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# An Homage to Bill Sholar

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On Monday, March 8, 1982, William Jessup Sholar died. Born in the first year of the new century, he had lived a decade longer than most men can expect. He was healthy, alert and creative almost to the end, and at 81, he'd had some time to look back on a life rich with experience and accomplishment. He would not find mourning appropriate, but somehow his passing changes things for the Porsche Club of America.

By the mid-fifties, when he embarked on the adventure that brought the Porsche Club of America into existence, Bill Sholar had already filled the cup to the brim a couple of times. Looking back, he called it a checkered career. In the heady days of the twenties, he was a hooper, working his way through New York University by dancing in Broadway shows when he met the Ziegfeld beauty who was to be his wife for 56 years. Not so long ago, Bill told me, "One day, when we have an interview, I'll give you some of the shady past stuff like when I was Clifton Webb's understudy in *Sunny* with Marilyn Miller. Virginia was a dancer in the Ziegfeld Follies; we met at 42nd Street and Broadway one night. Virginia almost went to Hollywood, as did I, etc. etc. I was a part time bootlegger, etc. What fun we did have in the roaring twenties!"

What a couple they must have been, the beautiful Ziegfeld dancer and the tall elegant engineering student. At some point in the college experience, Bill found himself drawn more to art than to engineering and changed the focus of his education. After son Lynn came along, Virginia left the stage to operate her own dancing school. The Sholars migrated to the Washington area after the Depression, settling in Alexandria, Virginia. Bill taught art at the Corcoran Gallery and opened his own advertising art studio, Sholar Mat Service. By that time, Lynn was working with him.

The year 1954 was a vintage year for Bill Sholar. He bought his first Porsche, a used 1953 Normal Coupe with about 3000 miles on it, and that act changed his life and yours and mine. "During the next two years," said Bill, "I learned from bitter experience all about cams and followers, pushrods and, among other things, how to take apart a Solex carburetor and put it back together again." He went through six clutches, a transmission rebuild, and eventually the total spent on repairs climbed to more than \$1500. "Why I stuck

with Porsche, I'll never know," he lamented.

Bill did stick with Porsches, and eventually owned an even dozen of them. The frustrations surrounding the 1953 coupe led Bill to call twelve other Porsche drivers together for a meeting in his Alexandria apartment in May. Looking for answers to the particular service and other problems that seemed to beset Porsche drivers, the "gripe-group" grew week by week until in August, the Porsche Club of America was formally organized with Bill as its first president. "They pushed me into it," he said years later, "because I called the meeting. That was really the only reason. It is true that I started this thing, but it is very easy to start a baby. Almost anybody can do it. I happened to be present in the right place at the right time; maybe I was persistent, but, as I said, anyone can do it."

That was easy enough for Bill to say. He was by nature literally bursting with originality and enthusiasm, eager to find the fun in life. In not much more than a year, PCA had a badge and a magazine, both designed by Bill Sholar. The objectives which remain in the PCA Bylaws to this day were written by Bill Sholar in that first year. And the plans and ideas kept flowing.

In the midst of a four day party during August of 1956, Bill Sholar received a telex from Stuttgart. "Best wishes for the success of your Porsche meeting," was the text and it was signed by Ferdinand Porsche. The first Porsche Parade was underway, and though there were no such titles in those days, Bill Sholar was its general chairman. Looking back over the first year in December 1956, Bill was pleased, "In one short year, the Porsche Club of America has become an internationally recognized club of high caliber. It offers the Porsche owner many benefits obtainable from no other source. I am proud to be a member and honored to be its first president . . . I'll do all I can to keep pushing in 1957."

And keep pushing he did. In 1957, Bill again served as PCA President, an office he had held in fact, if not by actual title, since the beginning. His energy seemed inexhaustible. From 1955 through 1958, he was the production manager of PANORAMA, having been its editor during 1957. At one point during those early years, Bill was simultaneously president, editor, production manager, chief administrative officer, Parade



chairman and Potomac Region president. In 1959, Bill shifted gears in response to the rapid growth of PCA as a national organization and became the first PCA Executive Secretary, handling the increasing load of administrative work out of his basement office.

If things were moving swiftly for the Porsche Club of America, there was also rapid change in the structure of the Porsche importer/dealer organization in the United States. By 1959, Porsche had taken control of its exports to the United States and Max Hoffman ceased national representation of Porsche. Service, advertising and other national operations were to be conducted by the new Porsche of America Corporation. Ferry Porsche was the titular head, with Erich Filius as executive vice president and operating manager of POAC.

In 1960, Bill Sholar joined POAC as manager for public relations, advertising and sales promotion, while he continued to serve PCA as Executive Secretary. Bill was therefore the first of a long tradition of dedicated men who have served both PCA and the Porsche car, enriching both immeasurably. As Erich Filius remembers, "I was well advised to hire Bill, because he not only could promote goodwill in the club and with customers, but also with our dealer organization and the factory. Bill organized the Porsche Treffen in Europe and was even active as scenarist and producer of films like *Made by Hand* and *Porschestrasse 42*, and he was in charge of many goodwill promotions between Porsche and our customers."

Under Bill's direction, some of the great U.S. sales

brochures of the sixties were produced. Of particular note were the pieces which contained the writing of Ken Purdy, a leading automotive journalist of the time, who wrote a very positive piece about Porsche for *Playboy* in 1963. Bill promptly had it reprinted in booklet form and called it *The Porsche Story*. One illustration from that brochure has become famous over the years. First appearing in *The Porsche Story*, it was subsequently converted to postcards and other promotional pieces. It shows two new 356C coupes parked on the plain below Hohenzollern Castle. Two men, one wearing a jaunty beret, are studying a map and the caption says, "Two members of the international fraternity of Porsche owners stop to exchange road information." The man in the beret is none other than Bill Sholar. Though the setting has been familiar to Porsche enthusiasts for years, this year's Treffen will visit the Hohenzollern site for the first time. It will be a fine spot to pay special homage to Bill Sholar.

After three straight years as Executive Secretary of PCA, Bill relinquished that responsibility in 1963 to Jane Nestlerode, who had long worked with him in his basement office. From 1963 forward, Bill was able to do that most difficult of all parenting jobs; he was able to stand back and let the "baby" he had created learn to walk on its own. Not that Bill ever got very far away from PCA. He continued to manage the annual PCA Treffens until they faded away in the late sixties as the result of growing pains at Porsche KG. And until 1969, when POAC was dissolved and a new import agreement was worked out with Volkswagen, creating Porsche Audi Division, Bill was PCA's liaison with the Porsche factory.



1954: Driving a gymkhana with son Lynn. This was Bill's first Porsche, a 1953 1500 Normal Coupe.





1956: Sharing a meal with PCA friends. On the far right is Earl Kirschbaum, who became the third president of PCA in 1959.

My last recollections of Bill during those years were from Daytona and Sebring in 1969. POAC fielded a team of 911s under the acronym PART (Porsche of America Racing Team), managed by Bruce Jennings and hovered over by PR man Bill Sholar. I remember seeing Bill pace up and down the pits at Daytona, keeping everyone in good spirits in spite of the fact that all five factory-entered long-tail 908s had dropped out of the race. Bruce Jennings and his 911 were going strong enough to finish fourth overall and Bill, in his characteristic way, was able to seize the small victory and use it to buoy the spirits of everyone around him. At Sebring the same year, I have a mind's eye picture of Bill engrossed in conversation with Dick Smothers who finished eighth overall in that race with a 906E.

With the dissolution of POAC and the formation of Porsche Audi Division in November of 1969, Bill Sholar found the moment to retire. He was, after all, 68 years old and the idea of an island in the sun appealed to him. He and Virginia found their hideaway on the Bahamian out-island of Andros. The Andros Bill discovered was primitive, but peaceful. The driving was British style, with a 45 mile per hour speed limit. Though there were some interesting Porsche roads, Bill said he had too much respect for the Porsche to subject it to the coral dust and pot holes

that played havoc with most cars on the island in just a few years' time. He and Virginia made do with their 1966 Variant, which Bill used to get back and forth to grade schools where he taught art.

He had found an island paradise, but he missed his Porsche. Writing to PANORAMA in August 1972, he said, "Since we became drop-outs in 1970, the thing that I still miss most is the good Porsche life. From 1953 through 1969 and the experience of 12 different Zuffenhausen vehicles, it has not been too easy to adapt to a Porsche-less existence. To keep my hand in, I put on a rally and autocross last year, the first ever on the island. They loved it and it is an established event."

And yet, in typical Sholar fashion, he found much to enjoy in his new life. "We've learned from scratch how to give TLC to papayas, key limes, bananas, poinsettias, hibiscus and the like. After three years, we're still glad we came. To breathe clean, unpolluted air, to drink clear water that tastes like water, to enjoy quiet and peace . . . it's a great privilege and we make the most of it."

About the time that Bill was really learning to enjoy the island life, this fledgling editor was attempting to write her first historical piece, a tribute to the accomplishments of Professor Ferdinand Porsche. It was a big deal, at least at the time, with an original





1958: Dancing with Mrs. Ferry Porsche at Merano Treffen party.

portrait and drawings and a collection of related articles making a special section devoted to the first Porsche and his works. Somehow, the article struck a nerve on Andros and Bill shot a letter back to me.

“Old Porsche Pushers, too, just seem to fade away. It took your impressive July *PANO* to bring me back into some sort of focus Porsche-wise,” he said. “Actually, I often wonder why it is that I am busier now than ever, though not with Porsche. But I have always been able to take on another project, so the attached effusion, something I’ve wanted to say for a long while, may serve to bring me back into the Porsche picture.” Enclosed was a sensitive tribute to the second generation of genius in the House of Porsche. Called “It’s About Time,” Bill’s article was published in the December 1972 issue of *PANORAMA* and explained in loving detail the contributions of Ferry Porsche.

It was Bill’s last major article for *PANORAMA*, but his interest in the workings of his nearly grown “baby” never flagged. Letters, though infrequent, continued to come over the years. He was ever amazed at what PCA had become and provided steady encouragement. “A million thanks for what you are doing with *PANORAMA*,” he said in one letter, “it’s one of my few remaining contacts with PCA. I know well how challenging it can be to publish regularly and on time. Virginia and I often ponder how it is that PCA has become, from modest beginnings, such a vast and successful organization bringing joy to so many Porsche idiots. It’s you and your group that has done it. Thanks, and stay with it.”

By 1975 or so, Bill and Virginia were living in DeBary, Florida. In his usual fashion, Bill plunged right into high gear. He became editor of *Florida Gallery*, the publication of the Florida Federation of Art, a bi-monthly magazine whose design resembled closely the *PANORAMA* format laid down by Bill twenty years previously. His spare time he devoted to learning to be an easel artist with considerable success. He exhibited his paintings often and won a number of top awards.

Many of Bill’s paintings were on display at the 1980 Porsche Parade, but my favorite was his “Purple Cows,” which went to the Amy Carter White House. Painting purple cows had something to do with what Bill Sholar believed about life. That art, and life, are not founded on imitation. That painting, and living, require that we reach the creativity that is within each of us. Bill said we should examine frequently what it is that we are about. He said we should endeavor to retain a boundless curiosity about this world which is filled with a number of wonderful things. And he said we should always strive to foster originality, inventiveness and creativity—in ourselves and others. When he said all that, he was talking about art, but he could have been telling us the secret of his life as well.

The last time Bill Sholar was present at a large PCA function was at the 1979 Parade at Reston, Virginia, not so very far from the site of that first PCA Parade in 1956. It was billed as a 25th anniversary celebration and the ranking Porsche AG official was Lars Schmidt, who had worked with Bill at POAC in the sixties. At Schmidt’s personal invitation, Bill was the honored guest at the final banquet. On that occasion, Schmidt said of his old friend, “Now, after talking Bill Sholar into coming to this 25th anniversary, I can tell you that the quality of life surely is determined by the people you meet on your way, and in this respect, I am very honored and I am very happy that I can call Bill Sholar my friend. This very important part of life, having good friends, really is the story of the Porsche Club of America.”

Bill’s short speech that night was received with thunderous applause. Though most in that audience knew him only through the organization he brought into being, his energy, his delight in the consequences of that long ago effort shone through. I believe in that hour, he felt the love and purpose he had infused into the Porsche Club of America returned to him a thousandfold. He said, “I was thinking of the many things that have made this silly little car, which is an inanimate object, what it is and what it has done. There is one word that describes not only that, but



you, the people who own it, and that word is integrity. Somehow I love you all."

When Bill returned to Florida, he found Virginia slipping farther and farther away, the result of hardening of the arteries. With a small annuity and their social security income, Bill hired nurses to care for Virginia for four hours a day. The rest of each day, Bill took loving care of his Ziegfeld girl, bathing, dressing and walking her for hours at a time. In spite of that, Bill never lost his enthusiasm and enterprising spirit. He drew up plans for a new house for the two of them, with a studio where he could paint.

In February of 1981, Virginia Sholar died and Bill sent a beautiful requiem for his wife for the April PANORAMA. "We had the most fun together of any couple I know," said Bill, "How fortunate I have been!" It was typical of him to look forward rather than backward. "Being a Single will take a while getting used to," he continued, "but I've had some time to think about it and believe I'll make out. I am doing a lot of painting and, come summer, I'll start to teach kids something about art."

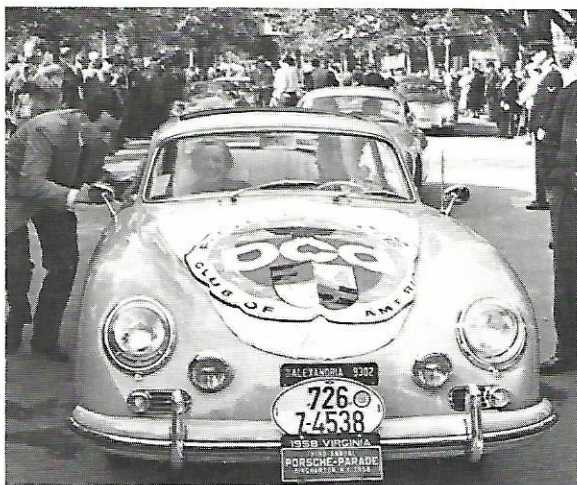
That was to be Bill Sholar's last summer. In November, he was hospitalized with what was apparently a pre-leukemic condition. The last time I spoke with him was in December. He was at home, sounding strong and optimistic, with plans to start a mail order art supply business to cover the cost of his own paints and canvasses. Bill's condition worsened over Christmas and in January, Lynn came and took Bill to his home in California. He died there on March 8, was cremated and no services were held, as he wished.

We know a lot about what Bill Sholar thought about life. I know very little of how he regarded

death. In 1978, Bill wrote a eulogy for Frank Beckett, who had been his stalwart companion in the early work to organize PCA. Perhaps what he said about Frank can give us a clue. "One day, when I'll be off to some never-never Porschelands, where there'll be no speed limits or gendarmes, and where anyone may afford a Porsche (with wings), I'm sure Frank will blink his lights in greeting and have the PCA Heavenly Region well organized."

Bill would not encourage mourning, but his passing does change things for the Porsche Club of America. With Bill gone, his "baby" moves from youth to maturity. Bill was always proud of PCA and he would say we're ready. For as long as we can hold his ideal of integrity before us, I think he'll have been right.

—BJT



1958: Bill and Virginia arrive at Merano, Italy, on the first PCA Treffen.



1960: Publicity shot for POAC with Bill in his 356C Cabriolet was published in the *New Yorker*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Fortune*.



To all Dad's many PCA friends around the world,

By now all of you have heard the sad news of Bill Sholar's passing. Those very few of you that I have been able to contact directly have been most understanding and leave with the family a mutual feeling of love and understanding for a very special person.

To those many, many others whom I have known and met either through Dad or through my own early days of PCA that I have not personally contacted, please understand that the omission has not been through any intended slight. To those many additional others that were to me only often repeated names, please understand my taking this method of saying thank you and letting all of you know that Porsche was quite foremost in Dad's thoughts the last few weeks he was with us. My only excuse is due to the fact that Dad had this habit of never updating his four address books and I just didn't know where to begin.

Shortly after Mother's passing, we brought Dad out to California to rest and recuperate. That lasted only a

few months and he returned to Florida to continue painting and putter around his new house. In November, he had a relapse and we rather hastily wrapped up things in Florida and made what we both knew would be the last trip to California.

The years of loving care that he gladly spent caring for Mother had taken their toll; his strength waned rather rapidly. He went quietly, peacefully and knowingly. He expressed no regrets, other than not being an active part of PCA.

Although he knew he had fully done his part, he felt that PCA and PCAers were no longer the close knit group he once knew. At the Silver Anniversary of PCA, Dad spoke of the Porsche and PCA as having integrity. Keep that thought when you think of Bill Sholar. There is only one of him per lifetime.

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1967: Porsche of America Corporation executives with their company cars. In the foreground is Eric Filius. Bill is at center rear with his last Porsche, a Targa.