goodies. I had said that do-gooders would even mop up
the bathroom floors if they could put it on their college
applications and get credit for being well-rounded stu-
dents.

"Are you sure you want to write this Shelby?" That
was Mr. Harrington's favorite remark.

"Are you telling me I can't write it, Mr. Harrington?"

"Just remember, Shelby, you can do a lot of damage
to a person with a little gold pencil."

He was referring to a real little gold pencil. It had
been a gift to me from Mom and Dad. It was attached
by a chain to a tiny refillable notebook, and I carried it
everywhere. I try to make the person I'm interviewing feel
comfortable. No tape recorders or big notebooks—just
this tiny pencil and pad that fit neatly into my pocket. It's
amazing, but when people see the pencil they're
cowed. I don't think they realize you can write just as
much with a little pencil as with a big one.

Of course I did get plenty of "Why don't you drop
dead and save us the trouble of drowning you?" letters
after the publication of some of my columns. But if that
was the price of freedom of the press, so be it.

Now I was angling for a column on L. Mark Compton,
super-jock, the athlete at Union High. A six-foot-two
senior with incredible black eyes and eyelashes, he had
letters in football, basketball, and track.

When I cornered L. Mark after his basketball practice
one evening, he said he'd give me a couple of minutes. He
had just showered, and there were still some drops of
water sparkling in his hair. We sat in the bleachers and

Barbara Walters would settle for, and neither would I.

"Mark," I said, "Really, the kids like to read personal
stuff. You know, your favorite foods, rock stars, TV pro-
grams... stuff like that."

He hesitated. When he did speak, his voice was low
and soft. But I wasn't supposed to be lulled by his voice. I
was supposed to be concentrating on his words. If I
didn't, Larry would say, "I told you so."

That's Larry Williams. He's a senior and editor-in-
chief. We've been sort of going together this year. He
keeps saying I've got the best chance at editor-in-chief
because I'm completely professional. He also said I was
the only one he'd trust to interview L. Mark Compton,
because every other girl on the paper would immediately
fall in love with him.

Mark stood up. "Listen, Shelby Dreighton, I've read
some of the interviews you've done with other kids. I'm
not about to give you any ammunition."

That annoyed me. Besides, I was beginning to feel
uncomfortable. He was just so big standing there. Every
once in a while our knees would touch, and those beauti-
ful eyelashes were very distracting.

I looked down at my notebook. My little gold pencil
had been drawing flower petals. I never doodle during
interviews. I flipped to a fresh page.

"Everybody calls you Mark, but your name is L.
Mark. Tell me, what's the first initial for?"

"No, you don't. That's my secret." He reached for his
gym bag. "But I'm starving, and I'll buy you a burger. My
car's in the lot."

That's how the interview began. In fact, it took a

WITH A LITTLE GOLD PENCIL