

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Cecile De Jongh, Literary Elite Attend Caribbean Writer Launch Party

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*Highlighting
Time, Place and Memories*

In an evening filled with poetry, prose and a panel discussion of time, place and memory, Volume 28 of *The Caribbean Writer* book was officially revealed to the public at a launch party held on the St. Croix campus of the University of the Virgin Islands on Wednesday night. The event featured presentations by First Lady Cecile de Jongh and other literary notables from around the Caribbean.

According to information issued in a news release about the new book, the *Caribbean Writer* is the "University of the Virgin Islands' international, refereed, literary journal with a Caribbean focus." More than 300 submissions of "poetry, short-stories, one-act plays, personal essays and book reviews" were submitted by "established as well as emerging

writers from the entire Caribbean region and the Caribbean diaspora" for the annual compilation. Now in its completed state, the volume is described as "overflowing with brilliant, insightful, imaginative writings highlighting the concepts of time, place and memories."

In her brief remarks, the First Lady stressed the importance of introducing young Virgin Islanders to the writings of Caribbean authors, stating that she was "very, very nervous" that she and the Governor "would get run out" of the building at the very first holiday party they hosted, where they decided to give the children books rather than toys.

"But to our great surprise and pleasure, the children embraced books," Mrs. de Jongh said. "I think one of the reasons they did that was because of the authors. These authors wrote stories the children could see, touch and feel. [The children] were reading about things they knew about."

As part of her husband's efforts to increase literacy among the Territory's youth, Mrs. de Jongh has worked with various local children's authors in providing these books for local children.

"It has been a great joy and labor of love to work with these authors and provide books for children," Mrs. de Jongh said. "We will continue to do this, after my husband leaves office."

The evening was also punctuated by poetry readings from authors with works contained in Volume 28. In addition, a special dance interpretation of the poem "Rex: A Transcendental Glory" by Simon B. Jones-Hendrickson was performed by Krystal Flores of the Caribbean Dance Company. Bandele Chinouyazue provided musical accompaniment.

A highlight of the three-hour event came when a four-person panel was assembled to discuss stories that left a mark on the Caribbean experience. One such panelist was Whitman Browne, Ph.D., a prominent writer and journalist from Nevis and longtime resident of St. Thomas. He gave an account of the sinking of the Christena ferry on Aug. 1, 1970, on its final afternoon voyage from St. Kitts to Nevis.

"It was a very horrific experience in the lives of Kittians and Nevisians," Browne said. "There are many stories of ships in the Caribbean [that have sunken] and many of them are not recorded, and that's what struck me."

He said he developed a desire to properly record the stories of Caribbean people, which inspired him to write about the tragedy of Christena--an event that saw some 200 people dying that day in August.

"I felt that one of the things that Caribbean people should do is to write their own history," Browne said. "Much of it has been written, but it has been interpreted by other people."

St. Croix Senator Nereida "Nellie" O'Reilly was also a guest panelist and gave voice to the Hispanic Caribbean perspective.

"Time and place equals memories, right," O'Reilly began, "for some of us, at least for me and my father, memories are really what makes us; we are made up of those memories."

She gave an account of her 77-year-old father's desire to visit the land of his birth, Culebra, after leaving the small island off the coast of mainland Puerto Rico at the age of 16. The senator recently took the trip with him.

"I know that going back to the place where he was born, where he grew up, and witnessing that many things were still the same, attesting that his memory is still sharp, I think that for him, it was just a moment that he had looked forward to for so many years," she said, "and I am happy that I was able to make that connection and help him."

David Edgecombe also performed an excerpt of the play "Lady of Parham" and certificates of appreciation were awarded to various participants.

Copies of the Caribbean Writer are \$25 and may be purchased by emailing Rosetta Romain at orders@thecaribbeanwriter.org or going [here](#).