

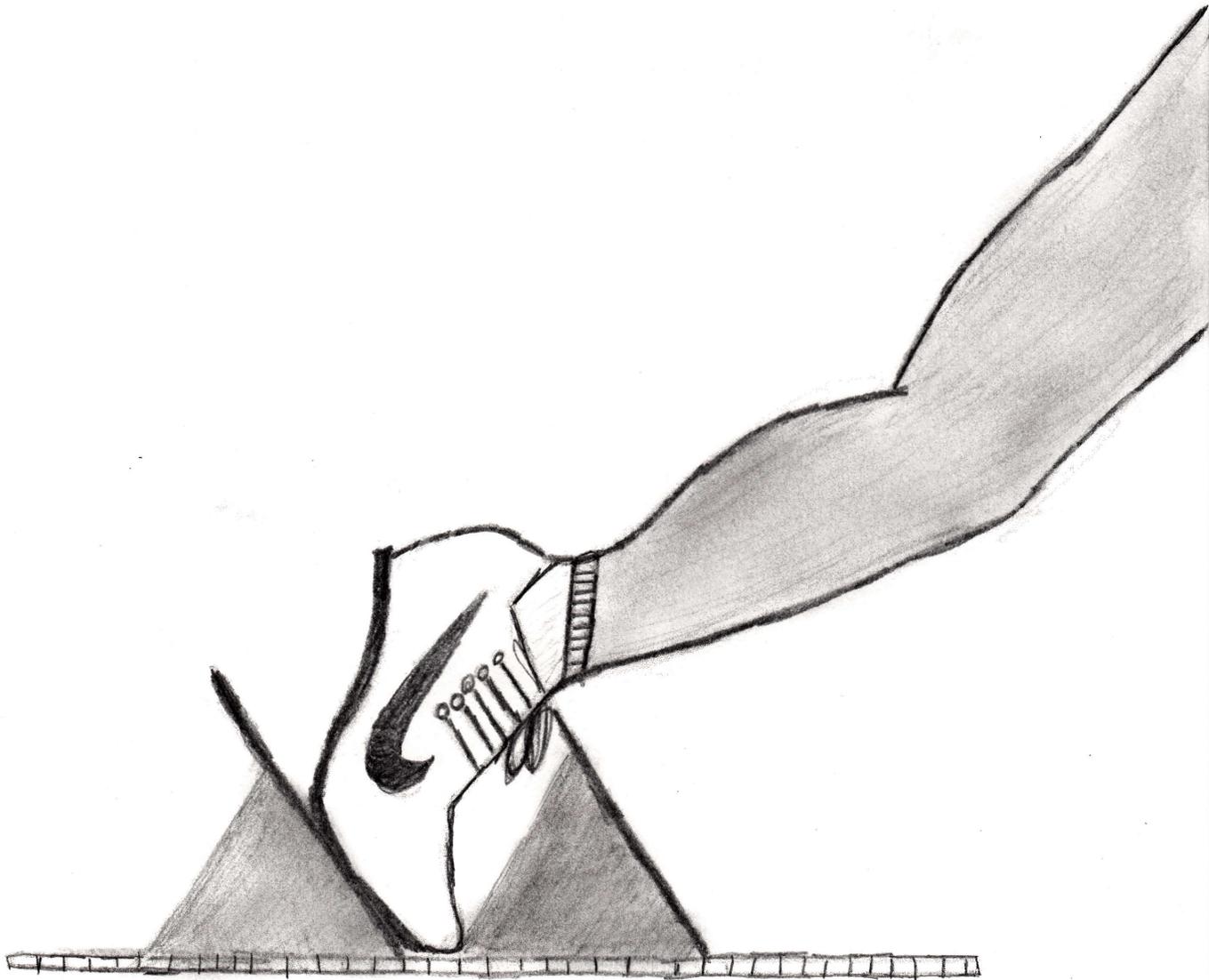
THE FINISH LINE

The Story of Harry Jerome

Rose Zhou-Radies

Bang!

I push off the blocks with all my
might, and pick up speed with
every stride...



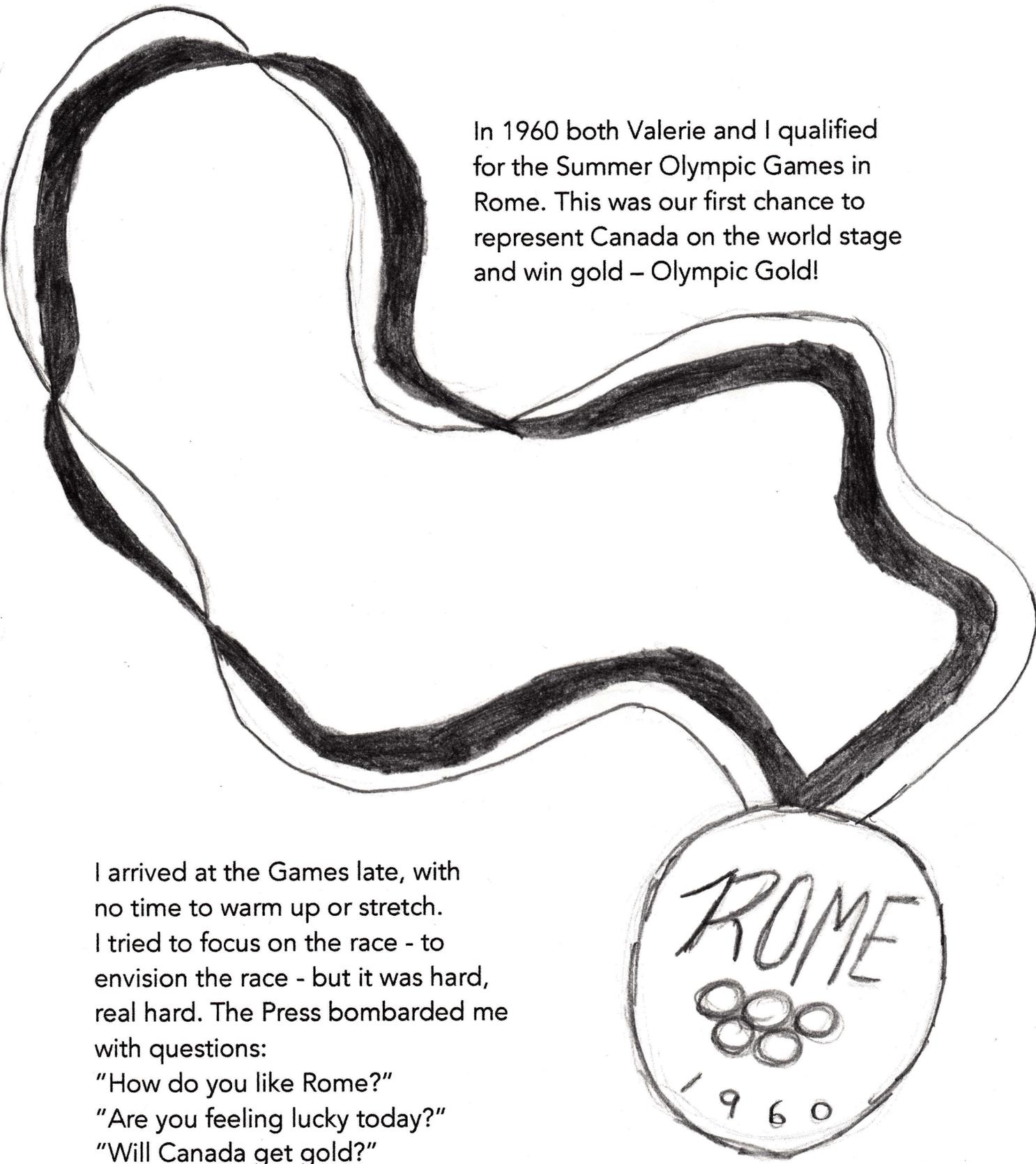
In 1959, I was at a regular team practice.
My sister Valerie and my best friend,
Paul, were on the team.

Valerie could
run faster and jump higher than girls
two years older than her.

After warm-up,
Coach Minichiello had us run through some
practice sprints.

After our final sprint, Paul gave
me a pat on the back and said, "Harry, you must be the
world's fastest man."





In 1960 both Valerie and I qualified for the Summer Olympic Games in Rome. This was our first chance to represent Canada on the world stage and win gold – Olympic Gold!

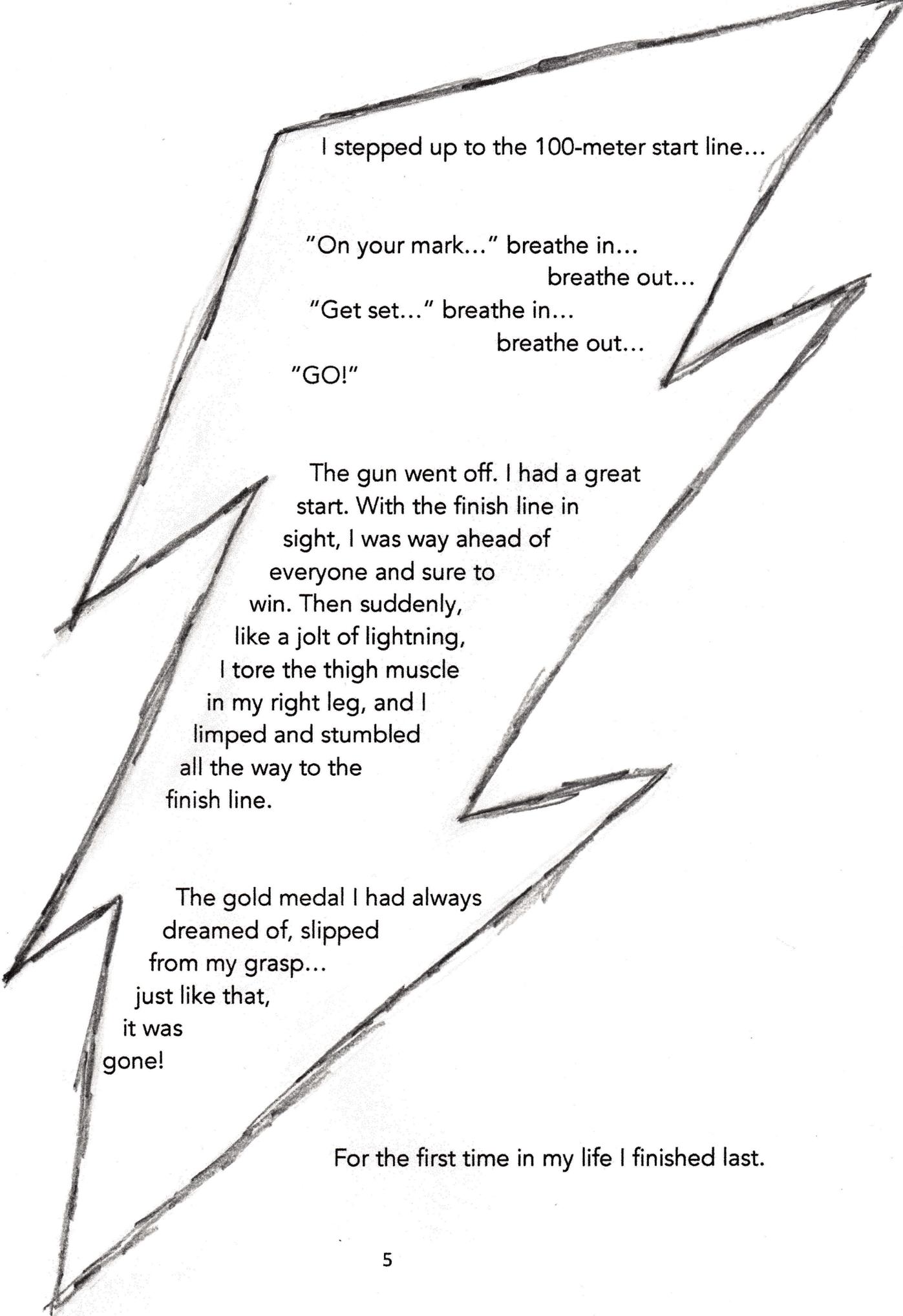
I arrived at the Games late, with no time to warm up or stretch. I tried to focus on the race - to envision the race - but it was hard, real hard. The Press bombarded me with questions:

"How do you like Rome?"

"Are you feeling lucky today?"

"Will Canada get gold?"

I said, "Sorry, not now, no time for interviews," and that was the truth.



I stepped up to the 100-meter start line...

"On your mark..." breathe in...
breathe out...

"Get set..." breathe in...
breathe out...

"GO!"

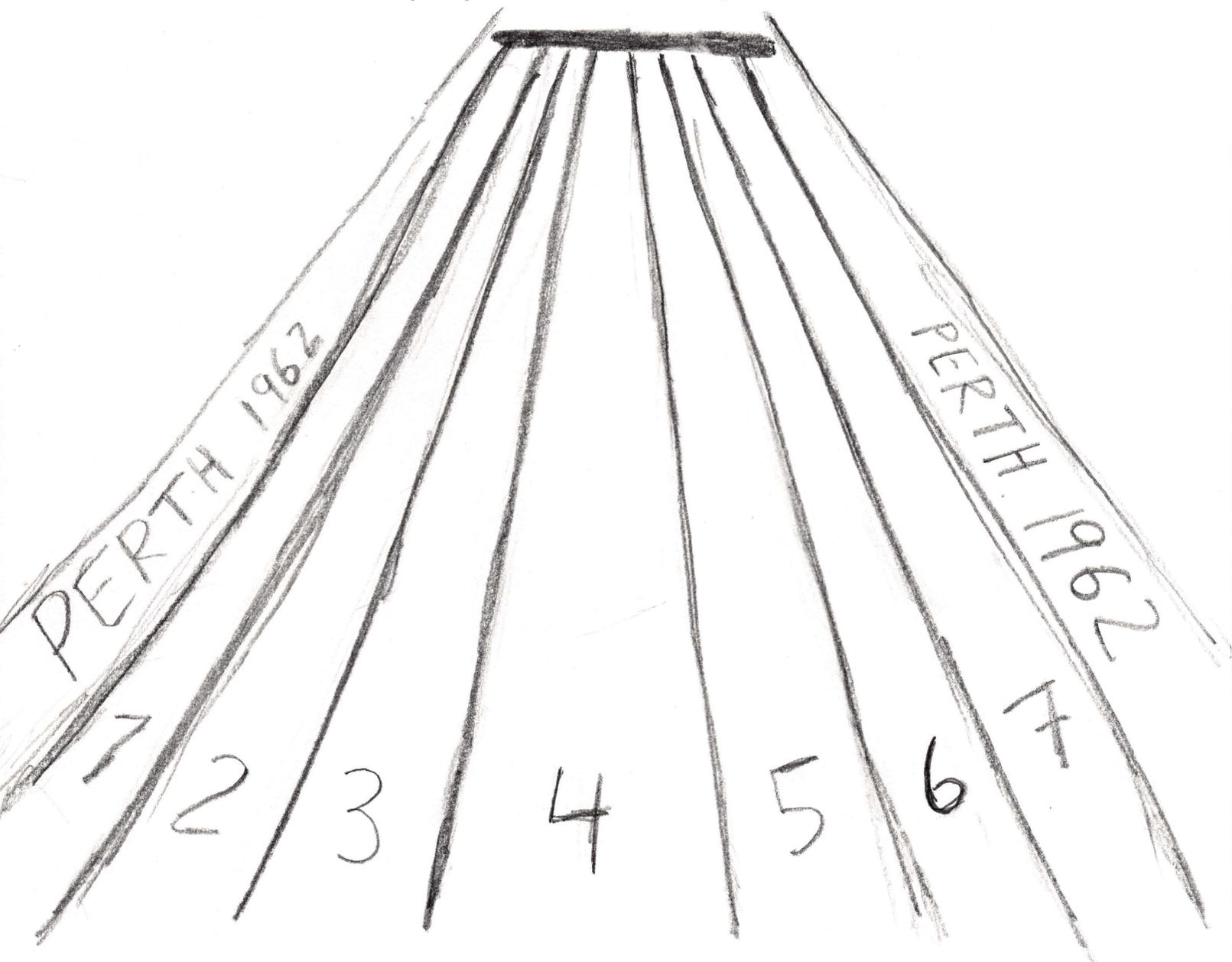
The gun went off. I had a great start. With the finish line in sight, I was way ahead of everyone and sure to win. Then suddenly, like a jolt of lightning, I tore the thigh muscle in my right leg, and I limped and stumbled all the way to the finish line.

The gold medal I had always dreamed of, slipped from my grasp...
just like that,
it was
gone!

For the first time in my life I finished last.

Despite this devastating injury, I was determined to get my leg better and continue competing. After months of rehabilitation, I began training for the next big prize, the British Empire and Commonwealth Games.

"I will win this time, just you watch," I told myself.



I was at the start line for the 100-meter race in Perth, 1962. I breathed in, envisioning the race...I, Harry Jerome, speeding down the track and breaking through the finish line. How hard could it be? All I needed to do was run, the thing I do best.

"On your mark..." breathe in...breathe out...
"Get set..." breathe in...breathe out...
"GO!" Away I flew down the track!
Then, in an instant, all my dreams vanished.
This time, it was my left leg. I dragged it to the
finish line and came in last, again.

"Your thigh muscle has ripped and completely
pulled away from the bone," exclaimed
Dr. Gillespie, "I am so sorry, but you may never
walk or run again. I will do what I can, Harry,
but no guarantees." And with that, Dr. Gillespie
performed a delicate, precise and long surgery.
When I awoke, my leg was encased in plaster all
the way from my hip to my toe. After what felt like
an eternity the cast was finally removed, and I
began months of rehabilitation and physiotherapy.
It was grueling and intense, but worth it.

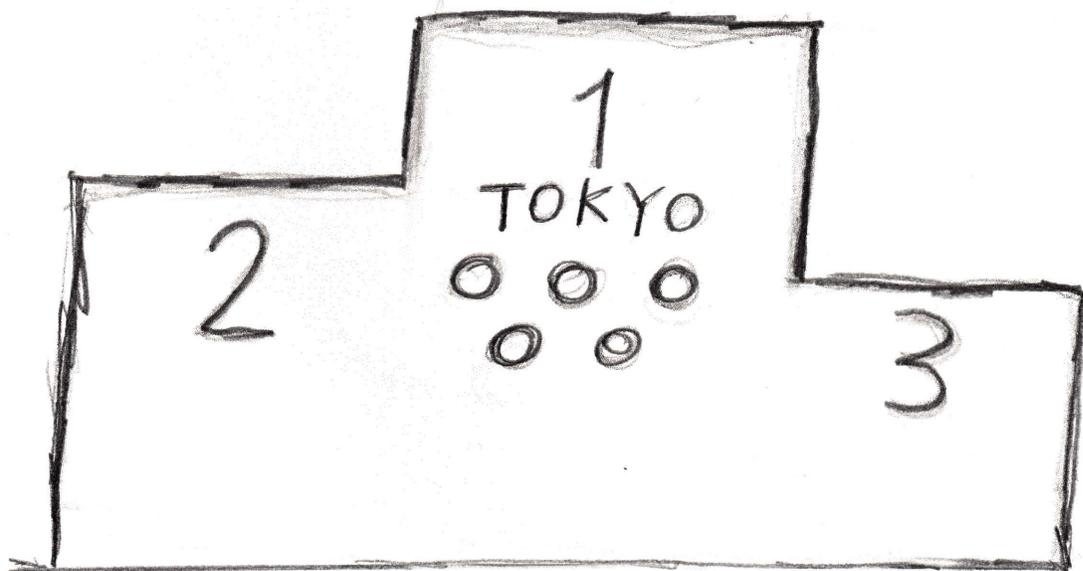
My hard work paid off and, remarkably, I could run again! Before I knew it, I was on my way to the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo. "This won't be like any of the other races," I told myself, "I won't be last again." I visualized the race - running down the track then breaking through the tape.

"On your mark..." breathe in...breathe out...

"Get set..." breathe in...breathe out...

"GO!" I ran!

Even with my leg telling me not to, I pushed through, and was awarded with a beautiful bronze medal. Newspaper headlines read, "Canada's Great Comeback" and "Harry, the Comeback Kid". Sure I wanted gold but, after everything that had happened, I was proud of my accomplishment and honoured to stand on the podium for Canada.



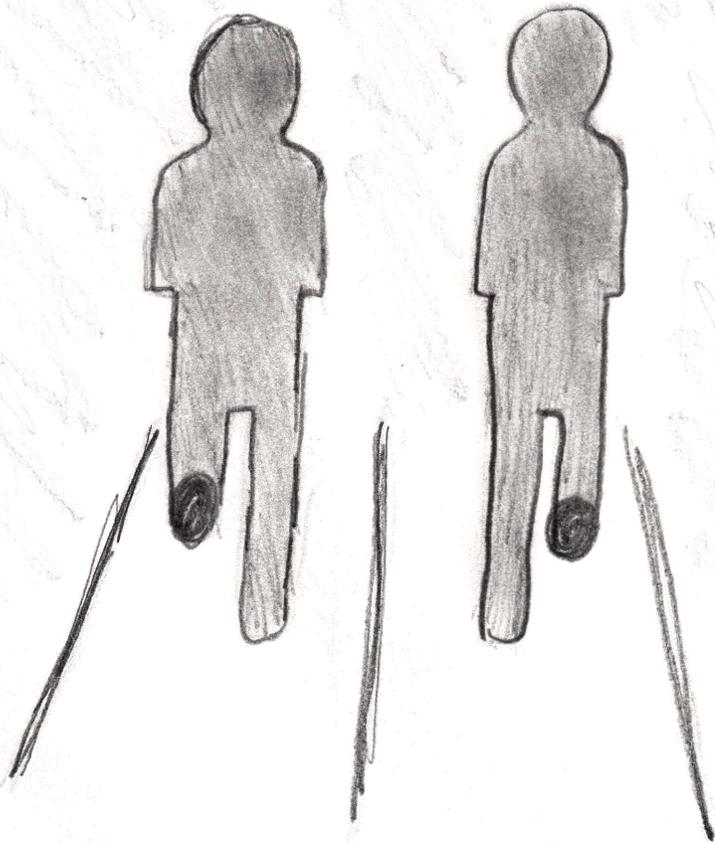
But I wasn't done yet...

I remember going over to Paul's place one night,
and knocking on his door.

"Hey Paul, want to go for a jog around the track?" I asked.

"Geez Harry, isn't it kinda late?" he said, stating the obvious, "I was
just getting ready for bed."

"Come on!" I insisted, giving him a little grin.



It is August 1966. I am in Jamaica for the British Empire and Commonwealth Games. People from all over the world are watching and competing. I stretch and envision the race – the biggest race of my life. Everything is perfect.



Breathe in... Breathe out...

Bang!

I push off the blocks with all my might, and pick
up speed with every stride...

left, right, left, right...

GO! GO! GO! My chest
hits the tape but so does
Robinson's. Thoughts whirl
through my head,
"Is it a tie? Could I have won?
Did he win?"



I bend down, and
a magnificent gold
medal is hung
around my neck. Finally, I am at the top,
the top of the podium, and the top of the world!