

The most exciting orchid moment

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There is this paphiopedilum (slipper orchid or paph) that has been in my backyard for the last 9 years. It is the first paph in my orchid collection, and I call it the Original Paph. If I could only take one plant with me during an evacuation, the Original Paph would be it.

The Original Paph is part of a small collection of orchids, which I inherited from my late father, who was an orchid enthusiast. It is such a no fuss orchid. This paph did not demand special attention, but was a solid performer. It is a bit like its original owner, a very no fuss person. Original Paph has mottled leaves, a white dorsal sepal with a tinge of green and burgundy vertical lines, droopy lateral petals, with a few black warts and a burgundy coloured lip. There was no identification tag as to what kind of paph it is. For the last few years, it sat in a terracotta pot under a callistemon tree in my backyard, and flowered yearly in late winter or early spring.



Figure 1: The Original *Paph*

In June 2023, I went to a local orchid society's show for the first time to see the display and what they had for sale. The society members asked what orchids I grow. I showed them a photo of the Original Paph hoping it could be identified. No one at the show on the day could identify it. Someone did remark that the Original Paph flower looked good, and it could be champion. I did not know what it meant to be champion at the time.

Fast forward to mid-2024. I am now a member of two orchid societies. After joining my first local orchid society in November 2023, I joined a second one more recently. When I heard that the societies hold shows, I had high hopes that the Original Paph would flower again this year, so I could bring it for display at a show.

In March 2024, the Original Paph grew a fuzzy flower sheath. I made sure I brought the plant under cover. Firstly, it was brought to the veranda to quarantine it, in case of any crawlies in the pot. Then, it came into the lounge room, as night temperatures dropped under 12 degrees celsius. After all these years of experiencing neglect, the Original Paph was finally being watered, cleaned, fed fertiliser on a routine, and brought under cover for protection. The Original Paph sat near a north-facing window for light behind a sheer curtain, and behind some larger orchids that gave it some shade. I watered it, only as the medium and the terracotta pot started to feel and look dry on the surface.

A few months later, I entered my first orchid show with the Original Paph. It was the Winter Show at a local society in June 2024. The Original Paph never flowered this early in winter,

but this year it bloomed exactly one week before the show, as if it was insistent on being taken to a show. The flower is bigger this year than before. It must have been the work of the bloom booster type fertiliser, which I fed it every 2-3 weeks.

On a Wednesday evening after work in mid June, I dropped off the Original Paph and two oncidiums at the show location, to enter the novice section. The following days were work days, so I did not get to see the show until Saturday morning. I wondered if any of my plants got displayed for a first time at a show. The show rules did say the Show Marshall can decide not to accept plants that are not of acceptable quality.

Bright and early that weekend, I went to the show venue to see the display. It never ceases to amaze me how everyone else's orchids seem to be of impeccably perfect standard. I found the Original Paph in the display, sitting snugly in the front row, closer to the centre, among the company of a few other paphs. It had a large pink ribbon around it. I thought perhaps it might have won a prize?

I asked one of the committee members of the society. He confirmed the Original Paph won champion of the novice section. That was a really special moment. My father's plant won me the first Champion award, in the first orchid show that I entered! Was that the most exciting orchid moment? It was, on the day, and up till that day! The best was yet to come.

The following week, the other society I am a member of held its Winter Show. I entered the Original Paph again into the novice section. It was the only entry in its class so it took first place in that class. What was more exciting, was one of the committee members and an orchid judge identified the Original Paph. I was told it would pass as a *Paphiopedilum callosum* and can be labelled as such.

Finally, it was identified, and is no longer a paph unknown. This moment was the most exciting moment in the journey that me and the Original Paph had been on. It is now complete, with correct identification, and is an award winning paph. The Original Paph has really come a long way!

The champion sash, which the Original Paph earned is now added to my evacuation packing list. It is a tribute to my late father, who got me interested in orchids many years ago. I wish he was still here to see it. I am sure he was watching over my orchid journey from afar, and quietly guided the Original Paph to championship.



Figure 2: The Original Paph, aka *Paph. callosum*, at the show