an alumnus finds special meaning in long-distance running.

Chul Hyun '83M (PhD) began running in his mid-40s to stay in shape, and decided in 2003, at 49, to complete his first marathon before he hit 50.

That was 56 marathons ago.

"Every one is precious," he says. "You get to meet new people and see beautiful scenery. There's endurance and hardship in running, but it does create a sense of well-being and accomplishment, and it makes me spiritually stronger as well."

Hyun runs between five and six marathons a year. Besides completing the New York City and Boston marathons, he often travels with his family to race in places such as Rome, Barcelona, and Quebec City.

He typically runs about 30 miles a week, bumping his mileage up to between 35 and 40 miles a week when in full training mode. As a gastroenterologist in private practice, he schedules early morning procedures two or three days a week in order to finish by late afternoon, when he heads to a nearby trail, with 16 round-trip miles of rolling hills, along the Hudson River near his home in Palisades, N.Y. He doesn't listen to music while exercising. "It gives me time to be alone," he says.

Marathons are also great teachers, notes Hyun. Some of his best lessons: don't be too happy to go downhill, because that just means there's an uphill battle ahead, and never underestimate the strength and speed of an unstylish grandmother, who once beat his time at a race in the Steamtown Marathon in northeastern Pennsylvania.

Last September, he and his wife, Mikyong Kim Hyun '82, ran the Rochester marathon, an event they make a point of running as a couple each fall. The course winds along the Erie Canal, not far from the Medical Center, and follows the Genesee River past the River Campus. The landmarks are special to the couple, who met while they were Rochester students—Chul studying biophysics and Mikyong studying studio arts—and to their families. Mikyong's sister, Mihea Kim '86, and brother, Jong Kim '80, also graduated from Rochester. Chul and Mikyong's daughter, 16-year-old Sarah, hopes to join the legacy to study medicine.

Hyun currently takes about four hours to run 26.2 miles, though his best time was three hours, 41 minutes.

His new plan for 2014? To complete one marathon a month.

"When you’re running in one," he says, "you think, 'Why am I doing this?' But when you come to the finish line, you think differently. It’s 'When is the next one?' It’s really the joy of my life."

—Robin L. Flanigan

Flanigan is a Rochester-based freelance writer.