

# Co-op member's imagination sparks first book

Author says 'The In Between' a fairytale for all ages

By Walter Allread

In retirement, J.W. Sparks is following the advice of his childhood teachers, who always said he had such a vivid imagination he should write a book. Now, he's done it — and a very imaginative book at that.

The Laurens Electric Cooperative member's first novel, "The In Between," features the adventures of a pixie and an elderly man who rescues her. "I'm 63, but still a kid in mind. I'm quite proud of that," says the Woodruff resident. Sparks wrote "The In Between" with kids in mind, too.

"All my life, I've wondered why certain things stay in a person's mind throughout their life and other things just fade away," Sparks says. "As a child, we all believe in the fairies. As we grow older, they all become a fantasy. We, the majority of us, also believe in angels. That never fades away. So, I combined the two. The In Between is a fairy, but she's not a fairy. She's an almost angel. I combined the two to let the kids believe in the fairy just a little bit longer."

"The In Between" tells the story of Papa Jim, an elderly man who, quite by accident, saves a "fairy" named Nina from a snake. Papa Jim doesn't see her at first, Sparks notes, only when she has fainted "dead away. So he puts her in a matchbox and takes her home. He starts fixing himself some soup and the matchbox starts doing a dance. She gets out and starts chewing him out. He can't understand what she's saying, she's so little."

The "fairy" disappears, only to reappear as big as Papa Jim. It turns out she's 257 years old and was once a person, too. But "when I passed, I wasn't quite up to snuff to be an angel. I wasn't bad enough to be an imp or a devil," she says.

In Betweens, as Nina tells Papa Jim, have



*J.W. Sparks, author of "The In Between," grew up playing with friends in woods they called "the little jungle." At 63, his imagination still conjures woods, and other places, filled with all manner of wonders.*

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earned temporary wings but Nina lost hers by breaking the rules and being seen by a human. The only way to get her wings back, it seems, is to do a good deed or two without being seen by anyone other than Papa Jim. Their adventures together — including putting on a magic show at a children's hospital — help her fulfill her mission. They help Sparks fulfill his mission as a writer, too.

The author says he wanted to show kids, in

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a gentle and entertaining way, the difference between good and evil.

His writing is earning good responses. "I've received 800 critiques and no negative feedback," Sparks notes. "I geared the book to children, but it brings the child out in everybody. A lot of people say they can relate. Kids, from eight to 80, like it," says Sparks, who is marketing the self-published book via the Internet. He's sold copies in seven countries.

Sparks, who has four grandchildren,

the oldest 15, says the kids recognize the fairytale's main character — the human one, that is — right away. "They all say, 'Papa Jim in the book is Papa Jim in life,'" says Sparks, who also goes by Jim. "They say, 'He's just like you, Papa.'"

Sparks, who remembers well his childhood adventures in woods that he and his friends called the "little jungle," has obviously kept his imagination alive. In fact, he's already imagining his second book. "It's sort of a noodle bender," he notes.

Called "Keeper of the Key," the new book is about a sailor in the Navy at the end of World War II who, Sparks says, "gets caught in a time warp and sent back to medieval days, but he finds out it wasn't a time warp at all. It was a wizard who pulled him back." Other characters include a phoenix, fairies, wee people, kings and queens, and "animals I've invented," he notes.

To enter Sparks' world, readers can visit his Web site, [jwsparks-author.com](http://jwsparks-author.com). Visitors can order "The In Between" or just e-mail Sparks for sample chapters of his books, which he's happy to send for free.

It's all proof, Sparks says, that even as we grow older, the "little people" are still alive. "There's still some child in all of us. You've just got to find it," he says. ♣