

A spritely tale

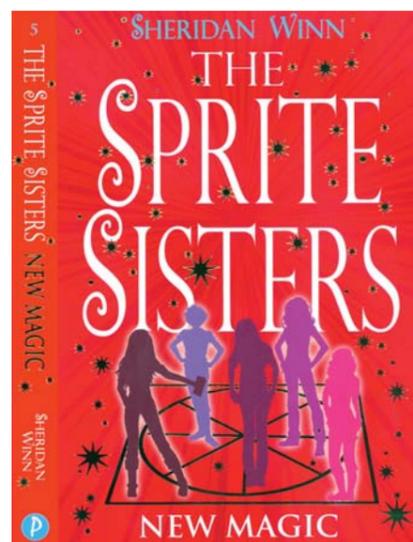
It's been a whirlwind couple of years for Norfolk author Sheridan Winn, who is about to see the final part published of her five-book series set in the county. She told **Angi Kennedy** what it was like to say farewell to the Sprite Sisters.

Five books, well over quarter of a million words, a growing fan base across East Anglia and success in Europe. Life has been frantically busy for Sheridan Winn, in the 30 months since she first sat down to begin writing about the Sprite Sisters.

In that short time, the Sprites – four young Norfolk sisters with magical powers – have won a large readership and earned their creator a place on the shortlist for a book award alongside such stalwarts of the children's books world as Michael Morpugo and Anne Fine.

But now, with the final instalment of the Sprites' adventures written and about to be published (by Piccadilly in March), Sheridan is closing her own personal book on the tales of the four girls –

BELOW: The cover to Sheridan's new book.



loosely based on her own childhood in the county – and opening a new one that will also be set in Norfolk.

"I am so rooted in Norfolk," she tells me. "I like the fact that at 56 I am very grounded and have such strong roots, with friends who I was at kindergarten with at Norwich High School when I was just four years old. In this fast-changing world, to know who you are and where you come from is so important to me – and I am very happy that I come from Norfolk."

Sheridan is the daughter of retired estate agent and property developer Alan Ebbage and grew up, with her three younger sisters, at Littlewood House in Drayton, on the outskirts of Norwich.

Her father had bought the house with 20 acres in 1960, and the girls enjoyed an idyllic childhood, with ponies, chickens, rabbits, ducks, scores of guinea pigs and even a pig!

With a large extended family, the house was always buzzing with activity. And it provided a rich source of inspiration for Sheridan's Sprite novels, which are set in a similarly larger country house, Sprite Towers, in the heart of the Norfolk countryside.

"Although they are based around magic, the books are all very much about family relationships," says Sheridan, who now lives in Norwich.

Her writing career grew out of reaching a time in her life – divorced and working as a freelance journalist – when she felt she could no longer put off her desire to become a storyteller. It was a precarious step to take, but within weeks of the publication of her first book, *The Circle*

of Power, she had the second book ready, *The Magic Unfolds*, and had been given an offer for film and TV rights.

In the fast-moving months that followed Sheridan was working to tight deadlines to complete the subsequent books, *The Secret of the Towers*, *The Ghost in the Tower* and finally *New Magic*, which is out in March.

"It was a great pace for me and I got into a routine so that I really enjoyed the writing," says Sheridan, who also visits schools around the county to give talks about her books and creative writing. "At the start of each book I felt as though I was summoning the Sprite girls around me and asking them 'Right, where shall we go with this one?' But now that I have finished the series the characters have slipped away from my mind."

Now though she is gathering up a new set of characters in her imagination, those who will inhabit the post-

Apocalyptic Norfolk of her next series of books, *The Earth Stories*.

"At its heart, *The Earth Stories* is about the fight for good and evil," she explains. "The actual idea for these stories came to me before the Sprite Sisters series and I knew straight away it would be a trilogy, a story of a group of survivors eschewing technology and going back to the 'Old Ways'."

"It will be geared to 11-to-14 year old boys and girls, and once again be an adventure story but also a lot about family relationships. "I want to set it in the Breckland area because it is such a mystical, strange landscape," she says. "I have also found myself increasingly drawn to the Oxborough area and to St Mary's church at Houghton on the Hill, which is absolutely tiny and has the oldest wall paintings in Europe. It's a magical place, a few miles west of Swaffham."

"It's one of the places that I shall set my tribe's domain. This whole area is central to where Boudicca and the Iceni lived, so it's rich in history and atmosphere. To me it's an area full of ghosts."

Sheridan feels a strong connection with the Norfolk countryside; it is where she always turns to for her "space" and inspiration.

"There is a wildness up here and the more I have got into the book writing, the more it has become necessary for me to have long, silent walks in the county when I can do my creative thinking," she explains.

"I love the feeling of an idea growing, and the times when I am out walking in Norfolk are when I have a little bit of a breakthrough on the specific problems that I need to sort out for the stories. It is as though I walk through the problems and the ideas just come." 🐾



ABOVE: Local author Sheridan Winn by The Tower at Blickling Hall.

The Sprite Sisters book five *New Magic* is out in March, published by Picadilly (£5.99). For more information on Sheridan and her work, visit www.sheridanwinn.com

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