

The Old Spaghetti Factory: John Baines

Festive can mean a lot of things.

When I think of festivals, the Mardi Gras in Rio and the Running of the Bulls in Pamplona come to mind. I guess festivals come in many guises, too. I would like to talk about a unique festival that occurs in Honolulu every year in early December the night before the Honolulu marathon. In December it's quite cool, around 60 Fahrenheit at 6.00 am when the marathon starts in Alamoana Boulevard and 80 degrees at 10 am when the majority of runners have finished at Kapiolani Park at the foot of Diamond Head.

The Festivities start the night before at **The Old Spaghetti Factory**.

In 1982, I was running my third marathon and I wanted it to be in Honolulu. The family was living in Hong Kong where I ran my first marathon in January, the second in Macau (it was the first Macau marathon ever run and I had a good finish time).

As all marathoners know, the night before any marathon is the most important. There would be more than 10,000 competitors, raring to go from 5 am to the start at 6. We need to carbo load the evening before and nowhere better than The Old Spaghetti Factory, a huge barnlike structure, three stories high with inside balconies overlooking the central dining room, an outdoor courtyard surrounding an area where no-one was sitting, (standing room only), a domed metal gate with the name of the establishment, and inside, elaborate antique furniture belied the raw nature of the festivities about to take place. Can you believe, they even have a railway carriage just inside one of the three large semi-circular entry doors.

The noise was deafening. We started early. But, over a thousand people were already crowding into the place which was 70-80 yards long. Everyone was standing. All held large picnic plates crammed with spaghetti with what looked like bolognaise sauce. Long tabletops on trestles stretched across the width of the restaurant and all you could see was mounds of steaming spaghetti and tureens crammed with sauces. You paid your entry fee at the door and helped yourself to all you could (or wanted to) eat.

Harvey, Leo and I burst out laughing and forced our way to the food. Ninety percent of the diners were male and there were a few youngsters who came for the experience and were thrilled by the feast, the noise, the high spirits and the obvious happiness of all the participants. Runners ask us where we are from, and we want to find out what times they are aiming to run. Harvey has a posh English accent; Leo is from California, and they all think I am from South Africa. Hardly anyone is drinking alcohol. Mostly Coca Cola and water. You would swear they were all into the beer, as the noise level is so high and their spirits almost as high.

After we have eaten, we talk to more of the runners and we can sense they are winding down. It's an early wake-up and despite the excitement, we head for home and bed.