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NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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The full legacy of Harry Jerome

It was only after the Jerome family moved into their Lower Lonsdale home that they learned every family on Lyon Place except one had petitioned city hall to keep them out of the working-class community. It was a precursor of what was to come.

As the children walked the fifty paces to Ridgeway Elementary for the first day of school, stones pelted their bodies. There were hateful, racist cries from future classmates blocking their way. More stones. More furious voices. From children.

They didn't even make it to the school grounds. The Jerome kids – Harry 11, Carolyn 9, Valerie 7, and Barton 6 – sprinted home. No teacher or administrator came to their home to encourage them to come back. It was only a week later, when their father returned from a work trip and spoke with the principal, that they finally set foot in their new classrooms.

Wounds that never heal

It's been more than seventy years and Valerie Jerome can still see the faces and feel the wounds of those slurs.

Her older brother Harry was once the fastest man on the planet – a three-time Olympian, and world record holder seven times over. After retiring from competition, Harry Jerome dedicated his life to creating athletic programs for Canadian youth. He died prematurely in North Vancouver at the age of 42 of a brain aneurism.

Over the years, Harry Jerome gained increasing stature as a role model – one who refused to let adversity or racism stand in his way. A recreation centre here in North Vancouver bears his name. There's the Harry

Jerome Sports Centre in Burnaby... an iconic statue in Stanley Park... and the Harry Jerome Oval - a new track in West Vancouver currently under construction.

But the full legacy of Harry Jerome is only now being shared. It's a powerful, disturbing yet inspiring book written by Valerie Jerome - finally published after more than two decades of effort – entitled *Races: The Trials and Triumphs of Canada's Fastest Family*.

Distinguished career

Though often overshadowed by her famous older brother, Ms. Jerome was herself an Olympic athlete who went on to a distinguished career as a teacher and community activist. She can now add best-selling author to her resumé, as her book resonates right across the country.

Ms. Jerome takes aim at what she calls “the fiction of Canada’s innocence that has dominated the discourse of race in this country.” Certainly, the events at Ridgeway Elementary School that September day in 1951 may come as a shock to many Canadians who think they know their country’s history.

Still, Valerie Jerome’s searing, deeper look at the Black experience in Canada holds traces of hope. Asked what she remembers most about her first day of school in North Vancouver, she focuses not on the rocks or jeers. She mentions a 7-year-old girl named Annabelle who had the courage to be the lone voice calling out the other kids. They went on to be lifelong friends.

I want to extend my personal thanks to Valerie Jerome for this consequential book and for her determination to tell her truth.

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