I'm not sure if it's extra time, and second, I don't see how it could have any real impact on the column." Some of the other kids nodded.

I cleared my throat. "Well, what I have in mind is giving the column a new slant, some new life. But even more important, well... I've been doing a lot of thinking, and I have a feeling that if I were more involved in what I wrote about, maybe I'd really understand the things other kids are interested in—instead of just putting them down."

Mr. Harrington smiled, and I knew I had another winner.

"Okay, sounds good to me," Larry said. "Go to it."

When the meeting ended Larry walked over to me and held my arm. "So, what's the first 'new' column going to be about, Shelby?"

"It's going to be a surprise," I answered. I pulled my arm away, but gently. "I'll tell you this much, though: It is going to take lots of 'practice.' But don't worry about my meeting the deadline—I'm starting the story right away."

"Okay, I'm counting on you!" Larry said with a smile. He headed down the hall.

Before starting for my next class, I pulled out my little gold pencil and wrote a reminder to myself: "Talk to L. Mark's basketball coach about getting hold of an extra uniform, my size." Then I drew a little flower petal next to the note.