

Coney Island History Project Oral History Archive

Interviewee: Jorge Gallegos

Interviewer: Leslee Dean

<http://www.coneyislandhistory.org/oral-history-archive/julio-sauce>

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LD- My name is Leslee Dean, I'm here with the Coney Island History Project, and I'm here with...

JS- Julio Sauce. It's a pleasure to be invited to be here with you, and well, thanks for the invitation.

LD- Thanks for being here. So, I'm going to ask you some questions about your life, first if you could tell me, where are you from?

JS- Yes, well I'm from Ecuador. And I spent my youth, or rather my childhood in Ecuador, and well, there came a time when I had to leave as an immigrant to this country. So in '94, I decided to come here. So I arrived here in '94, and I began living in Brooklyn, here in Coney Island. And since then my life has been...nice, the environment that I need, thank God.

LD- And how old were you when you came?

JS- I was exactly 20 years old when I arrived here in New York.

LD- And did you come to work, or...?

JS- Well yes, I think that sometimes we come with dreams. I came with the dream that I would go for four years, do something, and return to my country. But, now I think that I've been here more, more than 20 years, and I haven't returned to my country.

LD- Which part of Ecuador are you from?

JS- I'm from a place called Déleg, it's part of Cañar and we're from a farm, I'm not from the city. From the farm, and with pride we call it Déleg.

LD- What did you think of Coney Island, from Ecuador, when you arrived from Ecuador?

JS- Oh, very different. Or something, something that I had really never seen, never been familiar with. And well, first everything, should I say, was nice because I had my brother and he took me around those first few days. And then, I went to work, to what one comes for.

LD- Mhmm, and where did you start working?

JS- I started working in a restaurant, washing dishes. And from there washing dishes, I worked in cleaning, cleaning restaurants as well.

LD- Here in Coney Island?

JS- Yes I worked right here in Coney Island. But there came a time, when I said no, I have to find something more. Or rather, my thinking wasn't to stay stuck in one job. I simply had to find something more, to get ahead. So I left, then I began to work in Manhattan. Washing dishes, at the salad bar, and that's how I got to work cooking. And now that's, well to this day that's my profession, cooking in restaurants.

LD- And what did you think of the food here, when you started working?

JD- It's a little different. A little, a little different because one isn't accustomed to that kind of food. But, but with time you become accustomed. You become accustomed and, more than anything, I would say that in my country, well I come from a humble family, and sometimes we had, and sometimes we didn't have anything. So, I think because of that the food over here was a little, better for me. But, I thank God always, for the friendships that I've made, and the friends that have supported me in this project I've started, to run.

LD- So, how did you start running?

JS- I started running in my country. When I was 17 I did a race there, but in our country there's not, so to speak, the support. And well, bad friendships are always there and so I ran one time, and I didn't go back to running. When I arrived here to this country, I saw a marathon on television, and I saw German Silva, the Mexican that won. And the feeling came to me, that I have to run it, I have to start doing what I like. I think I've always liked it. In the second year, again, I saw him run again in '96, he won it again and I said, "Wow". So that's when my inspiration started, that I have to run that race. That I have to run and from there I started training, training, training. And finding friends that run and they gave me the, should I say, programs to be able to run.

LD- So, when you started did you just, go out and run, or...?

JS- Well in the beginning I started to run, to train. A little bit, 5 miles, 3 miles, 5 miles, 3 miles. And I went to a competition to investigate where the races were. And over everything I started running the one here at Coney Island.

LD- Which one?

JS- The half marathon they did before here in Coney Island, and also the one in Prospect Park.

LD- Ah, that was the first?

JS- That was the first, and it hurt a lot because I hadn't trained enough. And I almost didn't make it that run.

LD- And when was that? Which year?

JS- That was in '96. Yes, in '96 that's the year I ran. Because in '97 I wanted to qualify for the New York City Marathon. And I didn't, I didn't enter. I trained until '98, my first year in the marathon.

LD- And why didn't you enter?

JS- First of all I didn't have the training, second I didn't have, I didn't know where the club was. I didn't know where to register. I looked for friends to help me but there was no one...until one day a friend, a Mexican friend told me, "Go to Central Park in Manhattan, and there you'll find runners and they'll tell you where it is." And so one day I went, without having been before I went to Central Park and I was able to find a friend who said, "You like to run?" I said yes, and he said "Do you want to run in a team?" and I said well of course, why not?

LD- So, you got to the park, you saw a friend, and you started to run.

JS- No, I got to the park, I was already training, I went around once and he was there in the park. And after I went around again and when I finished training, he said, "You run well", he said, "I'd like it if you ran on the team. Do you run on a team?" I said no, I run alone. And he said if you want, come run with the team. I said, sure. And that's when I enrolled in West Side. So since then, I haven't left West Side.

LD- That was in ninety...

JS- At the end of '96, more or less '97.

LD- It's the West Side Runners Club, right?

JS- West Side Runners Club, yes. So from there, I haven't...I haven't stopped running.

LD- And in the beginning was it hard?

JS- Yes because, when someone...it's hard. But I think that more than anything when you start running and see the results, other people ahead and you always behind, then you say I'm doing something wrong. So, I found friends that already ran, they had experience, and they said look you have to do this, we're going to run, we're going to run together on the days that we can. So, we trained together and from there then I started to be, more than anything disciplined, and to listen to what they told me. And I heard everything they told me.

LD- And did they teach you?

JS- Yes, they told me, they gave me a running program. A program like on Monday to do one thing, Tuesday another thing, Wednesday another thing, and like that each day a different type of training. And that's helped me to, to grow, and more than anything to see results.

LD- So, from there you got to enter the New York City Marathon.

JS- Yes, in '98 I entered the marathon, my first year. The first year of a marathon and then, when it was almost '98, then with the team of West Side Runners. To start running with them, and for me to be able to train more calmly. So that was exciting for me. To run, and to represent them because they were helping me. So I said, "My only task is to represent the team well."

LD- And did you have a t-shirt, or something like that for them?

JS- Yes. We had a West Side t-shirt, they always give us one and we run like that.

LD- And do you run as a team?

JS- Yes. Every year they do a championship race, and that one you always run with the team's t-shirt. And we almost always run with the team's t-shirt. So, we identify ourselves with that always, and the whole West Side group supports one another.

LD- And how was your first New York City Marathon?

JS- Oh, the first marathon well, it was very hard because like I said, it was about experience, my time was 3 hours and 14 the first time. But, everyone was tired, but at the end I was happy because I said, at least I made my goal. That was my first objective. Then later, to continue getting results, and the effort, friends, the team that was always sending me to races. And for Bill [Bill Staab. President of West Side Runners Club]. Bill who has always been asking and doing the best he can for the team. So that inspired me, to come back with good times. So that's what I've done.

LD- And how did it feel, when you ran, was it the first marathon of your life?

JS- Yes, in '98 it was the first marathon of my life. It's, it's hard to explain because when been you're not training well, arriving to Queens, or arriving to Manhattan to go up to the Bronx, you don't have any more strength and you're really hungry, willing to eat anything, whatever appears. Because your training is lacking, your nutrition is lacking, and you go on learning those details. So now I say this to all the young people that come out. In their time, to train, to eat well, and the pain that discipline will cause. That's going to take them to their results and their triumphs. And that's what I've gone through.

LD- So, you continued training...

JS- Training, yes. Yes, I've always been training, consciously training, since then I haven't stopped running, since '98. I haven't run, 2 marathons I've missed, two or three. But one time because I felt injured, and another for Hurricane Sandy when it was cancelled, and another also because I had a surgery. Those three, it was because of that I didn't run because...

LD- Every year, except those three?

JS- Every year I participate, yes.

LD- Since '98?

JS- Since '98.

LD- And, during the year how many days do you go out to run?

JS- To run? Every day.

LD- Every day?

JS- Every day, but that's, that's the triumph, for me, I decided to think in any matter of success that one wants to reach, to be insistent, to maintain persistently, in cold, rain, sun. To give the best you can, and to do all there is to do, and the day of the results, of the race, there are the results, and it shows.

LD- And where do you run?

JS- I run, sometimes I come here to the beach. I come to the sand to do repetitions. Sometimes I go to Prospect Park. I run over there by, Bay Ridge, the Verrazano. Or sometimes we go out of here to find the mountain that's up by [the] Rockefeller [estate], upstate New York. And, I like that with friends sometimes we can run outside, and when there's time we go to run outside because it's really good to run, to do inclines, to gain strength for the marathons.

LD- And do you always run with West Side?

JS- Yes, always with West Side.

LD- Like for training, or...?

JS- No. For West Side, we always run in competitions, nothing else. For training, sometimes we go in a group but then it's a slower pace so to speak. We go relaxed, we go together and we come back together. For the competitions yes it's, giving everything you have.

LD- And is there a marathon that, that sticks out in your mind as...a favorite?

JS- There are some, but one of them is when I went, about in 2013...in 2013. My desire was to win, to win my category. So, when I did everything I could, I trained the maximum amount that I could, I did everything...a lot of discipline on my part. And when the race ended I ended very well. I didn't feel tired, and when...

LD- You didn't feel tired?

JS- I didn't feel tired. I felt good, I felt, no pain. And when I went back, I was already on my way back home, I turned on my phone and said I was going to check the results. But, I couldn't believe it because I entered my name and I was in first place in my category. First place in local

runners. Then, I was 70th in the over...

LD- Overall, out of everyone?

JS- The overall. Out of everyone. Number 70.

LD- 70th of everyone?

JS- 70th of everyone, I said no, I'm...I'm seeing it wrong. I turned it off because I said, wow. Because I wanted to be at least in the first 100, I said at the most 99th. But I want to be in the first 100. And that year I came in 70th. 70th and I did 2 hours and 37 minutes.

LD- And why do you think that one was the best? Did you do something different, or...?

JS- Yes. I put in a lot of discipline on my part. Discipline, training every day, doing at least 100 to 110 miles a week, every week. So I did everything someone told me who also runs, but has more experience. So, he told me you have to do everything, and you'll see that you'll do very well. And also, he said when you start the race, don't go crazy. When he saw me told me, you are well prepared. But now when you start the race don't start going crazily. Maintain your rhythm, softly, then when you get halfway through the marathon, get going, start your marathon. That's when your marathon begins. So I listened, and that's how it was. And it went very well for me.

LD- Wow. And, when you're running, what do you think about? Or do you listen to music?

JS- No, never. There are many who run listening to music, but no. Sometimes I try to listen to music but it doesn't appeal to me. I always go focused. I go thinking about my goal, my time, my family, my son and my wife who are at the end. Nothing else. That's what I think about.

LD- And your family is always at the finish line? They're not in the middle, or anywhere else?

JS- Yes, sometimes. Before, when I did less, I took longer, my wife went to see me here in Brooklyn, and after she went to Queens, to Queensboro. And from there she went to see me in Manhattan. But now she says that she doesn't have enough time because when she went several years ago she went to see me there and I had already gone by. So now she only goes to see me in Brooklyn, at 36th and 4th Avenue. And after she goes straight to the finish line.

LD- And how old is your son?

JS- He's 13 years old.

LD- 13 years old. And how do you have time to run every day with a family, and work?

JS- I think that more than anything it's dedication, the support that my wife has always given me, thank God. Because I think that's most important. Because, there are many who become committed, and well they simply stop running. And that's happened to a lot of friends. But for

me, thank God, I found a woman that has always supported me, always “That’s what you like to do, do it, I’m with you.” And my son, my son is happy seeing me run. Yes, he’s happy, and he also understands very well. And when there’s time, on Sundays, when I don’t work, I always go run. In the morning I go train, I come back, and I’m tired. Or, I feel tired but I say, let’s go out. And, that’s it, because they also feel happy, we go see a movie, or go around. But she also sometimes understands me, “You’re tired, rest today, we’ll go another day.” So that has made me value my races a lot, and value them as well.

LD- And do they run?

JS- Yes, now my wife has started running. She likes running, she says she wants to run, so I say “Let’s go do it, you can do it.”

LD- You run with her?

JS- Yes, sometimes. Sometimes I go out first, I do my training, and after I say let’s go run, I’m going to run slower with her. And my son also runs, he loves to run.

LD- And you run with him too?

JS- Yes I run with him too. Sometimes we go training, running. Right now because he’s, around that age, sometimes it’s like...there are times when he gets a little, should I say, lazy. But he does train with me sometimes, on the weekends.

LD- Mhmm...and do you still live in Coney Island?

JS- Yes, I live here. And sometimes I’ve wanted to move, but I like the area. I like the area, and I’ve already been here for many years, I’ve been living here for about 20 years. And, I like the area, the environment, I’m already accustomed to where I train. And, well I don’t know we’ll see, what happens going forward. But, for the moment, I’m happy in the area.

LD- And do you run sometimes on the boardwalk, on the wood?

JS- Yes. Yes, sometimes I run there. I like running on the sand more.

LD- Why?

JS- Because...on the boardwalk, I don’t like how it feels like it’s shaking. So I prefer to run on the sand, and it helps more, to make the muscles stronger.

LD- It’s more difficult, right?

JS- It’s more difficult, but it helps your muscles a lot, to make your muscles strong.

LD- Mhmm. And how has your, your body changed, because you’ve been running for what, 20 years? Now that you’re older, how has that affected you?

JS- A little with injuries. But, we keep going. Sometimes with injuries a little, sometimes I think that it's because I don't stretch enough before running. And...and also I've learned a lot about that. Because, one year, about 2008 I was very well trained. Very, very...I had trained all year, I had given my soul to run the marathon. I think that that year I was more ready, but God does things. God does things, because with 15 days left until the race I got hurt. And I cried. I cried and I went to a person who trains me, and he said, "Don't worry. That's the life of the runner. The runner, they'll always have an injury. We're prone to this. Sometimes there are runners that are on the way to the Olympics, and they're ready to run, and they get hurt. This is something that you have to work through. Be calm, relax and another race will come." And all of those words have helped me a lot. Because sometimes, you feel that way. I felt that way, hurt, because I had done all of the training. All of the sacrifices, they stayed with my pain, and my injury. My calf hurt a lot, I was injured.

LD- And throughout the year do you do more races? More marathons, or?

JS- Yes, before I did a bit more. When I was younger, I did the one in Boston, the one in Long Island I still do, I did the one in Yonkers. Half marathons I did all of them, the ones in Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, the Bronx. I participated in all those. I also did the one in Jersey, the half marathon, the marathon I've also done about 3 times. And now, now I've been focused again on the New York.

LD- When is it?

JS- In November.

LD- Ok. And is there one that you like the best?

JS- Eh, yes I'd like to run now, more I'd like to see if I can run the one in Walt Disney [World]. That's in January. We'll see soon.

LD- It's a marathon?

JS- A marathon, yes. Yes, I'd like to run that one. My friends have said it's really good. I'd like to do Chicago, but we'll see how we end the year.

LD- And, from what I was reading in the article, it's expensive to enter the races?

JS- Mm, yes. Because, in the New York race, it's \$250 that counts toward the race. And aside from that...that's what it costs. If you don't participate you need to have 9 races in the year, to qualify for the race.

LD- Oh.

JS- Yes, 9 races in the year, and then, that gives you the qualification to enter in the following year.

LD- Oh, ok. Within a certain time, or any time?

JS- Any time. But, for me because I have a good time, then the time counts. So, because of that, it's not the \$250, and they have my record.

LD- Do you have family still in Ecuador?

JS- Yes, my dad and my mom are there.

LD- And do they know, about how you run?

JS- Yes, recently, when the New York Times did the video, well, it went everywhere. So they found out about all that. Well they knew, but they didn't know I ran so fast. So they've congratulated me as well, and they're happy too. And they want to see me, soon we'll see what happens.

LD- Are they going to try to come here, or?

JS- Hopefully. We'll see if, the best would be if they could. We'll see if they give them a visa, we'll see.

LD- Yes, it's hard sometimes.

JS- Yes, it's very hard, yes. But, now that's the only challenge, for my parents who I miss a lot, it's been more than 20 years since I've seen them, and it hurts a lot. And now that my son is there, well, at least he's spending time with them.

LD- And what do they think of the success you've had?

JS- Well, they're pleased, happy, excited. Or rather my mom, my dad, my sister, she says I'm proud of you. So, that also inspires me, to keep running, to do what I can. And also many, many friends. From my country, outside of my town, they've supported me, they've given to me. Or after the video, they've given me a lot of strength, a lot of congratulations. But, thank God, I always keep doing the same thing.

LD- It doesn't matter?

JS- It doesn't matter what I've done, I keep doing the same thing. Calmly, helping who I can, and giving advice to young people because there are a lot of youth that come to run.

LD- And how do you know them, the young people?

JS- Always in the races, it's like today. Today I went to the championship in Central Park. So there you always talk with them, they support you, they see that you're running.

LD- Did you run today?

JS- No, I didn't run because I'm a little hurt. And I also got there a little late. So no, no I didn't run. I just went to support the team.

LD- And what's the advice you give to young people?

JS- That they don't rush, because there are a lot of youth who run well but they start running long distances. At about 16, 17 years old they start running half marathons, and they run very fast at the beginning. And after they burn out and they disappear. So I tell them, well, that they try to focus themselves first on short races. Short races, 5 up to 10 kilometers, no more. After 24, 23 years old you can try to do what you want. You have more strength, more dedication. Because the marathon is, is very intense for someone who's 16 or 20 years old. You can do it, but it's very intense. So I tell them to take their time, with calm, that they focus first in the short ones.

LD- Mhmm. And, do you think that it's something that's inside of you? Or is it something you learned, or both?

JS- Maybe a little, a little of the two. I've been learning from many, I've also heard advice. Because when you're young well, someone tells you not to do something. Because that's happened to me, I say this about myself, when someone's told me, they said "Do this", or go slow, and I went fast. And then sometimes the person got mad and said "You know what, if you don't want to do it, to listen to what I tell you," they say "I'm not going to tell you anything." And so I said no, and I learned from him. And what he's told me, has helped me. And so, he's telling me because he knows, he already has the experience. Because he's gone through it. So it doesn't cost me anything to listen, and to do it. More than anything it's given me results. From that.

LD- So, you think that anyone is able to learn to run long distances?

JS- Yes.

LD- Really?

JS- Yes, yes because it's just, like I say, the training. The training determines a lot. Anyone can run, anyone can participate in a half marathon, anyone can get a good time, if they are willing to sacrifice, if they are willing to do it. I consider it like any success. To reach success, there is a lot of pain. There is a lot... a lot of training, a lot of discipline and all of the passion from what someone likes to do, and they are going to get to where they want to get. But if we stay put, because I could have stayed put when that happened to me, in my disappointment, in myself, when I trained and I couldn't run. But, thanks to the team, thanks to all of them, their words helped me get out of that place. And I came back with more strength.

LD- Mhmm. And I read that the West Side Runners Club has a lot of members who are immigrants?

JS- Yes, there are a lot of us. There are a lot of us, and a lot of us are immigrants.

LD- Does that help?

JS- Yes because we're united, more than anything. Because there's always a gathering after the marathon. So we try to be together, to communicate, to support all of the team, like that. Like today, today we were together a bit hanging out because as it's the championship, everyone, every runner has their team. And everyone is united with a team. A lot of teams. So, we had a good time, there supporting one another, congratulating those who ran well, and those who didn't run well too. We always support them, give them encouragement that they can do it.

LD- And do you think that this has felt, or has made you feel happier here in this country, having this group?

JS- Yes, well, there are a lot of things, the team, my family, my wife, my son. I think that they've given me the strength to feel good and to feel happy. And more than anything, I think, to be happy with myself. To be happy because I do what I like to do. And that's what gives me passion. Like the trainer, Domingo, tells us, "Everyone last night, all of the young people would have be in bars, drinking. We were sleeping, but here we are." Because we like it, it's our passion, it's what we like to do. And it's the truth. We feel happy running, we feel happy training, and giving everything we can in the competitions.

LD- Mhmm. Are you still working in the kitchen?

JS- Yes, I'm still working there.

LD- Here, or in Manhattan?

JS- No, right now I'm working in Manhattan. I've already been there, a long time now in Manhattan.

LD- And do you like to be in the kitchen?

JS- Yes, yes I like it. I think that this inspires me as well, to learn the kitchen, and also the owners of the company where I work now are very understanding. When I started work, they gave me flexible days, for Saturdays, Sundays when the competitions are. And well, thank God they have given them to me, they put me on the list and well yes, they've given them to me.

(sound- door opening)

LD- And do they go to support you, in the races?

JS- No. No but yes, yes at least, always, at least they don't tell me "You know what, you have to work today." So for that at least I'm happy.

LD- Mhmm. And, the neighborhood of Coney Island, how have you seen it changes since you

arrived?

JS- Oh, well a lot of things have changed by now. Because, when I had just arrived everything was different, new, a little bit, it was more like a beginning. But when I got here everything was nice but later things got a bit uglier. And a few years ago, it changed again. Things are a lot better now. Different games...

LD- Why did it change?

JS- Different games, the people themselves are different. Because I had a memory as well, of when I came here once and some people grabbed me, from a gang. And I was just remembering that, being here...

LD- You were running?

JS- Yes, I was running, after I was going to rest and they surrounded me, and well. And since that time, I almost stopped coming around this area. But then later, when my son was about 5 years old, we came back here for the games. And it's better. Coming here, now things are much more fixed up. At least, I haven't seen things how they were before.

LD- Mhmm. What time do you run?

JS- Eh, there was a time before when I always ran in the morning. I always ran at 5, or 6 in the morning. I rested and then I went to work. Now, I changed jobs, and I want to work during the day, so now I train in the afternoon. Because I get out of work at 4, and in the afternoon I go train.

LD- And what do you do in the heat?

JS- Ah, I hope the sun goes away. (laughing)

LD- (laughing) Nothing different?

JS- Nothing different, I only hope that the sun goes away, and that's it. We go, and when it's not as hot, and we go train.

LD- And when it's snowing?

JS- When it's snowing, with a lot of clothes. (laughing) The only day that I don't run, we don't run, is when there's a lot of snow on the ground. You can't, you can't run. That's when. But when everything is cold, sometimes it's very cold, we're in the park. We're training, and it's that time, and we're running.

LD- What's your favorite season to run in?

JS- Eh, I think that it's nice right now, well, I like the summer. I prefer the summer. I prefer the

summer, my wife loves the cold, but I love the summer.

LD- For running?

JS- For running, for whatever but I prefer summer.

LD- Even with the, how do you say it, humidity?

JS- The humidity, yes, yes today was very humid. Yes, very humid. But yes, yes I prefer the heat. And wherever I go, when I'm done training, I rest, I lie down a bit, but in the winter you have to run, run and find the house to rest, you can't stay in the park.

LD- Mhmm.

JS- Yes.

LD- And do you have a favorite place to run?

JS- For the most part always, Prospect Park. Prospect Park. Because there, on the rest of the days, sometimes I come here one time, or two times here to the beach. And the rest sometimes I run there, through Bay Ridge.

LD- And what's the next goal that you have?

JS- Ah, my next goal is again, to do the time I did, or try to improve it, and try to win again, in my category.

LD- This year.

JS- This year.

LD- And what's the time...that was the fastest time you've had?

JS- Yes, that time, in 2013, I think. That, that's my fastest, fastest time.

LD- So you want to beat it?

JS- I want to, yes I want to beat it. That's the goal of every athlete, they always want to do less, or they want to do more. It's difficult, but, nothing is impossible.

LD- Mhmm...Well, those are all of my questions, is you have anything else you'd like to share, about your life, or...

JS- Well for me, nothing else, to thank you all, for the invitation. And well, to tell everyone, to keep going with their projects, that they don't let them go, in anything someone wants to do, they can do it. With a lot of pain, with sacrifice, but they will do it. Simply don't give up. Because

I've been running for more than 15 years to make this time, the time I've made. So, this has taught me to stay on the same track. And to give more than I can. To do more, maybe a little more sacrifice, but I know that I can achieve it, to get to where one wants to. And to not stop. For everyone. And well, to West Side, my team, that has always supported me and I'm very happy and very proud of my team.

LD- That's great. And you never thought of being a professional, or?

JS- No. I've never thought about that or of the interviews, or of the New York Times...I never, never thought about that I simply wanted to run, to participate, I wanted to die when they took pictures when I finished. Until one time someone told me, yes running they said, in the future, you're not going to want to take pictures. They're going to take pictures of you. And, I remember when, when they did the New York Times, I remembered because first they did an interview, just written and then they did the documentary. The next year. So...

LD- Were you embarrassed?

JS- Yes, a little because I wasn't used to it, and well yes, it was a little hard for me to do it. But I'm happy, happy now and giving thanks to God, there's nothing else. And enjoying every day.

LD- Well, good luck, with the next one!

JS- Thank you, same to you. Thank you for the invitation.

LD- Yes, thank you for speaking with me. Ok, bye.