SOME FRIENDS CHAT OVER COFFEE. OTHERS GET TOGETHER FOR A BARBECUE, OR TAKE IN A MOVIE. HES ALUMNA HALEY SCHWARZ AND HER FRIENDS SPENT QUALITY TIME LAST SUMMER RUNNING A 100-MILE RACE IN THE MOUNTAINS OF COLORADO. IT WAS A YEAR-LONG COMMITMENT: SCHWARZ STARTED TRAINING IN THE FALL OF 2013 BEFORE TAKING PART IN COLORADO’S LEADVILLE TRAIL 100 RUN IN AUGUST 2014. ACTIVITIES RANGING FROM STAIRMASTER WORKOUTS TO PARTICIPATING IN OTHER LENGTHY RACES HELPED PREPARE SCHWARZ FOR LEADVILLE’S ANNUAL HIGH-ALTITUDE COMPETITION ON ROCKY MOUNTAIN TERRAIN. STILL, IT’S THE CAMARADERIE AND SUPPORT OF FRIENDS AND FAMILY THAT SCHWARZ SINGLES OUT IN DISCUSSING HER ABILITY TO RUN A RACE THAT TOOK HER ROUGHLY 28 HOURS TO COMPLETE.

“JUST TO HAVE MY WHOLE FAMILY THERE TO HELP ME FINISH—AND REALLY GOOD FRIENDS—MADE A HUGE DIFFERENCE,” SHE SAYS.

Schwarz, who earned a Mizzou Human Development and Family Studies bachelor’s degree in 2002 and currently serves as an HES Alumni Organization Board member, started running after college graduation. Schwarz ran her first marathon in 2003 and several marathons after that, enjoying the challenge and focusing on improving her time. Once Schwarz and her husband, Tom, had children, running became a social outlet that she enjoyed with her closest friends.

Running’s social aspect drew Schwarz to the Leadville race. The brother of one of Schwarz’s running friends competed in the 100-mile run in 2013, and Schwarz and her friends were inspired to do the same. Schwarz turned to clinical exercise physiologist Tom LaFontaine to devise a training plan. LaFontaine, an adjunct professor in the HES Nutrition and Exercise Physiology department, came up with a routine that included regular long jogs, climbing muscle workouts and higher-intensity training at least once a week. Part of the training involved determining a pace that Schwarz could maintain for the kind of distance she’d be covering during the race, LaFontaine notes.

“When you’re preparing for it, the main thing is to get used to the pace, used to the terrain,” LaFontaine says. “There’s a lot of just being able to keep going.”

Emotion and adrenaline are part of what helped keep Schwarz going. So did the encouragement Schwarz received from her husband and two children at the race’s aid stations, where they helped her stay hydrated and quickly change clothing as the temperature varied. And though Schwarz acknowledges how tired she was by the race’s end, she also describes the competition as a highlight.

“It’s just a remarkable feeling,” Schwarz says.