

Brooding on the Back of a Buffalo

by Miriam Adeney

A little boy dozed on a water buffalo's back. Keeping track of the family's animal was his task. While he sat, he listened, looked around, and enjoyed the sun and the breeze.

Now the grown-up author of 20 books, William Girao recommends brooding over the rhythms of nature and people. He learned that as a child on a buffalo.

Life as a Filipino pastor and author has not been tranquil, however. "I used a small table, between our kitchen and living room. I worked within arm's reach of my wife while she cooked and our children while they played," he says. "When our three children were very young, they would turn on the radio or play the piano or do their own work or converse loudly, just a meter away from me..."

"I have never gone away on a study retreat. I am in good company. Most preachers in the Bible prepared their sermons while in the midst of fulfilling many other demands. The closest one came to having a retreat was probably the apostle John—while in exile on the lonely island of Patmos."

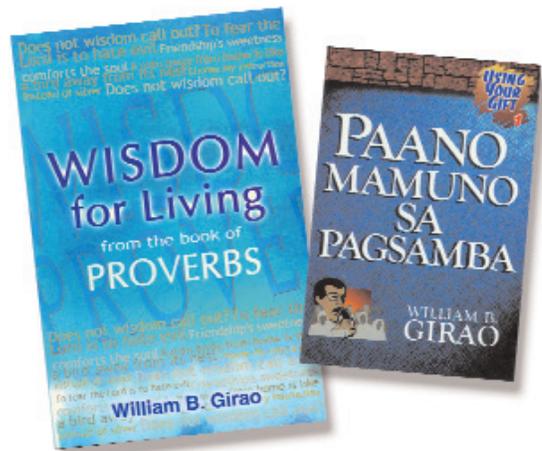
What advice would Girao offer to writers? "Know the Bible," he says, "but not as preparation for some role in writing or ministry. Love the Lord and aim to know Him more."

"Know your people," he adds. "Listen to old folks and to small children. Spend time with people who think. Linger to enjoy a baby's smile. Soak in what you see."

As you "identify with people, suffer with them, and shed tears with them, somehow the Holy Spirit will weld together your love for the Word and for people and you will have something to say. That will be a burning fire and will not leave you until you've shared it."

When he begins a piece, he brainstorms, quickly writing down ideas. "Do not stop to organize. Do not look up the quote," he advises. Next, he steps away to sleep or read or play with his family. He keeps a flashlight beside his bed to jot down midnight insights. Returning, he states in one sentence the purpose of the piece. After finishing the outline, he prays over every major point.

In Girao's books, the Word and the world merge. His book on stewardship, *Managers, Not Owners*, has sold over 20,000 copies. *Heart-to-Heart Conversations on Love; How to be a Success in Life; How to Understand the Bible Correctly; When Everything Goes Wrong; Being Single Is Better Than Being Married*



Above, two of Girao's many books. Girao is known for simple and clear writing.

to an Unsuitable Partner and Christianity Between Sundays start with questions and resonate with rich biblical reflections.

Girao tries to spend one full morning and afternoon a week reading. "Do not read just to find some good sermon materials," he says. "Read, rather, for the joy of discovery."

Make reading a priority and plan to read both secular and Christian materials. Imagine having conversations with the writers. Discuss the ideas with others.

Years ago Girao and his publisher regularly discussed issues facing the Filipino church. Some imported books were fanning extreme emphases. "Could you give us some counsel as to whether we should publish them?" the publisher asked.

Later this expanded to original Filipino manuscripts. "They seem OK to me, but I've never had seminary training," the publisher said. "Could you check them, too?"

So Girao became a theological consultant for OMF Publishers, significantly increasing the quality of this press.

"When I look at the prophets," says Girao, "I observe good balance. They proclaimed their message with much sorrow for Israel and at the same time with joyful celebration of God's grace. We ought to keep this crucial balance between anger and hope. We are not mere prophets of doom. We are, more than anything else, beacons of light to our sin-darkened generation, giving hope to our suffering people."❖

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