Jenny Lee was born in Clacton-on-Sea in 1935 and grew up in the Buckinghamshire town of Amersham. During Christmas 1934, Jenny's parents – Elsie and Gordon – had a runaway affair, and when they returned home, it was soon discovered that Elsie was pregnant. To hide the disgrace of expecting a baby prior to marriage, they had a summer wedding and then took a trip to a seaside resort, Clacton-on-Sea, a few weeks before the due date.

Gordon Lee later bought a holiday bungalow at Jaywick Sands, near Clacton and the family returned there for many happy vacations. And by living in Amersham, Jenny's family was sheltered from the harshness of World War II, and her father's business thrived and provided the opportunity to negotiate extra with food rationing. There were always great parties hosted by her parents at their house.

When Jenny was 10, she was spending a seaside break at the bungalow with her mother and aunts, and her father stayed at home because of work. Jenny’s mother decided to return home early to surprise her husband since she was missing him, and she found him in bed with his secretary, Judith. Her mother collapsed and suffered a severe near fatal stroke, and was rushed to the hospital where she was there for several days for treatment. Jenny and her sister returned from vacation to an eerily silent home and all of the adults were acting strangely. It will be years later before they learned the entire story, but their childhood was forever changed from that moment, and they no longer stayed at that house by the sea anymore.

Her mother returned from the hospital in a disturbing and shocking condition—bedridden, unable to move her left arm, and contorting her face in an effort to barely speak. As her parent’s marriage began to disintegrate, Jenny and her sister were sent to a very strict boarding school where they were eventually expelled.
Gordon did not pay monthly child support, and instead he lived in luxury with his new girlfriend, Judith, while his children barely had money for the essentials. He eventually married Judith, and they had two daughters. Judith was never welcoming to Jenny and her sister, and she could be cold and cruel during their visits.

Jenny’s mother, Elsie, eventually found some financial stability by remarrying a violent man named Jock who was not only abusive but he would also try to grab and kiss the two daughters on the mouth and they would have to fight him off – Jenny even spat at him. One day, Jenny was playing the piano, and he slammed the lid on her fingers. When Jenny fought back, Jock kicked her out of the house. She was only 14, and her mother packed her bags. Jenny left her mother’s home and never returned. Jenny eventually found some cousins to live with, and her father paid for her to go to London to study shorthand and typing.

Jennifer’s first job was as secretary to the headmaster of a Grammar School in Amersham. She was 15, but lied and said she was 17. The headmaster, Gerald, who was in his late 50s, was fascinated by his new secretary, and he encouraged her intellectual curiosity by rearranging her work schedule to have the afternoons free to review books with him.

The relationship between Jenny and Gerald started out innocently, but at some point he crossed a line and became enmeshed in her world. Gerald became concerned about the abusive environment at her mother’s home, and arranged a meeting with her father who agreed to buy a large house for his new family with room for Jenny and her sister. Unfortunately, Judith was totally neglectful of Jenny and her sisters, and only furnished their room with a bare light bulb, bare floorboards and a single Army bed.

Although, a romantic relationship was not a wise option for a married headmaster and a damaged 16-year-old girl, Gerald would do almost anything for her and expanded her cultural horizons by driving her around town in his Bentley convertible to theatres and concerts.

Her mother tried to intervene with Jenny’s affair with the middle-aged man, but Jenny refused to take any counsel on this. Jenny believed that her mother had given up any parental rights when she kicked her own daughter out of her home and allowed her husband to continue his abusive treatment towards her other daughter.
Gerald realized that the love affair was not healthy and potentially dangerous, and he tried to steer Jenny towards nursing – a career that would give her a home and a vocation. Jenny flung herself at him, crying, begging him to marry her, but he stood firm. Many people would disapprove of their relationship, but it can definitely be said that when no one else cared, Gerald intervened and made sure that both of Jenny and her sister were given a chance.

Jenny’s romance with Gerald was a relationship that she kept in her heart for the rest of her life, even when she had a family of her own. Her husband knew that she had been deeply in love with this man, but didn’t talk about him other than in general terms mainly out of gratitude for what the relationship had been for her. Jenny felt that she had been an uneducated girl before working for Gerald as his secretary. Since she never enjoyed school and didn’t come from an academic background, Jenny probably never would have pursued nursing if it were not for Gerald’s counsel and guidance.

In her story about Mary, the Irish prostitute, Jenny wrote:

“Would I have been in Mary’s position, had it not been for love? My thoughts went, as they always did, to the man I loved. We had met when I was only fifteen. He could quite easily have used and abused me, but he didn’t, he respected me. He loved me to distraction, and wanted only my ultimate good. He had educated me, protected me, guided my teenage years. Had I met the wrong man at the age of fifteen, I reflected, I would probably be in the same position as Mary now.”

- Jennifer Worth, Call the Midwife: A Memoir of Birth, Joy, and Hard Times (The Midwife Trilogy Book 1)

Jenny began nursing training in Reading at Royal Berkshire Hospital in 1957. She still dreamed of marriage to the headmaster, though it was never going to happen. After the nurse training, Jenny spent some time in Paris, before moving to London to start midwifery training in London.

In the 1950s, Jenny worked as a midwife in Poplar, east London, where she lived with the Anglican Community of St John the Divine (a pseudonym of St Raymond Nonnatus was used in the books). After 20 years of nursing, she left the profession to start a musical career, becoming a licentiate of the London College of Music in 1974. She was awarded a fellowship ten years later, and taught piano and singing for over 25 years. Jennifer died in May 2011, leaving her husband Philip, two daughters and three grandchildren.”
Sr. Julienne came from a family of nine children, and there was a lot of tension between her mother and the five daughters as none of them lived up to her expectations. Her mother did not attend any of their weddings, and she became outraged when Sr. Julienne took religious vows.

Sr. Julienne had been brought up on a farm, and she knew a great deal about livestock. She was always very encouraging and sometimes got involved in Fred’s entrepreneurial pursuits involving livestock.

In keeping with Jennifer Worth’s approach with people she maintained close relationships with, there is very little written on Sr. Julienne’s backstory and there is more focus on how she made everyone feel around her.

“The impact Sister Julienne made upon me – and, I discovered, most people – was out of all proportion to her words or her appearance. She was not imposing or commanding, nor arresting in any way. She was not even particularly clever. But something radiated from her and, ponder as I might, I could not understand it. It did not occur to me at the time that her radiance had a spiritual dimension, owing nothing to the values of the temporal world.”

- Jennifer Worth, Call the Midwife: A Memoir of Birth, Joy, and Hard Times (The Midwife Trilogy Book 1)

Sr. Julienne also enjoyed watercolor painting, and sent painted cards to friends and family on their birthdays and anniversaries.

Interesting notes about Jenny Agutter:
- Jenny Agutter met the real-life Sr. Jocelyn’s niece, who provided insight into her aunt’s personality along with some of her drawings and letters.
Born into a large family in the slums of Reading, Sr. Evangelina grew up in desperate poverty. She had to leave school at eleven to work in Huntley and Palmer's Biscuit Factory to help support her family. World War I offered Sr. Evie the chance to escape, and when she was fifteen she signed up to work in a munitions factory. Since the factory was too far to walk to, she stayed at a women's dormitory that slept up to seventy women in narrow beds. Since Sr. Evie had never slept in a bed all by herself, this was a real luxury for her. Uniforms and shoes were also provided for the workers, and this was a step up from the rags she wore although the shoes hurt at first since she was not accustomed to wearing any shoes at all. And the plain and meager meals from the factory kitchen were better than anything she had ever eaten, and she eventually lost her pale and gaunt appearance and became somewhat pretty. On the assembly line, Sr. Evie would hear stories about nurses on the battlefield, and she felt a strong calling to join that profession.

Sr. Evie applied at a military hospital and started out doing janitorial work due to her social class and education level, but she did not mind as she was used to menial work and this gave her the opportunity to observe the trained nurses. She decided that she would be one of them no matter how long it took.

She eventually received nurse training, and it was during this time that she had the one romance of her life. Sadly, the young man died on the battlefield, and Sr. Evie never spoke of him and she rarely spoke of her soldier patients at all.

When she was twenty, Sr. Evie volunteered to parachute down behind enemy lines because they needed nurses at the front and no one could be sent to them by road. She had to do it without training, and she was warned that there was a fifty percent chance that the parachute would not open at all.
After the war, Sr. Evie joined the Sisters of St Raymund Nonnatus, to take on the profession as a nursing nun, and worked in Poplar for thirty years, including during the Blitz.

Sr. Evie was a great favorite of the people of Poplar, largely because of her down-to-earth, no-nonsense approach to their ailments, her rough-and-ready ways and her crude language. Of course among the Sisters, Sr. Evangelina was very prim and proper and had a completely different vocabulary and use of language. Within the convent she could be extremely dour and grumpy, and not easily given to laughter (usually because she did not understand middle class humor). Yet among her Cockney patients, Sr. Evie enjoyed a vulgar, lavatorial sense of humor that would make Chaucer blush as basic bodily functions were an endless source of amusement to her. It was only with her patients that Sr. Evangelina could truly be herself.

Sr. Evangelina occasionally displays “battleaxe” traits when she harshly seizes upon flaws in some of those around her. However, in contrast to classic battleaxes, Sr. Evangelina does not abuse patients and is in fact fiercely devoted to them. Her toughness seems to be rooted in her high standards for care and her own personal history of fighting her way out of poverty. At the end of the day, Sr. Evangelina is a diamond-in-the-rough with a truly good-hearted soul.
Born into an aristocratic family in the 1860s, Sr. Monica Joan was traumatically scarred during her childhood when women did not have many rights. When she was a young child, her favorite Aunt Anne was locked up in a mental asylum for the rest of her life. Apparently, this was a common practice by wealthy men to get rid of an unwanted wife who they can then divorce years later with no scandal. Sr. Monica Joan’s father ruled every aspect of her mother’s life including her ailing health when a doctor suggested that her mother was sick because all of her strength was going to her hair and her teeth. So, without ever being consulted, her mother’s head was shaved and all her teeth extracted before she turned thirty-five. Sr. Monica Joan was only twelve years old when she heard her mother’s screams and found her afterwards sobbing in a bed covered in bloody sheets with a swollen face and bald head. These experiences profoundly affected Sr. Monica Joan, and she vowed that she would never be dominated by any man.

When Sr. Monica Joan was eighteen, she took in a young girl of only thirteen, Nancy, to be her lady’s maid. Nancy was rescued after being surgically raped by a policeman and a doctor. In 1864, the Contagious Diseases Act was passed in Parliament to prevent venereal diseases at military stations. This act empowered a volunteer police unit to arrest any woman found alone in the streets, confine her in a cell and call a doctor to examine her vaginally. Nancy was arrested while she was transporting clean laundry to the military base to help support her family. In her prison cell, Nancy was laid down with her skirt pulled above her head to cover her eyes and muffle her voice. Her underwear was removed, and her legs spread wide apart and put into leather stirrups. Nancy thrashed around in terror during the forty-five minute ordeal causing a spinal injury from which she never recovered, and after eleven years, Nancy died of tuberculosis of the spine.
After Nancy's death, Sr. Monica Joan announced that she was going to be a nurse to honor the memory of her dear lady's maid. Her father was furious and locked her in a room and threatened that he will send her to an asylum like her poor Aunt Anne. From her home confinement, Sr. Monica Joan wrote to Florence Nightingale who used her influence to speak to Queen Victoria on her behalf, and somehow Sr. Monica Joan was able to finally leave her home at the age of thirty-two to start her career and new life.

In 1902, when the first Midwives Act was passed, Sr. Monica Joan trained as a midwife, and in 1906, she joined the Sisters of St Raymund Nonnatus. This was the last straw for her family and they disowned her. Although, somehow she still received her dowry and a very large inheritance when her mother passed away. This money immediately went into the convent funds, and had it not been for these two large donations, it is fair to assume that the Sisters would not have been able to continue their work. Because of this amazing financial contribution on her part, she was given more allowances than a typical nun who had taken a vow of poverty – especially after she retired. One of these luxuries was to take taxis to her relatives in different cities since that was easier for her than public transportation at her age.

In the time period of Call the Midwife, Sr. Monica Joan had lived and worked in Poplar for over fifty years and was known by all in the community. Sister Monica Joan was overly eccentric and highly unpredictable. A consummate intellectual with a love for the arts, she was also very clever and possessed a particular talent in manipulating others to get her own way. This high level of intellect and whimsy often masked a hidden secret – that she was slowly declining with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

**Interesting notes about Judy Parfitt:**
- Judy Parfitt has a special camaraderie with Miranda Hart, and they have even had difficulties with “corpsing” when filming scenes together. Corpsing is British theatrical slang for unintentionally breaking character by laughing.
- Her late husband, Tony Steedman, suffered from Alzheimer's disease, which was the ultimate cause of his death on February 4, 2001.
Character: Sister Bernadette  
Age: 30-35  
Role: Young Nun at Nonnatus House  
Actor: Laura Main

There is not very much of a backstory of Sr. Bernadette in the Call the Midwife trilogy. The memoirs focus more on Sr. Bernadette’s amazing skill and capabilities as a midwife, and how much Jenny learned from her. She worked as a midwife in the 60’s and 70’s and nursed AIDS patients during the 80’s. When the Anglican Church started allowing women to be ordained into priesthood, she left the Sisters to join a Roman Catholic order because that practice did not align with her views on the theology and her religious conviction.

This limited backstory probably provided the flexibility for the TV writers to invent a new character who decided to leave her religious vocation to marry Dr. Turner and be a wife and mother. This also provided more of a storyline for the character of Dr. Turner as well.

Interesting notes about Laura Main:
- When they discovered Laura Main’s beautiful voice while filming hymnal chants, extra chapel scenes were created to showcase her Soprano talent.
Character: Nurse Trixie Franklin  
Age: mid-twenties  
Role: Nurse Resident at Nonnatus House  
Actor: Helen George

There is not very much of a backstory of Trixie in the Call the Midwife trilogy. The memoirs focused more on her character traits of being fun, quick-minded, clever, sharp-tongued and brutally blunt. She leaves the nursing profession to marry a young man who eventually entered diplomatic service, and they traveled the world.

Shortly after Call the Midwife was broadcasted, Michael Bruce, a British ex-pat living in Switzerland, contacted the executive producer. He revealed that his wife, Antonia, worked with Jennifer Worth in Poplar in the late fifties and they believed that she might be the inspiration for the character of Trixie. The production team immediately decided to meet with Antonia. During the meeting, Antonia shared a file containing case notes and photographs from her training days as a midwife.

**Interesting notes about Helen George**  
- Helen George is a non-smoker. On set, she speaks herbal cigarettes that apparently smell awful especially after multiple takes.
Jenny met Cynthia Miller on her first day in Poplar, and a special connection evolved that lasted until Cynthia’s death from cancer in 2006. Jenny insisted that Cynthia’s name remained unaltered in the series, and yet she never spoke of her backstory in great detail out of respect for their friendship. Jenny did eventually show a photo from her wedding album that depicted Cynthia as shy and slightly out of place.

The books focuses a great deal on Cynthia’s astonishing voice – how it was soft, low, slightly husky and with a touch of laughter in her tone that could have been developed into a sexy, alluring voice in another type of girl. However, with Cynthia, her voice only came across as warm and reassuring to be a balm against any fears.

However, with all this secrecy about Cynthia’s backstory, Jenny does reveal in the books that Cynthia struggled with clinical depression and was in and out of psychiatric hospitals, prescribed many different types of drugs, and also went through electric shock therapy. Cynthia attempted to join the religious order twice in her life but her mind could not take the mental demands required of spiritual life.

When she was thirty-nine, Cynthia married a widowed clergyman whose mental needs were even greater than her own. Somehow the necessity to look after him and organize his life became the focus of her existence and cured her, and she was very successful as a vicar’s wife. When he retired at 65, they lived like “hippy teenagers” backpacking to Greece, Israel, Jordan and Turkey and even lived a few months in Lima, Peru with the Church of England World Mission Association.

It was decided that the best approach was to treat Cynthia’s character as special, but not unique – as a shy, quiet girl who feels things deeply, yet can be funny and playful in the company of friends. It was a delicate balance to respect Cynthia’s memory with the need to write a role that would interest an actor.
Character: Nurse Chummy
(Camilla Cholomondely-Browne)
Age: late-twenties
Role: Nurse Resident at Nonnatus House
Actor: Miranda Hart

Chummy was the only girl among six brothers, and she was also the tallest at 6’2”. Her parents unsuccessfully spent a fortune to try to make her look more feminine, and yet, despite her appearance, Chummy had a very gentle nature and desperately wanted to please others and be liked.

Chummy’s great-great-grandfather had entered the Indian civil service in the 1820s, and the tradition had progressed through the generations to her father who was the Governor of Rajasthan. The mother remained in India with her husband, while the children went to elite boarding schools in England – the boys went to Eton, and Chummy went to Roedean. Chummy clung to her collection of family photographs, as perhaps they were the closest she ever got to her family.

After Roedean, Chummy went to finishing school in Switzerland and then back to London to the Lucy Clayton Charm School to prepare for her presentation as a debutante to King George VI at Buckingham Palace. After Chummy’s presentation at Court, she spent a year of residency at a cordon-bleu school to learn how to be a good hostess in society. When that did not suit her, Chummy then studied at the best needlework school in London for two years.

Chummy eventually found her vocation as a nurse and religious missionary. She attended the Nightingale School of Nursing at St Thomas’s Hospital in London where she was an instant success, and won the Nightingale Prize three years in a row.

Chummy’s next step was to be trained as a midwife since that was necessary in order to be a missionary; however, Chummy’s entry into midwifery was not as successful as nursing. Chummy immediately faced three difficulties: she did not fit in any of the uniforms, she could not ride a bike and she stuck out as a sore thumb among the East Enders. Although, she was able to make her own uniforms, she
never would have overcome her last two obstacles if it were not for an older Cockney child named Jack. Jack worked with Chummy every morning and evening to teach her to how ride a bike, and he also guarded and fought off anyone who would tease and torment her. On the whole, the Cockney’s did not take to Chummy and made fun of her behind her back, but Jack was very effective in changing that and enabling Chummy to be accepted by the Poplar community.

**Interesting notes about Miranda Hart**

- The author, Jennifer Worth, personally selected Miranda Hart to play Chummy
- Miranda Hart is a distant cousin of Princess Diana and went to boarding school with Princess Kate.
Character: PC Peter Noakes  
Age: early-thirties  
Role: Love Interest for Chummy  
Actor: Ben Caplan

During World War II, Peter served in the Battle of Arnhem as part of the Paratroop Regiment that flew 30,000 troops behind the enemy lines around the Dutch/German border. At the same time, British tanks and infantry were supposed to relieve the airborne troops, but they never arrived and the airborne divisions were cut off in enemy territory without supplies or reinforcements. Peter was one of the lucky ones who survived.

After the war, Peter struggled to readjust back to civilian life. He tried many different types of jobs including factory work, milk route, car repair, bartending and hardware shop assisting, but everything just felt too tame. His parents were concerned that he would never find a steady job with a pension. Also, Peter was not particularly a good student because school subjects bored him, and yet he was a voracious reader who often fantasized about traveling to faraway places to learn about the people and their customs.

After seven years of drifting from job to job with a lack of purpose, Peter entered the Police Training College. He left this parents’ home with their constant criticizing and worrying to live in a police hostel with other young men who had been through the war. He graduated top of his class and then served two years shadowing experienced constables. Life on the streets was more fascinating than sitting in a college classroom, and he was determined to become a sergeant and inspector.

Now that he finally found a steady job with a pension, his parents started to pressure him to settle down and get married. Unfortunately, girls were an even bigger failure than all of his dead-end jobs. He was quiet and shy and many of the girls he met were a bit empty, silly and self-obsessed, and he wanted a girl who could get her mind off her fingernails, her hair or how she plucked her eyebrows.
Character: Dr. Turner
Age: early-forties
Role: Love Interest for Sr. Bernadette
Actor: Stephen McGann

Dr. Turner was a General Practitioner who lived in the East End, and his character is symbolic of how the National Health Service supported the Sisters of the Nonnatus House – particularly with powerful new drugs like penicillin. Dr. Turner served as a medic in World War II -- which accelerated the treatment and testing of new drugs to fight infections.

Ironically, Dr. Turner smokes regularly which was a sign of the 1950s when cigarette brands were actually endorsed by doctors.

Dr. Turner had recently lost his wife, and he was struggling with both the demands of a doctor who was constantly on call and the needs of raising his young son. He develops a strong respect for Sr. Bernadette’s intelligence and advanced capabilities as a midwife that eventually turns into admiration and love.

Interesting notes about Stephen McGann:
- Husband of Heidi Thomas, Writer and Co-producer of Call the Midwife
- Delivered by a midwife who arrived by bike during a blizzard. Afterwards, she had to dig her bike out of the snow to go home.
- In 2013, he graduated with a Master’s degree in Science Communication from Imperial College in London.
Since Fred was unable to enter the armed services during World War II due to his eyesight, he was assigned to spend six years cleaning out latrines for the Pioneer Corps in El Alamein. In 1942, his wife and three of their six children were killed in the Blitz. After the war, Fred brought up the remainder of his family single-handed.

It was never easy for Fred to find a regular job due to his eyesight and also because he would not commit himself to be away from home for long hours since his children needed him. So he had developed a wide range of money-making activities with dubious legality.

Fred was a handyman at Nonnatus House seven days a week during the mornings and evenings for boiler stoking and other odd jobs, as needed. It was a good work schedule for him because it was a steady job that also allowed him plenty of time to pursue his other extra-curricular activities.

Since Fred was usually in the kitchen working on the boiler, he socialized with the young nurses during breakfast and entertained them with his outlandish stories peppered with his Cockney charm and humor.

**Interesting notes about Cliff Parisi**

- He was born in the East End in the late 1950s during a housing shortage. The landlady required his parents to give them the baby in order to remain living there since she did not have any children of her own. When they refused, she threw them out. The family lived outside in a park for a few days until the police came and took the children away for a few months until his parents found other rental accommodations.