



lives of 42 accomplished women from all walks of life.

During her Harvard years, Nelda returned to Africa on a grant from the anthropology department to pursue research for her senior honors thesis. As a side trip, she visited the Republic of Niger, where she had lived earlier, and traveled into the bush, encountering a Zarma griot.

"Niger is a special place," she says. "You can leave the capital and drive for a half-hour to reach the bush, where you will see wild giraffes grazing on acacia trees and domesticated goats frolicking nearby." She explains that the Zarma people live in several West African countries, but make up the second-largest ethnic group in Niger. With the help of an interpreter, she listened to a number of the griot's folktales and recorded these stories in notes.

Years later, Nelda rediscovered her notes and wrote her first children's book, *The Hunter and the Ebony Tree*. A best-seller, it received the Storytelling World Honor Award and was translated into Italian, Gaelic and Korean.

Animal Village includes an Author's Note describing the geography and culture of the Zarma people and a map of Africa. The book is a study in globalization: the publisher is based in Ghana; the book is printed in Europe; distribution centers are located in Great Britain (Oxford) and New Zealand; and the



story originated in Niger. The book, to date, has been licensed for translation in Spain, Rwanda and South Africa.

As both the author and illustrator, Nelda enjoys controlling the dialogue between the world of images and the world of words. Upon completing the story, she divided it into 15-page sections to form a mental image of what needs to be captured in each double-page illustration. Using acrylic paint, India ink, textured papers and collage, she translates that vision onto her art board. "I often feel like a conductor making sure every detail falls into place in the right order," she says. "Then I count on serendipity for that final magical sparkle!" A self-taught artist, Nelda developed her illustration skills by copying works from Matisse, who used collage in his later years.

Nelda is a sought-after speaker, doing readings of *Animal Village* for all ages. She is scheduled to speak at the 5th IBBY African Regional Conference in Ghana in August 2019. About her fondness for folktales, she says: "They are a transmission of culture. These stories passed down through oral tradition from generation to generation...can serve as bridges bringing the world together by revealing how much we have in common."

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