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"Reading Transports You to Places" —First Lady Cecile de Jongh



Some of us are born readers, while others have to be encouraged. First Lady Cecile de Jongh credits her father, Dr. Andre Galiber, for opening the portals of reading to her. When she was growing up, he insisted that she read, even during summer vacations when many of her friends were free to frolic and relax. But now she thanks him for his diligence, especially as reading is so fundamental and integral to her life and who she is. Mrs. de Jongh says:

"One important value of reading is being able to transport oneself to wherever and whenever the book takes place. The wonderful thing about reading is that each person can use his/her imagination to picture the characters and the scenes, the places described in the book. Reading introduced me to new worlds, enabling exploration of both real and imagined locations without leaving my reading place; that is a gift that we should all pass on to the next generation. The love of reading is such a wonderful gift."

For the past three years, First Lady de Jongh, has commissioned a local writer to pen a book for students in grades Pre-K to 3rd that she gifts to all children every December. She is not just zealous about reading, but has established a program to promote and cultivate reading in students throughout the Virgin Islands. She adds:

"I am deeply passionate about initiatives that promote and raise awareness of literacy efforts amongst children and adults, to ensure that these experiences are always possible."

While, *Gone With the Wind* is the novel that had profound, life changing impact on her when she was eleven years old, Mrs. de Jongh remembers being introduced to poets such as Edgar Allen Poe, Rudyard Kipling, Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou by her parents. While she "loves Maya Angelou," her favorite poem is "If" by Rudyard Kipling. She reflects that she shares her poetic taste with her father. "One of my father's favorite passages (and mine) from "If" is: "If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, / Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch."

Anyone familiar with First Lady Cecile de Jongh knows that she has not lost the common touch. Affable and at ease in any setting, she has her feet firmly planted on the ground. Perhaps her father was prophetic and was preparing her for the role she occupies today. Certainly the last two lines of "If" alludes to her present role, but the entire last stanza deserves our attention:

