

MCRRC Intervals

September 2021

Newsletter of the *montgomery county road runners club*

On the Horizon

Saturday, September 18, 8:30 am
Lake Needwood 10K XC
Derwood, MD

Sunday, September 26, 6:45 am
Parks Half Marathon
Rockville to Bethesda, MD
www.parkshalfmarathon.com

Saturday, October 2, 9:00 am
*Black Hills 10K
Boysd, MD

Sunday, October 17, 8:30 am
*Cross Country on the Farm 5K XC
Derwood, MD

Sunday, November 7, 8:15 am
*Rockville 10K/5K
Rockville, MD

Saturday, November 13, 6:00 am
Stone Mill 50 Mile Run
Montgomery Village, MD
www.stone-mill-50-mile.org

Races with asterisks are permit pending.

Please visit our website for updates:
www.mcrrc.org

Board Meetings

Board Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month.

Sun, Sweat and Summer Racing



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Bet Glover embraces tie-dye for the Groovin' Woodstock 7K XC.



Photo: Kira Reichmann

James Anderson picks up a fourth-place finish in the Eastern County 8K.



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Chris Moen, Steven Moore, Thomas Ryba, Hasan Hobbs, Nicolas Crouzier, and Mark Rosas kick off the Going Green Track Meet two-mile run.



Always Climbing

by Amy Lin

I'm sorry I to say I spoke too soon when I wrote about returning to normal in our July issue! We had a tantalizing taste of post-pandemic life, and now we have to backtrack a bit. Many of us know the feeling well, having gone through injuries or other setbacks that meant we needed to adjust our training schedules or reset our goals. We may be COVID-weary and frustrated with this latest surge and its ensuing restrictions, but we have plenty of collective experience getting over a long-term obstacle.

In my relatively short running career, I've had to work my way back to the sport after multiple injuries to a range of body parts. (Let me tell you about the fight I lost to a spider back in 2013...) I may not have learned from all my mistakes, but I like to think they've made me stronger—if not in body, at least in mind. Being a part of the MCRRC community has always helped me keep moving.

Our September issue of Intervals provides several perspectives on moving up, whether mental or physical. Brian Murphy offers members a chance to broaden the scope of the Club's regular pub runs. Dan DiFonzo talks to Don Shulman, the outgoing race director of Parks Half Marathon, and the incoming RD, Kiki Li, about the challenges of putting on one of MCRRC's most popular races and how to progress from everyday race volunteer to race director.

For Coaches' Corner, Jay Porter describes how the Club's program "ladder" not only trains participants to go farther in race distance but also helps members return from injury. Mourad Ezzine writes about a literal climb—one with which many MCRRC members have a love-hate relationship—the infamous Rock Creek Trail hill known as the Silencer. Our Runner Profile features nurse and ultramarathoner Liz Ozeki, whose next step up will be tackling parenthood in

addition to running.

Last but not least, Brian Belonia offers a personal take on the cornerstone of nearly all of MCRRC's training programs—the long run.

Most of us are not good at standing still. We're compelled to *move*—forward, up, anywhere that isn't the same spot. Onward, MCRRC!

The Lesson of the Silencer

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At the end of the run I approached Judith to tell her how sorry I was that I couldn't keep up with her pace this time. My legs simply refused to respond. She smiled at me and replied in her usual calm voice, "It's not your legs, it's your head." I must have looked bewildered and a little silly, so she continued, "Next time don't watch the end of the Silencer. Instead, choose an intermediate point, and get it in your head that you are going to reach it. Once you get there you redo the operation. As many times as necessary."

Thank you, Judith, for teaching me how to overcome the Silencer and for all the wisdom you share with us every Sunday.

I cannot end this without also thanking a friend who inspired me to get involved in running: Sadok Rouai. Sadok is now in another league since he too has run several marathons. Maybe one day I can run a marathon with him. It was a dream that seemed impossible to me not long ago. But with the lesson Judith gave me that morning, I feel I can dream again.

—Mourad Ezzine joined MCRRC in 2020. He enjoys running and biking on the Rock Creek and Capital Crescent trails. His long-term goal is to run a marathon, but for the moment he is trying to overcome the Silencer.

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Have comments or questions? Or want to help?

Contact us at Intervals@mcrcc.org.

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Intervals is published bimonthly by the Montgomery County Road Runners, P.O. Box 1703, Rockville MD 20849.

MCRRC is a non-profit, educational organization which promotes personal health and fitness through the sport of running. The club conducts regular running activities, including training sessions races, seminars, and social events.





Pub Runs Are Back and You Can Help!

by Brian Murphy

I've been asked about pub runs several times since MCRRC started opening in-person events back up. I've been slow on getting some dates on the calendar for a few reasons, but pub runs are now back every week and hopefully there will be more in the near future.

It's fun to look back on how pub runs started in the Club. One thing I love when I travel is checking out fun group runs happening with the local running club. My wife and I found a few clubs doing these pub runs, and these gave us a chance to meet some good people and check out the local beer scene (and get some miles in while we were at it). After a few of these, I thought, *This could definitely work in MCRRC*. When the Club president at the time, Mike Acuña, asked me to start up a regular pub run with MCRRC, of course I jumped at the idea.

I love all things group running, but one thing that's great about pub runs is hanging out with everyone after the run, continuing the conversations, and chatting with those in the Club you normally wouldn't know — maybe you run different paces, or you're in different programs. This social aspect really makes the Club feel more like a community than just some people that run together. This wasn't possible during the worst of the pandemic and has been difficult throughout all of it. The idea of social distancing didn't jive with the pub run aspect. However, once we learned more, and saw outdoor activities as relatively safe, we looked to restart these.

I also want to expand these pub runs across the county and possibly have them more frequently. We've already partnered with Astro Lab Brewing in Silver Spring to have a pub run every Tuesday — you can check that out on MCRRC's Weekly Workouts page:

<https://mcrrc.org/weekly-workouts/astro-lab-runs>

We've even partnered with Astro Lab to help you earn great prizes!

Here's where you can help. I'd love a Club volunteer to help bring these to other spots in the county. If you're interested in helping organize a pub run

and have some ideas, reach out to me at: bmurph83@gmail.com and we can work together. Cheers!

—Brian Murphy is the vice president of MCRRC and a member of the Competitive Racing Team.

The Lesson of the Silencer

by Mourad Ezzine

One morning at dawn, like every Sunday, I joined my group of runners for our weekly 5–8 miles in the forest. My group is very disparate in age, gender, and fitness. In fact, it consists of four subgroups: the fast; the average, which I am part of; the slow; and the walkers. We have one thing in common: the joy of exercising while breathing the fresh dawn air and listening to birdsong. In fact, after about four miles, the brain is so infused with oxygen and endorphins that we experience the famous runner's euphoria. Maybe that's why we call the Sunday run our LSD. Officially it's because it's a "long slow distance" run. But whatever the reason for the name, believe me, there's nothing like it to dispel all the dark and negative thoughts that occur during the pandemic.

The leader of my subgroup is an amazing lady named Judith Sitkin-Porzal. She volunteered to coach us. Judith told us she started running at the age of sixty-seven and has been running ever since. That gives me hope for a long running career. I usually choose my place in the peloton next to Judith to adjust my pace to hers, to take advantage of her advice, and to get contaminated by her energy.

The only problem I have with Judith is that she talks all the time while running. At the beginning, two months

ago, she even asked me questions, to get to know me. She didn't realize that for her, who has run a marathon, running with us is as easy as walking her dog. But, to follow her, I need every breath so I don't faint. After the second run I explained to her that I was the type who could either run or chat. Not both at the same time. Since then, she has continued to talk nonstop, but no longer expects any contribution from me.

This particular morning Judith warned us that at the end of our loop we would have to face "the Silencer." We were so eager to run in the morning breeze that no one paid attention. It wasn't until the end of the run that we realized that the Silencer was, in fact, a nasty hill, which felt as steep as it was endless. The inevitable happened. After giving all we had in our guts, one after the other, we dropped out. All except Judith who, tall as three apples, dry as a nail, and light as air, continued, imperturbable, to the end of the hill. Nothing seemed able to stop her. The only concession she made to the Silencer was that she ultimately shut up. Did the Silencer therefore deserve its name? I'm not sure. She may have gone quiet when she realized she had lost her audience.

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Parks Half Marathon Changes Hands

by Dan DiFonzo

Once the final finisher crosses the line on September 26, Don Shulman will step down as race director after seven years at the helm of what has become MCRRC's signature fall event: the Parks Half Marathon.

Kiki Li will take over the reins as race director next year, after beginning the transition while planning the 2020 race and serving as assistant race director for the 2021 running. "I was really excited about the prospect of being a race director because it's a combination of things ... that I really love, in terms of the running and the planning and the logistics," she says.

"It's time for someone who is a little younger, someone who has some different ideas, to take over," says Don Shulman. "I think the race is still fresh, and new people bring new ideas, and that's what every race needs."

Shulman explains that as he approaches professional retirement, he would like to focus a bit more on his own personal life. His wife, Debbie, recently retired after a successful career in nursing. They have four grandchildren.

"We want to do some traveling. I don't want to be tied down for the long term. Parks is an eleven-month-per-year responsibility. It has been seven years. I think it's a good time."

One of Shulman's first volunteer jobs with the Club was hanging road closure signs for the Parks Half. Over the years, he found himself volunteering more frequently and taking on greater responsibility and more challenging volunteer roles.

He recalls an encounter he had with the late George Tarrico (a prolific MCRRC race volunteer) at Riley's Rumble Half Marathon. While working at an aid station toward the end of a hot and humid race, Don and George helped a dehydrated runner board an ambulance. As the ambulance pulled away, he remembers Tarrico approaching him and asking him his name.

"George said, 'Well, you're going to be a race director, so I'm going to call you shortly to discuss. You can only say no to George once, and this wasn't the time.'" Shulman became race director of the Hills of Cabin John 5K trail race not long afterward. He continued to stay involved by volunteering at other races, including as a team captain for the Parks Half. It was here that Shulman

began working with then-race director Mike Acuña.

"It was my relationship with Mike that really drove me into this, because he's such a good guy. I really loved working with him, and he asked me if I would consider replacing him down the road," says Shulman. "Mike had a great plan, and I really enjoyed learning about all of the pieces of the puzzle that went into planning a race. A lot of it was the relationship I had with Mike and how close we were. If it weren't for Mike, I don't know if I would have ever done this."

After participating in MCRRC's inaugural training program for race directors, Kiki Li had been searching for a race to try her hand at directing. "[Then] the opportunity

of twenty-three team captains and an army of about five hundred volunteers.

Asked what he would miss most about being race director, Shulman didn't hesitate.

"It's great being able to work with all of these people and watch all of the details just come together," he says. "For me, my easiest day is race day because everything I have done and worked on has taken place in advance. On race day, it's like all of the members of the orchestra are coming together and executing this performance of coordination, organization, intellectual knowledge, and hospitality. It's a great feeling to see all of your hard work coming through and everybody just doing their jobs. I think I'll miss that the most."

Serving as race director has also been a great learning experience for Shulman.

"I've learned it's all about relationships. Whether it's law enforcement, transportation, all of your vendors, all of your team captains, you can't do this alone, and you have to be very patient and really cultivate and maintain great relationships with people to get them to trust you."

There are a few things, however, that Shulman won't miss.

"I really don't like having to worry about having enough registrations or about expenses. Parks works on a very tight budget and thin margins. We donate a lot of our proceeds to charity, so we want to make sure that we have enough to support our Club and support our community which is an important part. That's also the stressful part—watching registrations, and encouraging people to register, and worrying about getting the people we need to make this a viable event every year. There truly is a business end to all of this."

He also won't miss the sometimes ridiculous questions he has received throughout the years.

"On race morning in 2019, I got this phone call from a runner five minutes before gun time, saying, 'Hey, I'm here. What do I do?' Seriously? You almost need to have someone field those phone calls and those messages, so you don't have to deal with them while trying to use your patience to put on a race and find volunteers on top of everything else."

Shulman fondly recalls his favorite race



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Don Shulman (right) and son Billy Shulman, race emcee, pose at the finish of Parks Half Marathon 2018.

to be a race director "under Don came up," she says. "I have such admiration for Don. He's a tremendous leader ... and such a great teacher. I've learned so much in the past year, working with him."

Shulman took over as race director for Parks in 2015 (coincidentally the same year that Li joined MCRRC) and has held that role ever since. In his role he manages a staff

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Climbing the MCRRC Ladder

by Jay Porter

The MCRRC “ladder” of training programs works wonders for Club members. The programs not only helped me grow as a runner, but also helped me recover from recurring knee issues, get back out there, and build it all up again (and again, and again). I’d like to give a shout-out to my amazing pace coaches and program directors who helped make it possible.

In fall 2014, I was fifty-four years old and overweight, with little ability to run. I had just finished dead last in a charity 5K, and, huffing and puffing across the finish line, I was embarrassed, to say the least. It was at that moment I knew I had to do something different.

My wife, Patty Porter, has been running in MCRRC’s half marathon programs (and has done FTM to boot) for years. She finally convinced me that joining MCRRC was the way to go.

So my journey began with my first rung on the ladder, the 2014–2015 Winter 5K Program, and my first coach, the infamous Jim Farkas. While I thought I might not survive that first group workout, Jim was there to inspire, push, and pull us along the journey to our first 5K.

So why stop there? Next rung up: the 2015 8K program, led by Shirley Skorbianski. Just “Keep on moving,” says my many-time coach and coaching mentor, Wanda Walters, so next came the 2015 Fall 10K program. Then the 2015–2016 Winter Half Marathon program, led by the amazing Vicki Nathan, who gave us tips of the trade each week, and constant positive energy to inspire me to my very first half marathon, the 2016 DC Rock ‘n’ Roll. I was overcome with emotion after the race. The “runner’s high” was ever-present that day.

So I figured, let’s do this again... the 2016 Summer Half Marathon program, led by Larry Feidelseit. It was not so great this time. It was a hot humid summer, and I was already struggling compared to winter, but then I started having sharp pain in my right knee after five or six miles on each long run. Went to the orthopedist, who said it was nothing structural, “just” arthritis. My only choices: a knee replacement or stopping running altogether to let it rest. So I stopped mid-program. And I stayed stopped until winter.

That’s where the amazing ladder of MCRRC programs came through. Starting

once again with the Winter 5K program and then the 8K and 10K programs, I once again got to/through the Winter Half program. The slow build-up of strength and endurance through each program is perfect for returning from injury. This is also where I got introduced to coaching, when our pace coach got hurt and I was asked to coach our pace group for the rest of the program. I loved it and finished my second half, this time the 2017 Shamrock in Virginia Beach. I “kept on moving,” coached during the Summer Half program, and ran my third half, my first Parks Half, that fall. Why stop there? Then, oops! I decided to run the Philadelphia Half in November with Patty. I made it about four miles in and the sharp knee pain started up again, though I still finished.

This time the orthopedist’s order was to wear a protective brace that shifts weight away from the arthritis, and keep running distances low, or get a knee replacement. I took the winter of 2017–2018 off and started walking workouts again through 2018, and the knee brace did wonders. I felt so good that it was time to start up again, with the Winter 5K in 2018, and back up the MCRRC ladder I went. But I took it slower this time.

Speeding forward to 2020 and COVID, and feeling so good during the winter, I started extending my long slow runs to the point of co-coaching the virtual intervals group for the Summer Half. And after three years away from half marathons, I ran another, albeit by myself, the virtual 2020 Parks Half Marathon.

I ran on my own all COVID winter, coached in the virtual 2020–2021 Winter 5K, and had built up to double digits on long runs again by spring, before... you guessed it, I’m now recovering from the latest episode of my right knee squawking. So I have stopped running for the past few months.

It’s almost time to climb that ladder again. Fall 5K, here I come!

Thank you, MCRRC, and your amazing programs!

—Jay Porter has been an MCRRC member since 2014 and most recently coached in the 2020–2021 Fall and Winter 5K programs and 2020 Summer Half Marathon Program.

Parks Half Marathon

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memory.

“[Club member] Andy Steinfeld ran the race and his friend had recently passed away from cancer. Mike Acuña and I were holding two medals for Andy as he crossed the finish line—one for him, and one in memory of Jan, who was his running partner. It was a very emotional moment. They ran this race together for so many years. It reminds me that running isn’t business, it’s personal, and to be able to express and engage in that level of personal belief and memory was just the most touching thing that’s happened in all the years I’ve [directed] the race. It was special.”

Asked what he’d like to be remembered for, Shulman insisted that it’s all about the runners.

“I want people to remember having fun. I want people to remember finishing with their friends. They don’t have to remember me at all!”

But make no mistake, Shulman’s imprint has been indelible. He conceived “High-Five Hill,” lining it with smiling kids sporting oversized Mickey Mouse hands to help distract tired runners as they climbed the dreaded Silencer. He’ll also be remembered for having to reconfigure the course to accommodate the Purple Line construction. One of the unintended consequences of that change was that it fortuitously allowed runners to enjoy 11.2 miles of the course in the park and very little of it on the streets.

“The National Capital Park and Planning Commission liked it because it exposed more people in the community to more of our park and reminded them that the parks are open and should be utilized as much as possible,” said Shulman.

Shulman offers a simple few words of advice for his successor.

“Stay close to your people, trust everyone, and follow up. Double-check and triple-check everything to make sure that all of the little pieces are in place. It’s all about the little details with this race.”

—Dan DiFonzo is a frequent contributor to *Intervals*. He is also a coach with the *Experienced Marathon Program (XMP)*.

Liz Ozeki



by Lisa Levin

If there is a certain category of runners that is naturally talented at running long distances, Liz Ozeki falls squarely into that category. Liz qualified for Boston at her first marathon and subsequently placed first woman overall at her first two ultramarathon races in 2019, the Algonquin 50K and the inaugural Marine Corps Marathon 50K. Liz, who has been a member of MCRRC since 2018 and on the Competitive Racing Team since the beginning of this year, is a registered nurse and is expecting her first baby in late November. She lives with her husband, Ben, and dog, Harry, in Rockville.

When and why did you start running?

I started running in 2002 when my best friend asked me to join the high school cross-country team with her. I didn't even know what cross-country was at the time. I didn't run competitively in college, and got back into more consistent running when I decided to run my first marathon.

When did you run your first marathon? What do you remember most about it?

My first marathon was the 2016 Portland Marathon. My twin sister and I signed up together, and we also somehow convinced two other friends and my husband to run it with us. My sister decided that we would try to run a Boston-qualifying time despite it being our first marathon. She bought me the book *Advanced Marathonning*, by Pete Pfitzinger and Scott Douglas, and made me follow the training plan. Race day was rainy, but the temperature was perfect compared to the DC summer weather that I had trained in. We ran in a big group trailing behind the 3:30 pacer. The pacer was friendly and encouraging

and talked to us the whole way. It was so surreal running past the 20-mile mark having never run farther than that before. I kept expecting to hit the wall that everyone talks about, but the wall never came, and my sister and I finished together two minutes ahead of our goal time. We qualified for Boston, and ran our second marathon at the 2018 Boston Marathon.

How did you find out about MCRRC?

I learned about MCRRC from Hai Nguyen. I was looking for group runs closer to my house, and he directed me to the Sunday Ken-Gar runs. I became

to increase the distance, and what differences have you found in the ultra races from standard distance road racing?

I wish I had a great motivational story, but I think I signed up for my first ultramarathon (the 2019 Algonquin 50K) because I saw it advertised online and it looked like a fun and well-organized race. The trail was also flat and non-technical, so I thought it would be a safe first ultramarathon as I had very little trail running experience at the time.

As 50K is so far the longest distance I have raced, I actually don't find it that much different from training for and racing a marathon. I haven't run a race long enough yet to feel comfortable drinking pickle juice and eating potatoes mid-race.

Is there any one aspect of your training that you think has contributed to your continued success, particularly in longer distance races?

After a disappointing third-place finish at my annual Turkey Trot, a friend and I joked that we needed to do speed work for a year to get faster for the next year's race. It was after that race that I started going to weekly track workouts and I gradually began to see improvements in my race times. For those wondering, the speed training worked, and I won the race the following two years.

In the marathon, the biggest aspect of my training that I think has led to my success is my consistency and mileage. In my last marathon training block, I started running six days a week instead of five, and I increased my peak weekly mileage from 55 to 70+.

Do you do anything specific to help prevent injury?

I try to do strength work two days



Photo: Robin Lerner

Liz Ozeki at the Run for Roses 5K 2021

a member in 2018 for the free low-key races, but I also felt guilty eating the post-run cookies at Ken-Gar without being an actual member of the Club.

You recently started running (and winning!) ultras. What motivated you

a week. I'm convinced that it helps prevent knee and hip issues. I've had issues with plantar fasciitis in the past, so I also have a heated foot massager that I'll use at night when I'm sitting on the couch.

Do you have a favorite race?

Despite the super-challenging course, my favorite race is the RRCA Club Challenge 10 Mile. I love that you're not only racing for yourself, but you're also trying to do your best for your team. It's awesome seeing so many familiar faces on the course and competing against some of the best runners in our area.

You have an identical twin sister! What's your relationship like, and do you share your love of running? Do you train/race together?

We are very close. We talk every day, and a lot of what we talk about involves running. She lives in California, so unfortunately we don't get to run together very often. But whenever we visit with each other, usually we will find a race to run together. We've actually raced five marathons together, so I can kind of credit some of my marathon success to her, as I only ran as fast as I did so that she wouldn't beat me (sadly, I'm only 1 for 5). Although we do cheer each other on, we are still very competitive with each other. At our last in-person marathon together at the 2019 Chicago Marathon, I PRed by 11 minutes and she still beat me by 12 seconds. I recently beat her pregnant 5K PR, and my 50K PR is still 3 minutes faster, so it is an ongoing rivalry.

Particularly over the past 18 months, how have you balanced a demanding (and stressful) career in nursing with your training? What unique challenges do you face fitting your running/ training in with your career as a nurse?

With big races cancelled, I actually haven't done a serious training cycle since pre-COVID. During the peak of the pandemic in 2020, I was working on a COVID unit for three months. Although it was emotionally exhausting, my work hours changed and I actually felt like I had more free time to run. It was very isolating running solo but I took the opportunity to explore new running routes around my neighborhood, and I participated in some more unique virtual challenges like the Quarantine Backyard Ultra (run about 4.2 miles every hour on the hour) and the Broken Ladder Challenge (run one mile more each day than the day before). I lasted twenty-five days in the Broken Ladder Challenge, with my coworkers encouraging me each day not to drop out.

The most challenging thing about fitting in running with my work schedule are my work hours. I prefer to run in the morning, but that requires getting out the door around 4 am. Running after work is tough, because I'm usually very tired. I keep running clothes in my work locker, so I can always go for a run after work before I drive home. I've also run-commuted to and from the hospital. When I work night shifts, I'll have my husband drop me off at work, and I will run home in the morning. When I'm serious about my training, I will find a way to fit it in.

Currently, you are also juggling pregnancy with your running and training (congrats!). How has your pregnancy affected your training and how have you adapted your training, racing, and mental approach/ expectations to continue running through pregnancy?

Thank you! The biggest change is just having less energy. I've thrown all time and pace goals out the window both in training and in races and just run by

feel, making sure not to overdo it. Any time that I can get outside and run (no matter how short, or how slow, or how many walk breaks), it is a good run to me! I am very thankful for my Ken-Gar running buddies who will run my pace and wait for me when I need to use the bathroom!

What are your goals for 2022?

I'd like to tackle longer ultra distances like a 50 miler, 100K, and maybe even a 100 miler. I also plan to become an expert on running with a baby jogging stroller.

—Lisa Levin has been with MCRRC for more than a decade. She is a member of the Competitive Racing Team and co-founder of Run Farther & Faster.



Photo: Amy Lin

FTM's 10:00 pace group charges the Silencer in 2018.

One Long Run

by Brian Belonia

It's early. The sun isn't even up yet. But I am. I should sleep more. There's a scheduled long run, and I'm going to need all the rest I can get. I turn over and try to shut my eyes. It's no use. The giddiness of a long group run permeates my thoughts. *Let's go. Let's get it.*

As we gear up for a long run in our respective training programs for fall races, we can't help but feel like schoolchildren again. As the song says, "It's a new dawn / It's a new day / It's a new life for me." (All due respect to John Coltrane's version.)

And just like that first day of school, we've meticulously packed every square inch of our kits to ensure we have everything we need for today's run: energy gels, water bottles, phone holder, sunblock, and more. The list runs furiously through my mind like a strobe light. Never ceasing. Always triggering the next item. *Where are my socks? Which shoe rotation am I on today? Where is the meeting place? What time is it? Did I charge my watch?*

After making some questionable driving choices to meet the group and a half-hearted attempt at a warm-up stretch, we set off. With a click of the watch, the pace coach takes the first

strides and others follow suit. Breathe in, breathe out. Right foot strike, left foot strike. Kit in tow. Water sloshing.

Later in the run, we find ourselves approaching the Silencer. For the uninitiated, a few miles north of Ken-Gar Palisades Park is an S-curve climb. It gets its name because it tends to quiet all conversations as runners surge up the incline. The Silencer knocks down the enthusiasm I once had, replacing it with fear and doubt. *Are they all this bad?* Luckily, no. I find my stride by Mile 4, feeling my confidence grow.

The sun beams down like an oven on everything and anything caught without shade. The water I judiciously packed and consumed with regularity at the mile points now feels light and insufficient. *Am I going to finish?* "Two miles left," a coach yells to the group.

I pop a Gu, down the last of my water, and grit my teeth for the home stretch. The minutes tick by with the speed of grass growing. I pick up the pace. Anything to end the torture of the unrelenting heat. But it comes at a cost. Anaerobic exercise has taken over. It's all intensity and adrenaline at this point. Heart rate is spiking and it is no longer an "easy" run by perceived effort.

"Stay behind the coach!" fades into the distance as it is a sprint to the finish. All common sense is thrown out the window.

Crossing the original start line, we circle around and exchange high fives and fist bumps on a job well done. Still gasping from that impromptu finishing sprint, I look up to hear those magical words, "Great job. See everyone next week!" *Absolutely.*

—Brian Belonia has been a member of MCRRC since 2019. He currently coaches in the First Time Marathon program.

