SOFTWARE & TECH

What Is Call The Midwife Based On

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Introduction: The Heartwarming Story Behind the Hit Series

Since its debut in 2012, *Call the Midwife* has captivated millions of viewers around the world with its moving portrayal of midwifery and community life in 1950s and 1960s London. The show has earned widespread critical acclaim for its emotional depth, historical accuracy, and compassionate storytelling. But many fans often find themselves asking a simple yet important question: **What is Call the Midwife based on?**The answer leads to a fascinating real-life story—one rooted in the memoirs of a woman who dedicated her life to serving the poorest communities of post-war London.

Understanding what *Call the Midwife*is based on not only deepens your appreciation for the series but also reveals the remarkable true events and people that inspired it. This article will explore the original source material, the historical context, the real-life characters, and the enduring legacy of the show.

The Original Source: The Memoirs of Jennifer Worth

Call the Midwife is primarily based on the trilogy of memoirs written by Jennifer Worth (née Lee). The first book, **Call the Midwife: A Memoir of Birth, Joy, and Hard Times**, was published in 2002 and became an unexpected bestseller. Worth followed this with **Shadows of the Workhouse** (2005) and **Farewell to the East End**(2009), which together form the complete narrative arc that inspired the television series.

Jennifer Worth worked as a midwife in the East End of London during the late 1950s. Her writing captures both the profound joy of childbirth and the stark realities of poverty, disease, and social inequality. The popularity of her books prompted the BBC to adapt them for television, with the first episode airing in 2012. The show has since expanded beyond the original memoirs, but the heart of the story remains true to Worth's experiences.

Who Was Jennifer Worth?

Born in 1935 in Clacton-on-Sea, Jennifer Worth trained as a nurse and later as a midwife. She began her midwifery career at the London Hospital in Whitechapel, working with the Community of St. John the Divine—a religious order of nuns who had been providing nursing and midwifery services to the poor since the 19th century. This real-life order of nuns is directly represented in the series by characters like **Nurse Jenny Lee** (the fictional version of Worth herself) and **Mildred**, the mother superior.

Worth did not write her memoirs until much later in life, after retiring from her medical career. She drew on her personal diaries, letters, and vivid memories to recreate the world of Poplar in the 1950s. Her books are known for their unflinching honesty, blending clinical detail with deep empathy for the women and families she served.

The Historical Setting: Poplar and the East End

To fully understand what *Call the Midwife*is based on, it is essential to appreciate the historical setting. The

series is set in the Poplar district of London's East End, a densely populated and impoverished area. In the 1950s, this part of London was still recovering from the devastation of World War II. Bombed-out buildings, overcrowded housing, and widespread poverty were everyday realities.

The show faithfully depicts the living conditions of the time: cramped tenements, outdoor toilets, and the constant threat of disease. Yet it also highlights the resilience and warmth of the community. The real-life midwives and nuns worked tirelessly to provide care to women who often had no other access to medical support. The historical accuracy of the setting is one reason the series has been praised by historians and former midwives alike.

The Role of the Nuns

A key element of the series is the presence of the Anglican nuns of the Community of St. John the Divine. In real life, this order was founded in 1848 and established a mission in Poplar in the 1860s. The nuns were trained nurses and midwives who lived among the poor, providing free or low-cost medical care. Their dedication and spiritual commitment added a unique dimension to midwifery practice in the East End.

The show's portrayal of the nuns, particularly **Sister Julienne** and **Sister Evangelina**, is based on real individuals whom Jennifer Worth worked alongside. While the characters are composites and dramatized, the spirit of their work is authentic. The nuns' combination of faith, practicality, and compassion remains one of the most beloved aspects of the series.

The Real Women Behind the Characters

One of the most compelling aspects of *Call the Midwife*is that many of the characters are based on real people. This is especially true for the midwives and nuns, but also for many of the patients and their families. Worth's memoirs are filled with detailed portraits of the women she cared for, and the show has brought these individuals to life on screen.

For example, the character of **Chummy** (Camilla Fortescue-Cholmondeley-Browne) is based on a real midwife named Margaret, who was known for her cheerful disposition and tall stature. **Patsy Mount** and **Delia Busby** are also inspired by real midwives, though their personal stories have been adapted for television. Even characters like **Fred Buckle**, the handyman, have their roots in real people who were part of the Nonnatus House community.

The show's creators have worked closely with the Worth family and historical consultants to maintain authenticity. However, because the series now extends well beyond the timeline of the original books, many later storylines are fictional, drawing on broader historical events and social issues of the 1960s.

Key Themes from the Source Material

The books by Jennifer Worth are not just about midwifery; they are social histories of a bygone era. The television series retains these deeper themes, which include:

- Poverty and Inequality: The stark contrast between the wealth of central London and the deprivation of the East End is a recurring theme. Worth's memoirs detail the effects of malnutrition, overcrowding, and lack of sanitation on maternal and infant health.
- Women's Health and Rights: The show highlights the importance of access to contraception, safe abortion, and maternal care. It also explores the changing role of women in society during the 1960s, including the impact of the Women's Liberation Movement.
- Community and Solidarity: Despite their hardships, the women of Poplar supported one another. The series celebrates the strength of community bonds and the power of collective action.
- Faith and Vocation: The nuns' commitment to service without personal gain raises questions about

spirituality, sacrifice, and the meaning of a life well lived.

- Change and Modernity: The 1960s brought rapid social and medical changes, from the introduction of the contraceptive pill to the closure of workhouses. The series documents these transitions with nuance.

Medical Accuracy and Ethical Dilemmas

One of the reasons *Call the Midwife* stands out is its commitment to medical accuracy. Worth herself was a trained midwife, and her books include detailed descriptions of childbirth procedures and complications. The show employs medical consultants to ensure that the midwifery practices depicted are authentic for the period. This includes the use of equipment like the Pinard horn, the practice of home births, and the treatment of conditions such as pre-eclampsia and breech births.

At the same time, the series does not shy away from ethical dilemmas. Abortion, adoption, and infant mortality are handled with sensitivity and realism. These storylines are often directly drawn from cases that Worth encountered, making them all the more powerful.

How the TV Series Expanded Beyond the Books

While the first two seasons of *Call the Midwife* closely follow the events of Jennifer Worth's memoirs, the series has since moved beyond the original source material. This was necessary because the books cover only a few years of Worth's midwifery career, whereas the television show has now chronicled over a decade of life in Poplar.

The later seasons are still rooted in historical research and continue to explore real social issues, such as the thalidomide scandal, immigration, domestic violence, and the changing National Health Service. The show's writers also introduce original characters and storylines, while maintaining the tone and values established in the early episodes.

This blending of fact and fiction has been largely successful, though some purists argue that the later seasons lack the raw authenticity of the first two. Nevertheless, the series remains grounded in the spirit of Worth's work, and the creative team regularly consults with historians and medical experts.

The Global Impact of Call the Midwife

Understanding what *Call the Midwife* is based on helps explain its global resonance. The series is not merely a period drama; it is a meditation on life, death, love, and service. Its themes are universal, and its portrayal of midwifery as a noble profession has inspired many viewers to pursue careers in nursing and midwifery.

In the United Kingdom, the show has been credited with raising awareness of the history of the National Health Service and the contributions of midwives. Internationally, it has introduced audiences to a specific time and place in British history, while also exploring issues that remain relevant today. The series has won multiple awards and continues to attract a loyal audience.

The original books have also seen a resurgence in popularity, with readers drawn to Worth's vivid prose and compassionate perspective. Together, the books and the television series form a cultural phenomenon that shows no signs of fading.

Why the Question "What Is Call the Midwife Based On" Matters

For many fans, knowing the real story behind the show adds depth and meaning to the viewing experience. It transforms the series from mere entertainment into a tribute to the real women and men who lived through extraordinary times. It also serves as a reminder that history is not just about grand events; it is about ordinary people living their lives with courage and dignity.

Jennifer Worth passed away in 2011, just as the first season of the show was being filmed. She did not live to see the global phenomenon that her memoirs would become, but her legacy endures. Her story—and the stories of the people she cared for—continue to touch new audiences with each passing season.

Conclusion

So, what is *Call the Midwife*based on? It is based on the real-life memoirs of Jennifer Worth, a midwife who worked in London's East End in the 1950s and 1960s. It is based on the work of the Anglican nuns of the Community of St. John the Divine, who dedicated their lives to serving the poor. And it is based on the countless real women and families whose lives were marked by hardship, hope, and humanity. The series is a beautiful and respectful adaptation of a remarkable true story, one that continues to inspire, educate, and move audiences around the world. Whether you are a longtime fan or a newcomer, understanding the factual foundation of the show only enriches the experience of watching it.

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