

A Special Lady

By Ken Slump

The Influence of a Raffle-Table Orchid Plant

IN THE ORCHID WORLD, THERE are as many fascinating people as there are orchids, and this is a brief story about one of each.

Mickey Carmichael, a most enthusiastic and memorable individual, resides in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. She operates a retail orchid business known as Mickey's Orchids, with her daughter, Gale O'Connor, who also designs gardens and creates living orchid arrangements for local yachters.

Carmichael is originally from Tennessee. In 1952, she and her husband moved to the Miami area after living for some years in Indiana. Like many Florida transplants, she was intrigued by the many horticultural possibilities of the lush subtropical environment.

Yet her involvement with orchids almost never occurred. During their early years in Florida, her husband happened to install some windows at the famous Jones and Scully Orchids of Miami. They offered to give Carmichael an orchid plant. She chose a philodendron instead.

Orchids found their way into Carmichael's life despite this initial rejection. While she was still living in the Miami area, a Japanese neighbor gave her pieces of her orchid plants — terete vandas similar in type to the primary hybrid *Vanda* Miss Joaquim (*hookeriana* × *teres*), which is now also known under the genus name *Papilionanthe*. Carmichael became fascinated by them and began to attend orchid shows. Still, she refused to buy



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any plants, even though she thought the flowers were gorgeous.

She eventually overcame that hurdle as well. After growing orchids successfully for several years, she moved to Ft. Lauderdale in 1962 and opened Mickey's Orchids. She had started attending orchid society meetings and began clerking for the judges at area orchid shows.

Carmichael has been a member of the Ft. Lauderdale Orchid Society for 45 years. She has also belonged to the South Florida Orchid Society (Miami) and is a past president of the Plantation (Florida) Orchid Society.

ON THE ROAD Like many interesting folks, Carmichael is a great storyteller. She can relate numerous memorable exploits experienced during six trips she made abroad to study and collect orchids. Her first adventure was a nine-day trip to Nicaragua in 1975. It was a small group, just six travelers, led by the Florida orchidist Fred Fuchs. Carmichael was the only woman on that excursion.

She participated in subsequent tours led by Fuchs that traveled the Amazon and visited Bolivia, Paraguay, Ecuador and Peru. In 1980, she joined a dozen members of the Ft. Lauderdale and South Florida orchid societies for an Asian

ABOVE Mickey Carmichael of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, was so enchanted by *Stellamizutaara* Kelly 'Lea' (*B. nodosa* × *Ctna.* Keith Roth) that she had it meristemmed by Carmela Orchids.

excursion that was led by Andy Jackson. They visited Manila, Singapore, Thailand and Hawaii, and purchased orchids from growers, flea markets and roadside stands.

Mickey's Orchids has stocked a wide variety of orchid types since it was established, all suitable for South Florida's warm climate. In recent years, however, Carmichael has developed an interest in novelty hybrids from the *Cattleya* Alliance that have *Brassavola nodosa* or its hybrid *Brassolaelia* Richard Mueller (*B. nodosa* × *L. milleri*) as a parent. She finds that many of these are fast growing plants that flower frequently in South Florida. Many of her local customers also seek orchids that they can mount on trees outdoors, and these hybrids have proved well suited for that application as well.

A SPECIAL PLANT Her interest in *B. nodosa* hybrids grew, in part, from her experience with an orchid she loves to talk about — *Stellamizutaara* (abbrev.: *Stlma.*) Kelly (*B. nodosa* ×

LINKS

<http://www.orchidsonline.com.au/species1146.html>

Orchids Online's *Brassavola nodosa* information and photo page offers a brief overview and numerous lovely images of this delightfully fragrant species.

<http://www.orchidspecies.com/hybrid.htm#sec3>

The *Cattleya* Alliance Hybrids section of Jay Pfahl's Hybrid Orchid Photo Page offers a number of *Brassavola*, *Brassocattleya* and *Brassolaelio-cattleya* hybrid images and a brief background for each.

Ctna. Keith Roth). The hybrid was registered more than 20 years ago by Orchid World International of Miami. You might have a difficult time guessing its parentage based on its flowers — clusters of flat blossoms in tones of burgundy and olive green. It has surprisingly wide petals and sepals for a *B. nodosa* progeny, but its pencil-thin pseudobulbs and slender foliage confirm its parentage.

Carmichael sold many plants of the popular orchid, which typically flowered twice a year in Florida, but it was a cultivar of this grex named 'Lea' that really captivated her. Carmichael acquired the plant, a donation by Ken and Dottie Kone, from a raffle table at a Ft. Lauderdale Orchid Society meeting in the early 1980s.

Talented orchid growers are always watching for those plants that are superior to the norm, and it was not long before Carmichael noticed that *Stlma.* Kelly 'Lea' was a particularly vigorous grower. Soon the plant grew to specimen size and Carmichael noted that, unlike its siblings, it was almost always in flower. She divided the original plant into five parts, which also quickly grew into specimens. From these plants she planned to make divisions that she could offer for sale. This proved to be somewhat problematic. Due to its growth habit, she frequently ended up with small divisions consisting of just a single pseudobulb. However, she tried to save every one and believes that, over the years, she has sold at least 200 divisions of the original raffle-table plant.

"Every time I ran out of divisions to sell," says Carmichael, "the stock plants drew customers' attention like magnets and everyone wanted one."

The plant also drew the admiration of representatives from Carmela Orchids of Hawaii when they were visiting the large Florida orchid shows. They offered to tissue culture it for her, so she sent a division home with them about eight years ago. A couple of years later, Carmichael was disappointed to hear that the plants had been lost, but happily, they eventually resurfaced. She has had a good supply of mericlones to sell in recent years.

HER OWN HYBRIDS This great orchid led Carmichael and O'Connor to dabble in some hybridizing of their own, beginning in the mid-1990s. Among their first hybrids was a remake of *Doritaenopsis* Purple Gem (*Dor.*

pulcherrima × *Phal. equestris*) in which they used the small form of *Doritis pulcherrima*. The first novelty cattleya hybrid was named *Brassolaeliocattleya* Mickey's Freckles (*Blc.* Empress Worsley 'Roman Holiday' × *Bl.* Richard Mueller). Another early attempt produced *Hasegawaara* Mickey's Gale (*Hknsa.* Alice Iwanaga × *B. nodosa*), which was registered in 2000.

There have been a number of subsequent hybrids, and like most of us, Carmichael's favorite orchids have changed through the years. Currently, she is captivated by some new hybrids made with *Brassolaeliocattleya* Golden Tang (*Blc.* Waikiki Gold × *Bl.* Richard Mueller) that have become old enough to start flowering.

Unfortunately for those distant from South Florida, Mickey's Orchids does not ship. But if you are visiting the area, you should not miss the opportunity to visit this unique grower (for those unfamiliar with the area, call for directions). If you are lucky enough to be there when things are not too busy, you may also enjoy the bonus of a good orchid chat with Mickey or Gale.

(Mickey's Orchids, 315 Southwest 23 Street, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33315 [Tel 954-523-8867])

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