

## What Sparked My Interest in Orchids

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Like many addictions, my orchid addiction just crept up on me little by little- I didn't see it coming.

My dad, Tookie Williams, had worked in the bush since he was twelve years old and in his later years had what was known as a scavenger's license to process timber, (fallen by the local Forestry Commission), in a bush sawmill owned by himself and his brother. Many of the trees had native orchids and ferns attached, and dad, recognising their beauty and not wanting to see them die, started bringing them home. Voila! He had started an orchid collection!

As a man with a green thumb and a yen for collecting plants, he never rested with only owning a few orchids. He began collecting all of the local epiphytic species on the mid-north coast and hinterland and when he'd exhausted this source of orchids, he then branched out into the exotics.

This is when I became involved. How could I not admire such beautiful things? Who wouldn't want to own more of them? I would goo and gush over them and help to feed his passion.

Birthdays, Father's Day, Christmas- what could you buy a man who had very little desire for clothes, books or chocolates? Why orchids of course! There was no internet or eBay in those days, but dad would sit for hours reading descriptions of orchids in catalogues from nurseries like Aranbeem and Fame, ticking the ones he'd like. Too easy- gift sorted!

I'd drive with him to Woolgoolga where an orchid importer of Dendrobium softcanes, Sandy Anderson, had his nursery. How many different colour combinations are there of softcanes? I don't know but he sure got a lot.

Like all young people, I moved away from home and ventured out into the world, but always when I came home, I'd spend hours with dad in his bushhouses while he rattled on about the winning qualities of the orchids which he had entered in the local orchid association's show, (yes he was competitive) or about how to care for them. As the orchid collection grew, so did the bushhouses with many an extension being added.

Dad's orchids and garden were amazing when in his retirement he had time to devote to them. However, with retirement comes age and as he grew older, caring for such a big collection became harder. I now lived in the area again and would try to help on weekends with dad giving the instructions.

In 2008 however, I was fortunate enough to retire relatively young and was able to devote much more time to the orchids. Dad at 85 years young joined me and for nine years we grew and showed the orchids together. What a precious time it was! We now had the internet and eBay to feed our desire and what started as his collection grew into mine.

The orchid houses are now at my place and although they are crammed full, I can always find room for more. Like Tookie, if I don't own it, I need to.

I now belong to and show at three orchid societies in my district and am secretary of one. I still have many of dad's orchids and if one manages to win a prize at a local show then I'm really chuffed. I also have orchids which have been given to me after the passing of an orchid enthusiast in my area. If one of them flowers, I always think of that person- the orchid keeps their memory alive.

I recognise that I have an addiction (I'm pretty sure it's a genetic affliction) but can't think of a better one to have. Like many addicts, I justify the money I spend on it with various

excuses such as: “I don’t waste money on manicures”, or “That’s the same as two cartons of beer” (I’m not a drinker) and am very good at smuggling new plants into their new home. Is this a bad thing? I don’t think so! I’m never bored or without something to do, I’m continually surrounded by beautiful and fascinating plants, and I’ve made heaps of wonderful friends through my orchids. Thanks dad!

Some of dad’s orchids in case photos are needed. The third photo is Blc. George King ‘Serendipity’

