

Call the Midwife

Season 1 Character Backstories

Nurse Jenny Lee

Born November 14, 1935, seven months after her parents Valentine's Day wedding, Jenny is the only child of loveless parents. Her father didn't hide his infidelities and her mother was more concerned with saving face than being a loving parent to her daughter. Jenny was a rebellious child often arguing with her mother and running away from home. To combat this, Jenny's mother sent her to a boarding school when Jenny was only 10 years old. Jenny learned etiquette, manners, history and rhetoric while rubbing shoulders with the daughters and sons of wealthy families who shared her sense of alienation and parental resentment. Still feeling betrayed by her mother's decision to send her away, Jenny continued to act out to the point that at age 14 Jenny was nearly kicked out of boarding school. Jenny's history professor intervened on her behalf convincing the administration to give Jenny one more chance. Jenny began having an affair with her 28 year old professor soon after. Though she never intended it, Jenny fell in love with him. She was devastated when he married his longtime girlfriend, a wealthy and politically connected woman, just two months shy of Jenny's graduation. Determined to get away from his betrayal and her feelings of rejection, Jenny choose midwifery thinking it was the last place he'd look for her.

Her overwhelmingly trusting and kind nature coupled with anger and resentment leaves Jenny vulnerable to the wolves of the world. She is too passive to tell Jimmy or Gerald how she truly feels about them but too stubborn to be pushed into a premature decision.

Nurse Chummy Noakes

Born in 1932, Camilla “Chummy” Brown arrives at Nonnatus house the daughter of a viceroy and a noble woman. Chummy spent her first 15 years in India until its independence in 1947. Chummy was raised largely by nannies and domestic help. Chummy’s mother was especially harsh chastising her awkward, lanky daughter for failing to excel at dance, music or any of the “virtues of a lady”. Midwifery is a second career for Chummy having been educated in needlework and sewing previously. Despite five years of nursing experience, Chummy barely passed her midwife exams.

Chummy’s mother is hiding a secret of her own which drives her to push her daughter to excel and makes it impossible for her to except her daughter as she is.

Primarily skillful and optimistic Chummy, is more than willing to compromise, sacrificing her happiness for the happiness of others. After years of trying to meet her mother’s expectations though, Chummy defiantly took a position as a midwife. In spite of (or perhaps because of) her mother’s disapproval, Chummy is determined to pursue a career as a midwife and is unfazed by Sister Evangelina’s disapproval.

Nurse Beatrice “Trixie” Franklin

Born July 29, 1933 Trixie is the youngest of five brothers who grew up in a working class suburb of London. Trixie’s brothers cut her no slack because she was the youngest or because she was a girl. While studying to become a nurse, Trixie felt out of place and out of touch with the other girls as a result. Determined to fit in, Trixie began studying fashion and design dyeing her hair platinum blonde and taking up smoking and drinking. Trixie’s efforts worked and she soon became one of the popular girls. Trixie relishes the attention she gets for her fashionable appearance.

Trixie’s ingénue exterior belies her cynical edge. To date, she hasn’t found a love interest that can both appreciate her physical appearance and her fiery personality but she remains hopeful. Witty, reliable and supportive, Trixie gets her best ideas from movies and magazines. She’s loathe to admit when she doesn’t know something and takes rejection and/or correction personally.

Nurse Cynthia Miller

Though she seems the most naive of the midwives Cynthia is actually the oldest born January 9, 1932. Raised in a working class neighborhood Cynthia was a quiet, studious child. She loved to be needed volunteering to watch other children every chance she got. She eagerly helped her mother when her younger sister Rebecca was born five years later. She took her role as caregiver so seriously, Rebecca accused her of “acting like a second mum”. Cynthia’s parents and sister enthusiastically supported her decision to become a nurse and midwife though her father’s sister has yet to warm to the idea.

Dependable and efficient, Cynthia is painfully aware that her focus on midwifery justifies her non-existent love life but Cynthia just isn’t comfortable in social settings or with the opposite sex. Cynthia both hopes to find a man who is patient and understanding with her and also fears no man will understand her painfully shy and awkward romantic interactions. For now concentrating on midwifery is just the excuse Cynthia needs to avoid talking about dating and marriage.

Cynthia is the type of person who will take time the time to listen when someone needs to vent even if it’s the same story they’ve told again and again. Her biggest flaw is her inexperience in love and social interactions but it is also her greatest strength because it allows Cynthia to interact with her patients with an open mind and an optimistic outlook. To unwind Cynthia enjoys the mindless repetitiveness of knitting then donates the finished product to patients in need.

Sister Julienne

Despite being born Christmas Eve 1912, Sister Julienne never thought she'd become a nun. Pretty and popular in her neighborhood, she expected to marry her first love Vincent. Their first official date was to see Disney's Steamboat Willie. Sister Julienne's dreams of marriage and motherhood were cut short when Vincent died unexpectedly. Urged to find someone else to marry and spend her life with, Sister Julienne never felt for another man the way she felt for Vincent. Rather than give in to societal pressure to "move on", Sister Julienne joined the convent seeking a life of independence and purpose. She committed herself to her work volunteering for whatever position needed to be filled. A quiet and shy woman, she is never the less gifted at mediating disputes and diffusing tense situations. Sister Julienne never wanted to be a leader and initially resisted Mother Superior's request to manage Nonnatus House but Sister Julienne's dedication to her purpose and desire to go where she is needed compelled her to get over her self-consciousness and accept the position as leader of the nuns at Nonnatus House.

When she's not mediating between Sister Evangelina and Sister Monica Joan, she is working with Dr. Turner and community leaders to provide services to East London with limited staff on a meager budget. She occasionally loses sleep second guessing herself when she must deny services to people in need or shift resources away from patients. Sister Julienne unwinds by sipping a hot cup of Earl Grey while listening to serial shows on the radio.

Though altruistic and optimistic, Sister Julienne fears she will compromise too much to meet her ideal.

Sister Evangelina

Born in 1907 Evangelina has endured more than most in her generation. The 16th of 19 children she was 7 when World War 1 broke out. Three of her older brothers were killed in the war but soon after one brother returned home from the war he, her mother, 4 sisters and her baby brother were killed by the Spanish Flu. At 11 years old, Evangelina began working as a domestic to a doctor's family. Evangelina sent every penny she earned to her father and siblings. When not cooking, cleaning or washing, Evangelina would slip into her employer's study to read his medical books and teach herself everything she could about medicine. Her employment ended at age 22 when Britain was gripped by the Depression of 1929 when her employer was no longer able to pay the bills and his family was evicted from their townhome. Evangelina managed to save several of her favorite medical books though.

Had it not been for her self-taught nursing skills, Evangelina might also have ended up homeless and unemployed but she was able to find work at an Anglican hospital changing sheets and emptying bed pans. Despite her lack of formal training, her skill and dedication earned her an opportunity to complete her nurse training at the hospital's expense if she agreed to take vows. Grateful for the opportunity, Evangelina dedicated the next ten years of her life to nursing until World War 2 broke out. Thinking herself as capable as any man, Evangelina volunteered to join a group of nuns needed to parachute onto the front lines to provide medical care for soldiers. With no training, over half the nurses were killed in the endeavor including Evangelina's best friend Mary Margaret.

Sister Evangelina holds no punches nor suffers fools gladly. If she had a motto it would be that "sometimes we need to deal with what the lord has sent us." Sister Evangelina has no trouble voicing her opinion and since she's smarter than those around her, she usually manages to get her way.

Sister Monica Joan

Born in 1897 Monica Joan lived a charmed life as the eldest daughter of an Earl. From age 4 to age 10 she was best friends with Mary Princess Royal and at one time dated her brother George the Duke of Kent. Monica was disillusioned with life as a noble and a royal with its emphasis on rank, titles and wealth. At the time, the only formal education a noble girl could have was through private tutors in subjects such as art, piano and etiquette. A chance meeting with Princess Louise, who was determined to study art despite her mother's disapproval, prompted Monica to follow her own passion and pursue a nursing degree at King's College London the premier institution for nurse training inspired by Florence Nightingale's 1868 Notes on Nursing. Teenaged Monica was also keenly aware of the disadvantages facing Edwardian women who were neither noble-born nor married and often got into impassioned disagreements with her father and brother at dinner over the treatment of single mothers in particular. Monica's mother, Lady Bathurst, hoped that marriage would dissuade her daughter from studying nursing and arranged a marriage with the son of a prominent noble family. Monica refused to marry him but did not disclose that the real reason was because of his relationship with a close male friend from college. Lady Bathurst opposed nursing describing it as filthy, unfeminine and beneath the dignity of a member of nobility. In 1918, just as the Spanish Flu began to spread, Lady Bathurst gave her daughter an ultimatum: give up nursing or be disowned. With nowhere else to go, Monica Joan took her vows with the Anglican church.

Sister Monica Joan's behavior is quirky to say the least quoting Shakespeare one minute and forgetting her train of thought the next. Shaken to her core by her mother's rejection, Sister Monica Joan went from a passionate and outspoken socialite to an imaginative, undisciplined nun.

Dr. Turner

Though Dr. Turner attended an elite medical school, he lacked the connections that could afford him a staff position at a private hospital or appointment as private physician to the wealthy. Dr. Turner however finds purpose in working at the National Hospital and caring for the residents of East End. He periodically attends alumni gatherings where he uses his former classmates false concern for the impoverished to guilt them into making large contributions to contribute to his work.

Though principled and dignified, Dr. Turner can veer towards self-righteous when necessary.

Officer Peter Noakes

Officer Noakes grew up in the East End and always felt an obligation to give back. He was perfectly content to remain in East London as a beat cop until a chance encounter with one of the midwives forces Officer Noakes to re-evaluate his career and his future.

Officer Noakes loves stability but love has brought out the fearless, even foolhardy aspect of his personality.

Fred the Handyman

Fred lost his wife and most of his children in the 1941 Blitz. Since then he has found purpose in his work at Nonnatus house throwing himself into one get rich scheme after another. Fred enjoys the chatter and drama which fills Nonnatus house as it reminds him of life with his family before the war.

Fred can fix a bicycle with little more than twine and a rubber cement but he has so many good ideas he can never commit to just one resulting in one failed moneymaking scheme after another.