

## OBITUARY

### A EULOGY FOR CARLOS GARCÍA ESQUIVEL (1939-2020)



Photo by A. Zaslawski, Brazil, 2009.

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Carlos Simón García Esquivel (CGE), commonly known by his orchid friends as “García Esquivel” or simply, “Esquivel” or “Dr. Esquivel”, was born in El Hatillo, Estado Miranda (at the outskirts of Caracas), Venezuela, in November 28, 1939. After his high school studies, in 1956, he became an associate of the La Salle Natural Sciences Foundation, where he begun collecting insects, orchids, and other plants. He entered medical school in 1956, at the Universidad de los Andes, Mérida, Venezuela, eventually obtaining his medical degree in 1960 at the Universidad Central de Venezuela in Caracas (he specialized in psychiatry and gastroenterology). He collaborated with G.C.K. Dunsterville when the second volume of *Venezuelan Orchids Illustrated* was being prepared, where four of his orchid collections were treated, one of them

named by Garay and Dunsterville after CGE for his efforts: *Epidendrum garcianum* Garay & Dunsterv. [now *Prosthechea garciana* (Garay & Dunsterv.) W. Higgins]. Eventually, 22 additional collections by CGE appeared in the following four volumes of this monumental work and, in the acknowledgments of the sixth and last volume, he was cited by the authors among a small group of “friends and colleagues” for their “...active participation and continuous interest”.

He also collaborated with Ernesto Foldats in the 1960’s when the five volumes of Orchidaceae for the *Flora of Venezuela* were being prepared and eventually published in 1969 (the first volume) and 1970 (the four additional ones). CGE also collaborated with all subsequent Venezuelan orchid specialists (G. Carnevali, I. M. Ramírez-Morillo, G. A. Romero-González, and



Carlos García Esquivel with María Belén Arreaza, 2019.  
Photo by R. Gorrochotegui.



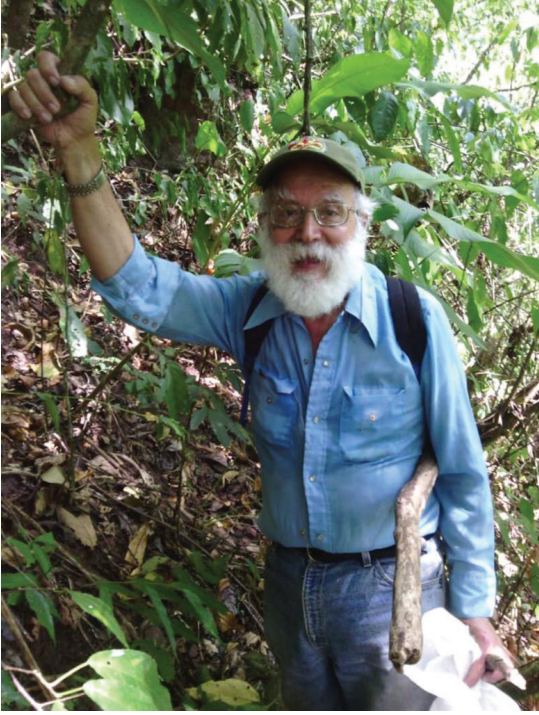
*Prosthechea garciana*, one of the orchid species named after Carlos García Esquivel. Photo by F. Pupulin.

M. Speckmaier), all working in other countries today due to the diaspora of Venezuelan scientists, or with international experts interested in Venezuelan orchids (e.g., Eric Hágsater and collaborators at AMO for *Epidendrum*; Günter Gerlach for Stanhopeinae, and Carl Luer for the Pleurothallidinae), to whom he sent material and photographs as well as accounts of the habitats of the plants. Besides *Epidendrum garcianum*, he had four other species named after him: *Masdevallia garciae* Luer (syn: *Alaticaulia garciae* (Luer) Luer), *Pleurothallis garciae* Luer (= *Acianthera garciae* (Luer) Pridgeon & M.W.Chase), *Encyclia garcia-esquivelii* Carnevali & I.M.Ramírez, *Epidendrum garcia-esquivelii* Hágsater & L.Sánchez, and *Kefersteinia carolorum* Carnevali & Cetzal (named both after him and his orchid friend Carlos Bello, of San Cristobal, Táchira). He was the co-discoverer of *Miltoniopsis santanaei* Garay & Dunsterv., the only Guayanian member of an otherwise west Andean genus; the plant was eventually named after Gustavo Santana, a fellow physician and orchid collector. We have two additional orchid species new to science that we planned to name after him, a species of *Rudolfiella*, and an *Anathallis*. He discovered many other species that were new to science at the time he collected them and further contributed documenting the distribution of many other orchid taxa.

His interests grew from Venezuelan orchids to the family worldwide, eventually acquiring and encyclopedic knowledge that was tapped by orchid scientists and *aficionados* alike. His orchid expertise spanned the taxonomy, distribution, and horticultural information for many orchids from all over the world. Also, of people, places, and the history of Venezuelan orchid science and horticulture. He amassed a large and diverse orchid collection of his own, with emphasis on species and primary hybrids. During part of his retirement, in the late 2000's, he held a job at the largest orchid nursery in Venezuela (Plantío La Orquídea, property of Enrique Graf), where he was in charge of the breeding program, and focused on selected orchid species and primary hybrids.

CGE was an activist in orchid societies, being a life-long member of several of them in Venezuela, and of international associations such as the American Orchid Society. He was frequently invited as a guest speaker and judge in orchid conferences, shows, and society meetings where he thrived sharing his knowledge with friends and fellow orchid lovers. In orchid shows, he would often be called upon to participate in the judgement of orchid species, both Venezuelan and from other countries. Many of us will remember him as a teacher and as a friend. He





Carlos García Esquivel in the field in Venezuela, ca. 2009.  
Photo by C. Fernández.



Carlos García Esquivel in his house in Caracas with a plant of *Orleanesia pleurostachys*, ca. 2012. Photo by G. Carnevali.

took genuine care of his friends (orchid and others) drawing from his experience as a psychiatrist and often provided needed council and support for them. He also was the ultimate collector: he wanted to possess the superlatives and diminutives of the genera he liked, or aimed at having all of the members of a particular group (provided they could be grown under his conditions at his house in Caracas). He was particularly interested in *Coryanthes* and the mystery of its successful cultivation. CGE was also interested in *Encyclia*, *Schomburgkia*, and the Pleurothallidinae. If he was interested in an orchid species, we would become obsessed until obtaining it, often after years or decades of waiting. He kept his interest in insects (particularly Dynastid beetles) throughout his life, frequently asking friends and orchid aficionados to collect the beetles for him in their travels. Later in life, he developed an interest in parrots, doves, and cracid birds, and built a large collection of them. This ornithological collection (along with his orchid collection) demanded of him much time and effort, particularly during his last years, when he depended

solely on his retirement money and the Venezuelan economy was less than buoyant.

As a physician, CGE would willingly share his knowledge and expertise, offering advice, and taking care of friends and relatives. He helped curing many seriously ill patients on a *pro bono* basis, just because they were his friends, a friend's friend or relative, or an orchid lover. As an individual, and even in the face of economic, family, and health hardship, CGE was always an engaging, jovial, cheerful, selfless person. He would attentively listen, closely staring at the eyes of his interlocutor, and showing genuine interest in him. You could always tell he was interested in the conversation by the way he would arch his brows while he listened. A conversation with CGE was always an adventure. He was a great storyteller, spinning engaging arguments, drawing from his almost photographic memory of people, places, and plants. His stories ranged from how he discovered and collected a particular plant, how he conceived a particular orchid cross (and what resulted from it) to the tales of how even his entire family would collaborate in the incubation and hatching of the eggs of

his favorite birds. He would remember the names of his myriads of friends, even those that he had only met by mail.

He was the ultimate, old-fashioned, postal mail correspondent, even in the age of computers, e-mails, and the social media, which he would only reluctantly (and clumsily) use. His long letters were always meticulously handwritten with impeccable orthography and flawless calligraphy, and as a rule included a long list of the orchids he would like to obtain and what he would like to trade for them. For those of us who were lucky enough to receive these letters, they will be treasured and cherished as fond memories of a true friend that will be forever missed.

It is difficult to understand the history of Venezuelan orchidology during the last half century without CGE. He collaborated both with the orchid scientists and the orchid *aficionados* and was greatly cherished by both.

He left a legacy of orchid knowledge as well as many friends and admirers who will miss his company and love for orchids.

CGE died Thursday, April 10, 2020, after the attack of thousands of Africanized honeybees in his house while taking care of his orchid collection in Caracas.

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