was hardly an elite athlete myself. I really enjoyed training with them. I learned from them and Coach Rohe both, of course; it strengthened my mental toughness, I think, to be able to keep going when you just think you can't go any longer. That helped a lot in ultra marathon cycling because a race can be anywhere typically from eight hours to 4 days or more. And it's not staged races like the Tour de France where you race a 100 miles or so (a stage), and then you rest much of the day, and then another one the next day, day after day. In ultramarathons you keep going except when hallucinations or exhaustion force you to stop for a (hopefully) quick nap.

The kind of training we did—I was a brittle runner, so I got hurt a lot, but I kept trying. I wanted to meet my goals, and Coach Rohe's standards, and I wanted to show Coach Rohe, myself, and my teammates I could do it. He was very good at transmitting his work ethic to the rest of us, and it really carried me through, even when I was working through some tough times as a scientist at ORNL. If I had to pull a 30-hour stint of data analysis and writing reports and everything, I don't know if I could have done it if I hadn't had the kind of hard training I had under Coach Rohe—and Ben

**Martin too for that matter. Coach Martin had the same kind of approach I think, tailored more for high school, of course.**

**TS: Yes, I always thought very highly of him.**

**GE: He was a real likable man too.**

**TS: Yes.**

**GE: But Coach Rohe, I still feel like he is looking over my shoulder sometime. I was thinking just a while ago before you called, I remember this knocking sound way down the fourth floor of Gibbs hall around 5:30 in the morning.**

**TS: Uh-ho!**

**GE: I recall I would usually wake up before Coach would even start knocking on the doors to get us to go running. It would be a short night with studies and all (that word “all” can cover a lot of sins, can’t it?), and then he would be knocking at the other end of the floor, getting closer and closer and closer [laughs]. It was hard, I’m telling you, but it was funny how I would anticipate it and wake up because, frankly, it was unpleasant to hear that knock [laughs].**

**TS: I’ll bet so.**

**GE: But once you got up and got to running, it felt good. No, he definitely had a big impact on my ability, I think, to keep going when it seems like it’s hopeless, when it seems like you cannot go another step. What do you think? Did you feel like that at all?**

**TS: It was the same way. I improved greatly under his guidance at Tennessee.**

**GE: If I hadn’t had this nagging injury, and this may be just excuse making, but I know I could have run under two minutes in the 880 because in just a time trial we had one day I did 2:01 out there on the track. I said to myself, “I know if I can just keep up a consistent training schedule and not get hurt, I can do something under two minutes.” But I never got around to attempting it, except that one time trial. I’ve regretted it ever since because just once I would have liked to have gone under two minutes in the half.**

**But enough of excuse-making and dwelling on a few piddling disappointments!**

**I do better to remember the resourcefulness, wit, and sound coaching of Coach Rohe; the thunder of pounding feet on the worn, uneven boards of the old tobacco warehouse (where else in the world could the feet of young**

men sound like the thrilling thunder of stallions' pounding hooves?); slogging silently down Neyland Drive through a beautiful snow storm on a cold and utterly quiet winter's night; sprinting through the long, dim, curving corridors of old Neyland Stadium; dashing through violent thunder storms on Cherokee Boulevard; the rumbling, gut-shaking, low growl of locomotives warming up along the grimy south of the campus as we trotted alongside on a wet and dreary early morning run; prancing up lovely mountain trails of a misty morning with my teammates (yes, for a couple miles at least one can really "prance" up a gentle hill!); shouts of sheer animal joy as we flew—flew—down a steep grassy slope under a bright, searing sun; and yes, the endless 440 and 220 intervals on that unforgiving track. Sometimes we ran like stallions....

**We were stallions!**

Summing up, I would have to say it was a great honor, and a real pleasure, to run and live with such an outstanding group of young men - the Tennessee Vols track and XC teams - and all under the tutelage and guidance of one of America's greatest coaches, not only in track and field, but in Life itself, in helping to mold boys into real men—Coach Chuck Rohe.

**I'll never forget my time with my teammates and Coach Rohe!**

**TS:** Sure. Well, this has been fabulous! I've enjoyed talking to you.

**GE:** Great! Look forward to seeing you at the next reunion.