Rick Trujillo trains in the Rockies, not on the roads. He chases elk, not PRs. He fuels up on Oreos, not PowerBars. He loves running. But is it possible to love it too much?

Twilight of the Mountain God

BY Steve Friedman

PHOTOGRAPHS BY Ture Lillegraven

HIGHER CALLING
Trujillo, overlooking Telluride, Colorado, has spent his life running the trails of the San Juan Mountains.

CLIFFHANGER
Trujillo pauses along Bear Creek Trail, part of the Hardrock 100 course. He won that race in 1996.

David Horton is a 58-year-old professor of kinesiology who has devoted much of his life to running courses so long, steep, and absurdly brutal that many other merely elite runners—marathon champions, for example—chuckle and shake their heads when they read of his exploits. Horton set a speed record by running the 2,175-mile length of the Appalachian Trail in 1991 in 52 days, nine hours, and 41 minutes, and he inspired a movie when he set a record running the Pacific Crest Trail in 2005, all 2,650 miles of it (he did it in 66 days, seven hours, and 16 minutes, a record that still stands).

Horton, whose nickname in the trail and mountain running communities is, simply, "The Runner," believes in optimism and toughness and in the men and women who embrace these traits in their quest to run ridiculous distances over laughably difficult terrain.

In the summer of 1992, Horton heard of one such man, a geologist who lived in the San Juan Mountains of Southwestern Colorado and who, according to legend, trained by running with elk. Horton figured that any man who could inspire such a comically tall, patently impossible tale would be a man worth running up a mountain with.

They met in Ouray, Colorado, where the geologist lived, and they headed toward snowy peaks. They ran for a long time. They ran up very steep slopes. Horton doesn't remember exactly how long, or how far, or how steep, because it happened 16 years ago, and because, even though measurements like 2,650 miles mean something to men like Horton, the distance a man can go in a day is too trivial to pay much mind. (Mountain runners, like trail runners, avoid paved roads and regular mileage markers. The routes that mountain runners travel, though, are often unmarked and just happen to slither up mountains.) What Horton remembers most vividly is that when the two men arrived at a

cliff face that no human would ever consider running, Horton stopped and he did what mountain runners did.

"What are you doing?" the geologist asked.

"I'm walking," Horton replied. "Isn't that what you do when you get to a place in the mountains that's impossible to run? Isn't this how you do it?"

No, the geologist said, that's not how he did it.

Well, Horton wondered, how *did* he do it?

"I keep running," the geologist said. "And when I get to a place I can't run anymore, I turn around and I run home."

That was the day Horton understood where he fit in the firmament of mountain runners. That was the day "The Runner" started believing the stories about the man who ran with elk.

I had heard stories about Rick Trujillo beginning in the mid-'90s, when I first visited the southern San Juan Mountains. People said Trujillo never kept track of mileage, that he based his stride on the movements of deer, that he had survived wilderness encounters with bears and mountain lions. I'd heard the elk story a number of times. People said joining him on a run through the surrounding peaks was like trying to keep up with a mountain goat. They said that the year he won the Hardrock 100 Endurance Run, an ultramarathon that traverses the southern San Juan Mountains, and which ascends and descends more than 66,000 feet (one of the most difficult ultramarathons in the world), he did it by eating Oreo cookies and guzzling Mountain Dew, that even among ultramarathoners (runners who cover more than 26.2 miles in a race), a group known historically for possessing the bottom-feeding eating habits of catfish, Trujillo stood out for his gleeful and disgusting gluttony. They said that his favorite type of training run was called the "Dumb Dog," which involved running as fast and as far as he possibly could, until he collapsed, panting on the ground. (He denies that, but a man I know who once tried to run with him swears it's true. I suspect it's how the man felt, in any case.) They said he was a kind of Zen master, or idiot savant, of mountain trails.

We first met in July of 2007, when he had just returned from doing geology fieldwork in Mexico. He was suffering from some mild indigestion. We sat down at a barbecue joint in Ridgway, 10 miles from Ouray, where Trujillo ordered a plate of chicken nuggets. "I don't understand how people spend lots of money on stuff that's going to be gone the next day," he said, when I inquired—this was an expense account meal, after all—whether he wouldn't prefer something a little fancier. "People ask me what my diet is, and I say, whatever's available. Iguana, goat. I eat what's there."

He was 59 but looked 45. He had black hair slicked back, a face of granite slabs, and he bore a vague resemblance to Jack Palance. He was 5'11" ("I used to be closer to six-foot-one") and weighed 155 pounds, the same he had weighed since his first year in college, despite an appetite for sugar and sweets that baffles those who know him well. He bought ice cream by the gallon. "Whatever flavor is there. Whatever brand is cheapest." He ate it by the half gallon. "The one thing I can't do without is cookies." He hitched his jeans up high, wore light-sensitive aviator glasses, had three pens stuck in his dark green cotton T-shirt.

"What kind of shoes do I wear?" he said that evening, in response to the kind of dumb questions he barely endures. "What fits me. Whenever I find a pair that fits, I buy out the store." He said people who focus on mileage and time are idiots, that people who race for records and fame are greedy, self-centered idiots. He said that he hated tracks, that he had run on one exactly once

CALL OF THE WILD
Mountain running came naturally to Trujillo. "I cover real rough ground real fast. I take it for granted."

since he left college, when a friend who was worried about his health wanted to take up jogging and asked Trujillo to help him run a mile. He said he didn't like flat courses in general, and that he detested flat, hot races. He said one of his unhappiest days in running shoes was at a Florida cross-country championship. "If these tropical places are paradise," he told me, "I'll take the cold, white hell of the mountains any day."

A year later, I've returned to Ouray to see him again. He's been through a lot in that time. Besides dealing with chronic tendinitis in his Achilles tendons and a torn meniscus in his right knee, he also had a stent placed in his chest. Doctors had placed it there in October 2007, after Trujillo—worried over months of odd heartburn and episodes of breathlessness—scheduled an exam and discovered that one of his major arteries was 90 percent blocked. It was the left anterior descending artery, known among cardiologists as "the widow maker." "In other words," Trujillo e-mailed his friends, "I had been a candidate for a full-fledged heart attack for more than a year but didn't recognize it."

I want to ask Trujillo how a brush with mortality has affected him, what a health scare does to a man who spent much of his existence clambering up slopes of perilously shifting scree. I want to ask the middle-aged mountain man how slowing down and growing old makes him look at life differently.

On this June morning he cooks us a breakfast of bacon and eggs ("What the hell am I supposed to eat? I can't exist on acorns.") He invites me for "a walk" into the mountains (which forever will alter my notions of walking). He complains about "all the heavy questions."

"Major accomplishments?" the runner says. "I don't know. I just do what I do."

How about the five consecutive victories in the Pike's Peak Marathon, the race that climbs 7,500 feet over the first 13.32 miles? Or how about setting the speed mark—15 days, nine hours, 55 minutes—for ascending Colorado's 54 14,000-foot peaks at age 47? "Nah," he said. "I don't consider all that a big deal. Some do."

His legacy? His place among trail and mountain runners? "I don't even think about them until late in the race. If they're still around."

Trujillo is not the fastest mountain runner. Matt Carpenter, a 44-year-old from Manitou Springs, Colorado, probably holds that distinction. Trujillo is not as widely known in the running community as Carpenter or Horton or 41-year-old Karl Meltzer, who has won 48 ultramarathons, 23 at 100 miles or more, and who tried to set a speed record on the Appalachian Trail last summer (he failed). And there are certainly other mountain runners—many of them impoverished Mexicans whose names have never been published in a running magazine—who have doubtlessly logged greater distances, at swifter speeds. Trujillo is not the friendliest person to have ever jogged into an alpine forest, nor the most decorated. And all his records have been broken.

But when it comes to mountain running—which, at its most irreducible, involves following rocky trails long distances into rockier mountains—Trujillo was the first champion, and in many ways the most irreducible. He was—and is—a throwback, a man whose primitive and at times dangerous approaches to things like nutrition and equipment and training seem positively medieval by today's standards. Yet he and his throwback approach to what is, after all, a throwback kind of sport—lope through rugged terrain as fast as you can while you try to ignore things like lightning and lack of oxygen and the occasional hairy predator—are still spoken of with affection and even awe by the men and women of the sport today.

Even among ultramarathoners, known historically for possessing the bottom-feeding habits of catfish, Trujillo stood out for his disgusting gluttony.

HOMEBODY
A well-traveled geologist, Trujillo always returns to Ouray, where his mother, 83-year-old Becky, lives.

Meltzer and Carpenter, both professional runners, have Web sites and corporate sponsors. Carpenter possesses, according to his Web site, a resting pulse of 33 and a VO_2 max of 90.2, "the highest recorded...by a runner." Trujillo is a junk-food junkie and a grouch who thinks the idea of an athlete racing for something like recognition is contemptible. He has no idea what his resting pulse is. Meltzer, Carpenter, and Horton are celebrities whose exploits and training regimens are studied and emulated. Among a certain type of mountain runner, though—the older runner, the runner with an appreciation for pain and its transformative power, the runner who doesn't care for corporate sponsors and Web sites, the runner who remembers when mountain running was simply a matter of going higher, and harder, and faster than anyone else...among those runners, the most intense feelings are reserved for a 60-year-old bachelor who doesn't like to bother himself with little details like time and distance. Among that community of runners—the hardest core of an unapologetically hardcore sport—it is Trujillo who inspires reverence.

"He's way beyond me," says Horton. "I consider myself a pioneer, but he was running the trails and the roads and the big mountains before it was cool. He's just unreal. He's from another age. If he'd come along today, with the technology, and the popularity of the sport, and the emphasis on training and nutrition, there's no telling what he would have done."

"Rick is simply 'The Man' of mountain running," says Kirk Apt, who, at age 46, recently completed his 14th Hardrock 100, more than anyone in the history of the event. "When he started doing his thing, there were no names like mountain running or trail running. Without intention, he invented the sport."

He was 15, skinny, and shy, and not very good at basketball, the sport that drew crowds and impressed girls at Ouray high. The school's industrial arts teacher had decided it was time to start a track team, so he told Trujillo and five other skinny, shy, not apparently athletic boys to run from the school, past the town's ski area, up to the natural amphitheater that loomed to the east of town. This was Ouray's first track team. They ran for a mile and a half before they hit waist-deep snow. Running up a mountain was difficult. Plunging through snow, breaking new trails was very difficult. Everyone stopped, except Trujillo.

His father was a miner, 14th generation American, descended from Spanish conquistadors in New Mexico (genealogy is another one of Trujillo's abiding passions). His Mexican mother, Maria Rebecca (Becky) Trujillo, moved to Ouray in 1950. Trujillo is the oldest of 11 children, and it was that spring day that he found his calling.

"I knew it right then and there, this is what I wanted to do." The other boys ran dutifully every day after school. Trujillo ran joyously, after school, in the summer evenings, on weekends, whenever he could find the time. He ran up Angel Ridge, over Chicago Peak, along Horse Thief Trail. He ran up and down trails that only animals had run before. "It just came naturally," he says. "Have you ever seen deer move down a mountain? Seen them hop? That's what I use for carving high ground at a fast pace. I cover real rough ground real fast. I take it for granted."

COMING OF AGE
Trujillo running for Ouray High School in the mid-1960s (below, left); with the Colorado Track Club in 1972 (above, front row, far right); winning his fifth consecutive Pikes Peak Marathon in 1977.

There was no track in Ouray, so, other than meets at other schools, the only time Trujillo and his teammates ran on cinder was once a week, when they all drove to Montrose, 30 miles away. Trujillo hated it. "I thought, *What good is this?* I saw no point in seeing how fast you can run in circles. The point is to see how far you can go, to explore."

In high school, he set a state record for the mile at 4:26.9 and won three class A state championships in the event. He also won the state cross-country championship. In college, at the University of Colorado, he was named All-American in cross-country, but it wasn't the same. It wasn't as much fun. And that's why he ran, for fun. Why else would anyone run?

Running in college often involved a track, which he didn't like. And he didn't like the track meets or racing against opponents from schools he had little connection to. He liked to race against himself, and the mountains. The coach discouraged running in the mountains altogether. And he complained to his runner about his eating habits.

"He saw me eating popcorn a few minutes before a race at Arizona State, in Tempe," Trujillo says, "and he threw up his hands. It was the fastest two miles I had ever run."

After graduation in 1970, he returned to Ouray to work as a staff geologist for a mining company. He'd work from early in the morning until late afternoon, and then he'd run. Up White House Mountain, 10 miles and 6,000 feet of elevation, along

COURTESY RICK TRUJILLO (3)

mostly game trails, ancient mining trails, and no trails at all. He followed a single line of cow and calf elk up that trail once, summiting at the same moment as a mother and her calf. Or he'd run along Horse Thief Trail to The Bridge of Heaven, a 12-mile roundtrip with a climb of 4,650 feet. For short jogs, he'd take the Lone Widow route, 2.5 miles and a 600-foot climb, but with short stretches of almost vertical walls. He called them "H, T, and E runs. Here, there, and everywhere. You go. You just go."

In 1973, he won his first Pike's Peak Marathon. The same year, Trujillo broke his back in a mining accident. His third, fourth, and fifth lumbar were crushed. Two weeks later, he got fitted with a back brace. Trujillo told the examining physician that he wanted to start running again, as soon as possible. The doctor was skeptical. On August 6, 1974, after spending a day working in Camp Bird Mine, he set out from his parents' front porch on Third Avenue, headed up the mountains that ring Ouray, ran over the 13,114-foot-high Imogene Pass and into Telluride, then not much more than a depressed mining town. He covered the 17.1 miles in two hours, 32 minutes, and 52 seconds. When he arrived, he was wearing only his shorts, T-shirt, and running shoes, and his friend who had promised to pick him up to drive him back to Ouray was nowhere to be found (he had gotten lost). By the time his friend showed up, Trujillo had run into two other friends, and spent some time with the local priest. One of those men called the local newspaper, which published a story about the young man who had run over the mountain. And that's how the Imogene Pass Run started in September 1974. It drew six entrants its first year. Trujillo won the race, in 2:21:18.

Yes, he has encountered bear. Yes, he once stood face to face with a mountain lion. Did he eat only Oreos and drink only Mountain Dew the year he won the 100-mile Hardrock ultramarathon? He's not sure, but it sounds about right.

Trujillo is a throwback whose primitive and at times dangerous approaches to nutrition, equipment, and training seem medieval by today's standards.

"Did I run with elk?" It's as if someone asked him if he could breathe underwater. Trujillo does not suffer fools gladly. "Elk could outrun any guy," he said, "so I just followed the herd. Back and forth, back and forth. After awhile, they stopped running."

In 1978, the mines closed. That's when Trujillo began his life as an itinerant geologist. Except for a couple of years in the early '90s, when he spent time in Ouray during the final years of his father's life, he has spent most of his days on the road, in desolate outposts, searching for gold, silver, and diamonds "from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego." Two days before he left Ouray in 1978, for Grand Coulee, Washington, he took a final run.

It was near the amphitheater where he first ran in the mountains. He went up the trail, breathing the thin mountain air, enjoying a final H, T, and E run in the place he would soon be leaving. Then he saw an elk. A bull. It looked familiar. Trujillo stopped, looked at the elk. The elk looked at him. The elk took several steps toward the runner, and the runner, for a rare moment in his life, stood still. He thought he noticed something.

"If an elk could smile," Trujillo says, "he was smiling. He recognized me."

"**You wanted** to take a walk, right?" Trujillo asks.

"Sure," I say. We have finished the bacon and eggs. We have discussed his youth and the anatomical causes of chest pain and the medical details of an arterial stent. I thought a stroll through the mountain air sounded invigorating. Plus, I didn't want him to think I was lazy, or a whiner, both traits he seemed to despise. So we drive a few minutes to a spot next to a waterfall, then start up a somewhat unused-looking path. It is the Lower Lone Widow trail, which sounds ominous, but, I think, *If it's got a name, how dangerous could it really be?*

A few minutes later, I am clutching a large rock, doing my best not to plunge off a mountainside, sweating heavily and panting. Trujillo is flying up the same mountainside, about 20 yards in front and above me. "I find it easier to climb and to run up here than to walk," he says when I manage to grunt and

GOING HIS OWN WAY
In 1974, Trujillo inspired the Imogene Pass Run after doing a long training run (17.1 miles) from Ouray to Telluride.

struggle up to where he waits. He is tearing a fallen tree apart with his bare hands, tossing limbs down the mountainside. Later, he will return with a chain saw. I can't recall ever feeling quite so unmanly.

Then he is off again, climbing, and descending, and climbing again. In the year that has elapsed since we first met, he seems to have somehow gotten younger. He still looks like Jack Palance, except more vigorous than the night of the chicken nuggets. I only catch a few glimpses of him, a rangy figure in a green chamois shirt and jeans hitched up high on his waist and tinted aviator glasses, because most of my attention is focused on the ground immediately at my feet, loose rock and boulders and treacherous dips and ankle-breaking logs and roots. Suddenly, we are stopped, and there is a very loud noise. I look up. We are at the base of a giant waterfall, Upper Cascade Falls, and Trujillo is yelling (to be heard above the falls) that he loves running at this time of year. And this is where the favorite part of this trip begins, because this is where the Lower Lone Widow bleeds into an abandoned mining trail, which melts into a game trail, which disappears into "a trail that only I and a few others know about." There are cliffs involved. Should we keep going?

No, I say, we should not.

He fell in love in 1986, with a Mexican woman who was a schoolteacher in Silverton, Colorado, where Trujillo was working at the time. "She didn't run, she didn't ski, she didn't hike. Even our two river trips were disasters. The only thing we had in common was an irresistible chemical attraction. It was the most stressful thing I've ever done."

Though he didn't enter nearly as many races in the 1980s and '90s, nor run quite as religiously, he ran "informally" up "mountains in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska; and in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay." He climbed Mt. McKinley in Alaska, Cerro Aconcagua (22,840 feet) in Argentina in 1980. In 1984, he climbed Tortolas (20,210 feet) in Chile. By 1990, he suffered from chronic Achilles tendinitis, which was tolerable as long as he managed to stay off flat surfaces, and terrible pain in his lower back, a lasting reminder of his mining accident.

A couple of years after that accident he went to see a doctor who took x-rays. The doctor put the results up on a wall and told the runner about the surgery he would likely need. "I told him to shut up. I didn't come here to have surgery. Then he told me the muscle will go into spasm and get tighter and tighter and he was talking about medicine I could take. The hell with medicine! I'm not a pill popper, never have been."

The back pain was so great, he says, "I wondered if life was worth living." After deciding it was, he also decided that there was a connection between stress and running. "I realized more than ever that running relieves stress in my life—emotional stress, physical stress, all kinds of stress."

So he started shying away from jobs in hot places and flat places. The mountains were his home. Running in them would be his salvation.

A KING AND HIS CASTLE
Trujillo outside the home in Ouray he built himself (below); his Hardrock 100 trophy (top, left); holding a relief of himself (right).

We are high up on a ledge. This trail seems dangerous, too, and I am gasping again before we go even a few feet, but I suspect this is caused by altitude (we're at about 8,500 feet) as well as post-traumatic stress brought on by my problems on the Lower Lone Widow. After that "walk," we had stopped back at Trujillo's house, where I asked some questions about the stressful love affair ("It's a closed chapter, a bridge crossed and burned, and there's no going back") and whether he's ever tried yoga and how exactly he manages to move so comfortably and swiftly along such challenging terrain ("My rough-ground reflexes are really rusty right now. To improve them, you need to run in a creek bed for a few miles. You either survive it and improve or you end up with a couple of broken legs.")

And now here we are, on another faint, high, rocky trail that seems kind of life-threatening, especially considering his sentiments about broken legs. Trujillo points at some cliffs to our right, tells me that the rocks are one billion, six million years old. He is, after all, a geologist.

"Hmmm," I say, focusing most of my attention on a steel cable that has been fastened next to the trail that I'm clutching.

Below us is another raging waterfall. Ahead of us is a cave. Trujillo mentions that he's always wanted to visit Angel Falls, in Venezuela, and that he hopes to get there one day. He says, in a rare moment of acknowledging his chest pains and the stent helping keep him alive, that "you think you have all the time in the world, then you realize you don't." On the other hand, he admits, except for turning down work to stay in Ouray for the summer, "my life hasn't changed at all."

"I don't know if I ever had a middle-age identity crisis," he says, "but I'm certainly having the onset of an old-age crisis. My biggest regret I have now is not really having my own family. It'd be nice to have a woman to share life with. But at this point, what's the point?"

He says he hopes to keep running until he dies, and that, in fact, that wouldn't be a bad way to go, "in a flash. Just one step to the right or left and it's over."

Such sentiments might sound melancholy, or even frightening, coming from another man, but not from Trujillo. From him, it's just the unsentimental small talk of a 60-year-old who recently has encountered his own mortality, reflections on the future from a lifelong loner, "a hermit in the middle of nowhere."

He says that he canceled his health insurance years ago ("I said the hell with it") and consequently had to pay for his angiogram and stent himself, which ran him about $30,000, and which he forked over in cash, two days after the procedure, which confused the Montrose Memorial Hospital billing department. Consequently, he says, "I might have to make a visit to Uncle Dave," which is what people in Ouray say when they need to take a loan from the local bank, Citizen's State, whose chairman is named David Wood. After he gets the loan, he says, and after he spends the summer fixing his house, and running some races, and running in the mountains, Trujillo will go back to work.

"I'll see if I can line up something in South America," he says. "It's time to get back to the high Andes. Mexico was too damned easy. I want to get to 16,000 to 18,000 feet, where it's a struggle to walk from one place to another."

"Uh-huh," I say, still focusing on the cable.

"Nothing's definite, though," he says. "Life isn't definite."

We are at the end of the trail now, looking down on Box Canyon Falls, where a knot of tourists are gathered to look at the raging water below them, and at the two odd middle-aged men on the cliff across the canyon and above them. We've climbed maybe a quarter of a mile, and though it has been very steep, and though the trip back down the path will be difficult, and though I'm with a guy talking about how great it would be—hypothetically—to die in a flash by just taking one step to the right or one to the left, I will survive if I concentrate on every step. I believe in this because I must. I make a note to myself that if I ever take a "walk" with Trujillo again, I should get in better shape first, and maybe do some dry-creek-bed runs for a few months beforehand.

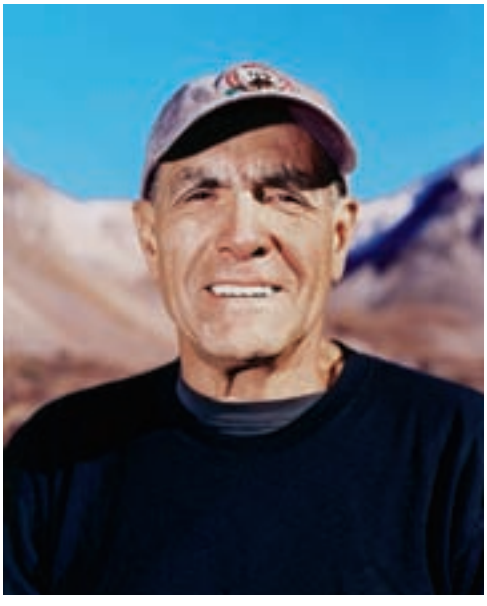
"This is a hazardous climb," Trujillo says.

"What!?"

Did He-Who-Studies-Footwork-of-Deer just use the word *hazardous*? This doesn't make sense. This makes very bad sense. I look up. He has jumped over the cables. The cables that clearly and unequivocally mark the end of the very steep trail. He is floating up another mountain. I lumber over the cables myself, my fear of embarrassment trumping my disinclination toward dying—and try to follow. I think he hears me breathing, and turns to me with a look of something like concern on his face.

Is the mountain runner going to berate me for my weakness? Might he reconsider his climb and come back? Is he feeling sympathy for a lesser mortal than he? No.

"Don't fall," he says, in a very sensible tone, and keeps climbing.



After he had a stent inserted in his chest, Trujillo told himself, "I'm going to do what I want to do, no matter what."

It's early morning, early June, still chilly in Ouray, the mountain village where the runner was raised and where, over a peripatetic and sometimes grinding life as a freelance geologist, he always returns. Outside, birds twitter, snow glistens on the peaks that encircle us. Across Main Street and down the road is the house where he grew up and where his mother still lives. Scattered around the area are siblings, nieces, nephews, uncles, aunts, and cousins. In every direction, accessible from unmarked paths that lead from his wooden porch, are waterfalls and canyons and ridges and slides, the formations that draw Trujillo back here.

He has just completed a run along Lower Lone Widow trail, and the mining trail/game trail/not-really-a-trail. He complains that the trip took him 37 minutes, 35 seconds (he ran it in 29 and a half minutes when he was younger). He holds his right hand out, to show me an ugly, purpling bruise. It's a consequence of the Plavix he had been taking to keep his blood thin and flowing. (He still takes simvastatin to lower cholesterol, aspirin for extra blood thinning, and metoprolol to keep his blood pressure and pulse low.) Because of the Plavix, even brushing against something can result in heavy bleeding and bruising. For someone who spends much *(continued on page 113)*

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of his life alone, scrambling through brush and next to often-jagged rocks, it seems a particularly cruel medication.

He sits on the floor of his living room, stretching. (He always stretches these days; it's what cured him of back pain.) He says when he woke last October in a hospital bed, after surgery, the morning seemed fresher than he remembered, the sun brighter. "I told myself," he remembers, that "life is to be lived, I'm going to do what I want to do, no matter what."

He put off jobs in South America and in Alaska, moved back to Ouray for the summer. He decided if he had to take a loan to cover the idle months, he would. He needed to rest. He wanted to rest. He would rest, here, in the mountains.

So far this restful summer he has lugged a chain saw high into the mountains, on trails that few humans venture, to cut away underbrush. He is planning to put a door onto the second floor closet that has stood open almost two decades. Later today he will drive a few miles outside of town, across a bridge, then a few more miles down a dirt road to visit a fellow geologist, who also had heart problems years ago, to discuss healthy living, and he will pick up a 16-inch saw that he will use to saw some planks for new steps to his porch. Tonight he will take his mother out for dinner, to celebrate her 83rd birthday.

As he stretches I ask, for the sixth time, how confronting the possibility of cardiac arrest has changed him, what regrets he might have, how he views the world differently now, and for the sixth time, he sighs and says, "Oh, no, another deep, existential question," before coming back to the joys of pain and the pleasure of running alone in an uncaring landscape.

"The mountains don't care!" he says. "They'll wipe you out in an instant if you give them a chance. That's part of the appeal. There are times when I knew, if I didn't get down, it would kill me. And that's okay."

Admiration for uncaring mountains shifts to the stupidity of tracks, which segues into the challenge of organizing the Imogene Pass Run, which takes place the Saturday after Labor Day, and then—I'm not sure if it's because Trujillo tends toward orneriness or if I bring it out in him—he starts talking about Matt Carpenter, the sport's current star, who most definitely *won't* be involved.

Carpenter used to run the race, and win. He even stayed at *(continued on page 116)*

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Trujillo's house a few Labor Day weekends. Then, a few years ago, Carpenter lobbied Trujillo to grant exemptions to elite runners, like Carpenter, allowing them automatic entry into the Imogene Pass Run. Trujillo and the race's board of directors decided not to act on the suggestion.

It's not that Carpenter's asking for an exemption to the registration requirements is that unusual among mountain runners. It's not. Neither is his lobbying for cash prizes for winners, something else the Imogene Pass Run does not do. Elite runners bring prestige to events, the thinking goes, and that prestige benefits the race organizers, and it's not like many elite runners are getting rich running, so why shouldn't they make a little something from their participation? Why shouldn't this elite runner receive payment for running in and winning the Imogene Pass Run?

"When races fill in insanely fast times...it is just a travesty not to set aside a few spots based on bio so top runners can get in," Carpenter wrote me later in an e-mail. "What other sport does not let in the best athletes?... Some out there even feel that [Trujillo] tries to keep top runners out of Imogene so his times can still be relevant and boast of how he used to run faster. I really hope that is not true. But how ironic is it that the race he started now turns away top runners just because it fills so fast? Had Pikes Peak had this attitude about runners in his day, he would not have gotten the name he got."

Carpenter didn't seem to understand that running, to Trujillo, wasn't about prizes or special exceptions. It was about running. Winning was never the point. Competing with others wasn't the point, either. Records certainly were not the point. The race itself—making sure it was safe, and that everyone had a good time—that wasn't even the point. Getting outdoors and testing yourself against the elements—*that* was the point.

Trujillo explained that to Carpenter. Carpenter explained some things to Trujillo. They explained back and forth.

"My name's bad in his book," Trujillo says, "and his name's bad in my book."

I've met several elite mountain runners, Trujillo among them, and while they all seemed bright, articulate, even occasionally kind, none of them falls into the category I would call easy-going. That makes a certain kind of sense. *(continued on page 119)*

TWILIGHT OF THE MOUNTAIN GOD

Continued from page 116

Mountain runners dedicate a large chunk of their lives to solitary, rigorous, sometimes dangerous assaults on protean and unforgiving terrain. There's not a lot of room for self-doubt. Hamlets might hurdle. You could probably find a muttering poet or two running 800 meters, or stretching in the high-jump pit. But mountain runners incline toward single-mindedness. Arguments—over entry requirements, prizes, whatever—tend to be clear, and fierce.

Trujillo told Carpenter why the Imogene Pass Run—the race Trujillo inspired on a late summer day when he ran for the same reason he always ran—was not going to pay Carpenter or anyone else. He told him what he thought about runners who ran for money, and fame, and glory.

Trujillo is still stretching while he wonders aloud at how any runner could ask for payment for running in the mountains. Too many people wanted things easy. That was the problem. Too many sue-happy lawyers (most from Telluride) and fancy-food eating pansies and Gore Tex-wearing, clock-watching, mileage-counting joggers running in simple, easy circles. Easy wasn't the path to happiness. Easy didn't chase elk, or climb mountains, or face down mountain lions. Easy didn't confront other hard men and beat them in a race called the Hardrock. Easy was never something in Trujillo's blood.

Now he is speaking loudly. He is railing against the spineless race organizers who would actually accede to such odious demands, then railing against runners who focus on winning, and who look for shortcuts and who care about the wrong things, and railing against arrogant doctors and people who think they know what's best for him, and people who take steroids and whiners and tracks and Florida races and much of the modern world.

Then he is back on the runner who is bad in his book.

"His records will be broken some day," Trujillo says, as the birds twitter outside his home and as the sun climbs higher over the natural rock amphitheater where Trujillo once ran with elk. No one paid *him* to do that. Why *would* anyone pay him? Why would he expect payment, or even want it? Why would he even accept it? What is *wrong* with people?

It's still early, and even though he came home to rest, he has a lot to do today, what with his home repair and trip preparation. First, though, he'll finish stretching. And he'll talk a little more about the inevitable fate of the records held by the misguided, self-centered record holder. Then he'll talk about the fate of all records, held by all self-centered record holders. The fate of us all.

"They'll be broken by a young guy," the old runner says. "By a young runner for whom it's the most natural thing in the world to run up the mountain. Why? Why will he run up the mountains? Because he has an innate natural ability and because that's what he does. That's all. It's just what he does." RW

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