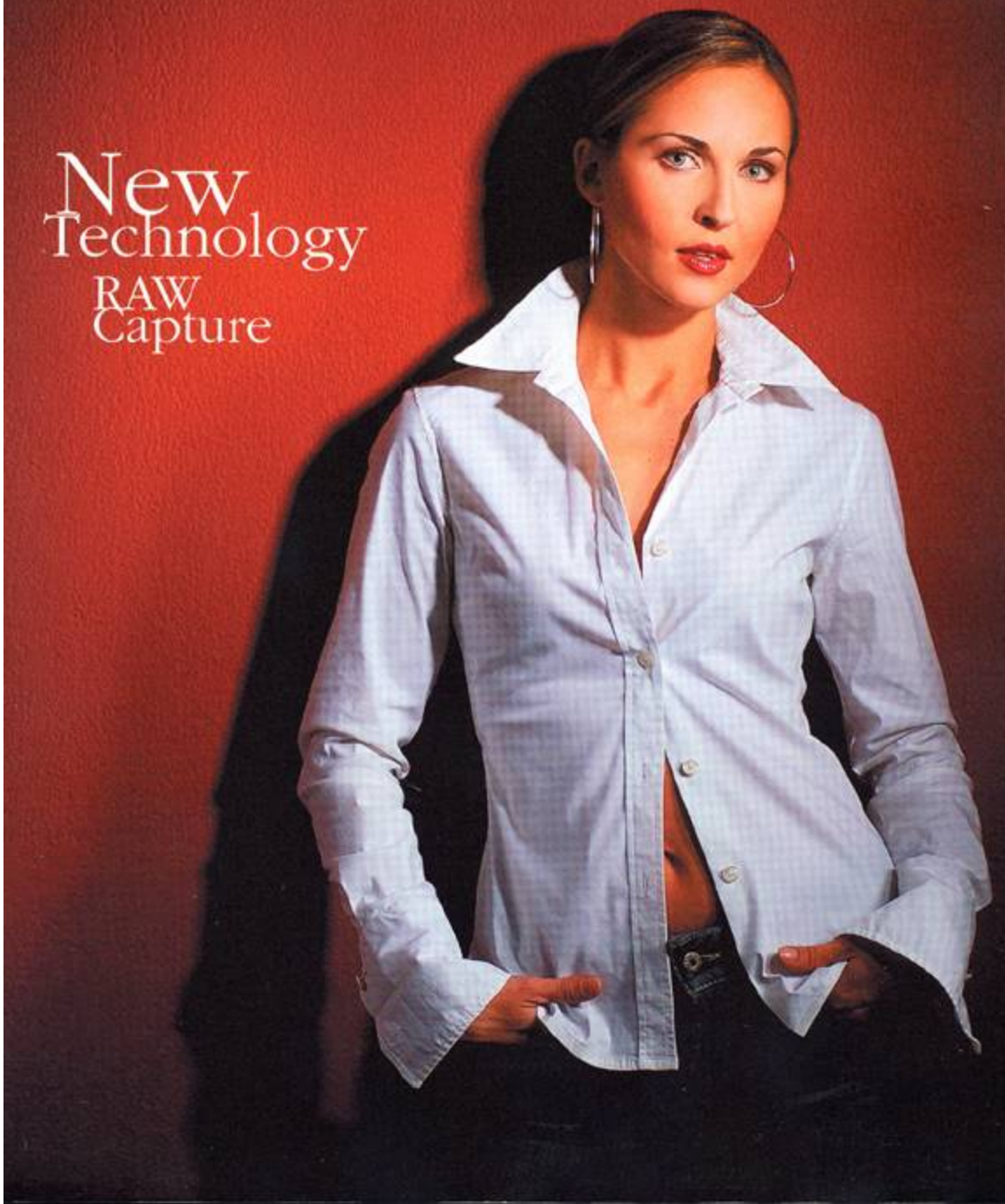


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\$5.00/APRIL 2004 ■ THE MAGAZINE FOR PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS

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# Marilyn Sholin

## Fearless Artist

BY LARRY SINGER

**"T**o live a creative life we must first lose the fear of being wrong," said author, psychologist, anthropologist, biologist and student of human consciousness, Joseph Chilton Pearce. And Marilyn Sholin, Miami-based author, part-time child psychologist, full-time portrait artist, marketing guru and teacher, couldn't agree more.

The remarkable professional triumphs of Sholin are not unlike the jigsaw puzzle found on her web site. It is not until all the segments are viewed as whole, that her individual achievements come together to reveal a quarter century of unparalleled output—containing originality, insight and technical excellence.

From the beginning, Sholin admits, photography was a frighten-

ing family affair.

"I used to hang out with my two older brothers in the darkroom they set up in the basement of our house in Fairlawn, NJ," Sholin confided with a chuckle. "Whenever they turned off the lights, before turning on the safe light, they would pretend there was something extremely scary in the room that was about to start eating at my ankles. I'd scream, and they would yell, 'You can't turn the light on! You can't turn the light on!' Even though they tried hard to keep me out of that darkroom, I'd put up with their nonsense and stay because I loved watching them making magic."

### Precocious Focus

The Sholin family always had cameras in the house. When she was about 12 years old, Sholin started taking the pictures at all the family

events. "I was always the one that had a camera in my hand," Sholin says. "All I really wanted for my 16th birthday was my own Instamatic camera."

Years later, after being married and having children, Sholin still hadn't found a cure for the insidious shutter bug that had invaded her imagination decades earlier.

"I always wanted to know how to take pictures and really do it right," she declares. "I had been a retail buyer for Burdines department stores, and when I quit to have children, I saw what the studios at Sears and Penney's produced, and I didn't want my children portrayed like that."

The next stop in Sholin's photographic journey was in 1978 at Nova Davie Community School, adjacent to a very large cow pasture in Davie, FL.

After taking the course—which gave her biweekly access to a darkroom—

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three times, Sholin began taking pictures of her own and her neighbor's children. "When we would get together for a play group," she says, "my friends brought me film and asked me to photograph their children. Eventually, it dawned on me that I could actually charge for the photography." In early 1979, she sold her first picture and never looked back.

"What was missing from the market at that time," Sholin continues, "was high-key color portraits. I went after that market, and it just cracked right open for me."

#### Times Change

"Since my days as a department store buyer," Sholin explains, "marketing has always been second nature to me. Fortunately, I could say things in my advertising in the early 1980s that no one can do now. The local newspaper put out a mini-



paper called 'Neighbors' that had a classified section. Under 'Personal Services,' in big bold letters, I advertised, 'I SHOOT KIDS.' That was the beginning of my business, and it brought a lot of phone calls.

"Eventually," Sholin continues, "I wanted to do studio work, so I built a 300-square-foot studio onto the house. After three years, the orders were piling up in my bedroom, and my husband and I decided that because the business had overrun the house, I needed to take the business out of the house.

"I then rented an 800-square-foot storefront about three blocks from my home. I was in there four years, and in 1986, I built a new 1200-square-foot studio in a shopping center on a main street. Six years later the state took the space away from me to widen the road. I then moved to an office



warehouse and worked out of a custom-designed, 2600-square-foot studio that I built from scratch."

After eight years, however, Sholin began growing bored with her studio work and with developing a creative fascination with emerging technologies.

On January 1, 2000, Sholin closed her custom-designed studio, moved everything she could fit into her

home, and began doing all her portrait photography on location. "Nobody comes to my home now," Sholin states. "I go to their home, the park, the beach, or wherever, and photograph everything on a Hassleblad with a 150mm lens.

"All the exposed film goes overnight to Miller's lab in Pittsburgh, KS," Sholin continues. "I get everything back over the Internet

as digital files from ProShots. I then manipulate the digital files and show those for the sales presentations on my laptop. There are no paper proofs. Amazingly, since I've started going to clients' homes, my sales have gotten higher than they were at the studio. When I'm in their homes, I see what they have on their walls already and what they like, so I get a clue about what to shoot and what to show them.

"Once the client has placed an order, I have the lab scan the negatives onto a CD. From there, the images are manipulated and painted in Adobe Photoshop and Corel Painter 8. Once the order is printed, everything is hand delivered to the client in person or by courier."

#### Learning to "Paint"

"I first started looking at watercolor portraits around 1998," Sholin explains, "and I thought to myself, this is what I want my work to look like. But I had no idea how to do it. In 1999, I discovered Corel Painter, and I ascertained that it was fairly complicated software. This led me to a five-day school in Cape May, NJ. I took a class from Helen Yancy and got familiar with the technique. Then I took another full-day, one-on-one class with Jane Conner-Ziser."

Marilyn also became friends through the Internet with Jeremy Sutton, who has been involved with Corel Painter from its inception, and she learned a great deal from her friendship with him and his books. She has since learned that the Corel Painter 8.1 software is much easier to learn than originally thought, and now teaches many photographers how to make it work for them and their style of photography.

Between these classes, and information she learned from the Internet, Marilyn was pretty much ready to develop the style of work she produces today.

Knowing talent and output are not the only necessary ingredients to surviving as a professional photographer, Sholin purposefully exposed her work to the clients she sought.



"In the last couple of years, I've done a number of things to promote my work," Sholin explains. "For example, I got involved with the Miami Children's Museum, which just built a new 25 million dollar building.

"I did something with them, where everyone who made a donation between a \$1000 and \$5000 received a free portrait and a five-inch, framed watercolor portrait. The word of mouth from that was overwhelming. Unbelievably, nearly everyone who received a portrait ordered more images, and many people placed substantial orders with me for watercolor and canvas paintings."

This promotion technique worked so well for Sholin that she tried it again with two other charities on a much smaller scale. They proved equally successful, because the response, she explains, while not as large, was targeted toward an entirely different group of potential customers than the museum project. So she gained a foothold in entirely new markets. She also appreciated the opportunity to give something back to the community and support her favorite charities.

"What makes me feel really good about the original museum project," Sholin says, "is museum officials have told me my artwork was responsible for \$100,000 in donations." In addition to a permanent plaque now hanging in the Miami Children's Museum thanking Sholin, the museum also uses her paintings on official thank you notes. The museum project was so successful that the new children's museum in Broward County has already contacted her about helping them raise funds.

Unlike her photographic artwork and career, Sholin's book, *Studio Portrait Photography of Children and Babies* (Amherst Media, \$29.95) came about primarily due to Sholin being in the right place at the right time.

"I was in a booth at a PPA convention," she explains, "doing marketing consults for members, and this publishing company was in the booth across from me. On one of my breaks I went over to see what they were up to. At the time I did a lot of postcard mailings, and I gave one of the people in

the publishing booth one of my marketing packs. Later, he called me and asked me to write a book for them. He walked me through the entire process."

The version out now is the second edition and, like the first, is based on Sholin's studio work. Both the first edition, which came out in 2000, and the second edition, which came out in 2002, are step-by-step manuals illustrating in words, diagrams, and handsome photographs, how to be a suc-

cessful studio photographer of babies and children.

Among other topics, the book details how to create a child-friendly environment; what to expect during a typical portrait sitting; how to choose the necessary equipment, film and lighting; and techniques for customer service and profitable sales.

#### Future Plans

Just over a year ago Sholin designed a



new line of greeting cards called Sholin Pictorials, on which she used various Photoshop and Painter techniques in combination with original portraits.

"I decided to market them and have them printed by a greeting card printer in California called Celebration Cards ([www.celebrationscards.com](http://www.celebrationscards.com)).

"My line is represented by Robyn Tauber. I had the marketing ideas, but no time to implement them. Robyn put together the material and showed my work to various businesses. The cards sold locally and nationally on a small level, but we realized manufacturing the cards myself had a lot of drawbacks. At the National Stationary Show in New York City, Robyn and I showed my work to a number of art directors, and a large greeting card manufacturer purchased my images.

"When I showed my artwork, I discovered there was a great deal of interest in my technique, so I've put together a new line of distinctive paintings with strong, vibrant colors. I call it my 'WOW Line' because that's what people tend to say when they see it. I'm also implementing a plan to introduce a limited edition line of art that will be marketed as original prints, posters, calendars and greeting cards. Additionally, I have plans to market a line of newborn, baby and children's room art that can be hung in a nursery or child's room as part of the decor. Recently, a national magazine and the producer of a national cable television show have expressed an interest in using my artwork.

"It's been a long and challenging road since that first photography class," Sholin admits, "but it's been fun and enormously rewarding. My life has changed dramatically and so has my creative output.

"When I give a class on photography as art," Sholin concludes, "I implore my students to be fearless. Change is good, I tell them. Don't fear it—embrace it!"

Marilyn Sholin's jigsaw puzzle and work, as well as her schedule of classes can be found at [www.marilynsholin.com](http://www.marilynsholin.com).

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