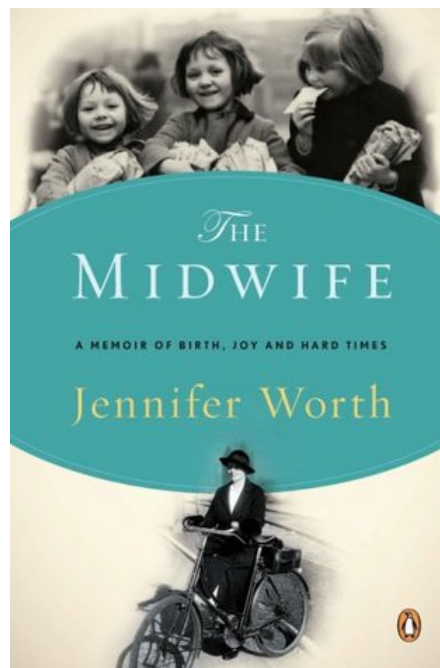




The Midwife: A Memoir of Birth, Joy, and Hard Times

Jennifer Worth

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The Midwife: A Memoir of Birth, Joy, and Hard Times Jennifer Worth

Call the Midwife' is a most extraordinary book and should be required reading of all students of midwifery, nursing, sociology and modern history. It tells of the experiences of a young trainee midwife in the East End of London in the 1950's and is a graphic portrayal of the quite appalling conditions that the East Enders endured.

The Midwife: A Memoir of Birth, Joy, and Hard Times Details

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From Reader Review The Midwife: A Memoir of Birth, Joy, and Hard Times for online ebook

Leslie says

As a series of vignettes about a very interesting profession in a fascinating historical moment, this book was quick and fun to read. However, I would hesitate to recommend it to friends, because it is not very well written.

Insight is not Worth's strength. The book is sprinkled with tired old saws about men, women, and their relationships. Her obvious compassion for the poor shines through, but does not lead her to recognize or question many of her internalized prejudices; the way she writes about other racial and ethnic groups, though usually not overtly negative, is particularly discomfiting to today's reader. I found her observations about womanhood and motherhood especially disappointing; her position on the latter is unmitigated sunshine, happiness and womanly fulfillment, which is rather shocking coming from a midwife in an area where, due to their lack of power in relationships and access to contraceptive measures, many women had many more children than they wanted or could afford.

Additionally, when Worth wants to make a moral point, she tends to ruin it by showing and then also telling, in very didactic terms. The story of her changing attitude toward religion is also predictable, superficial, and ultimately unsatisfying.

That said, she's good at narration and pacing, and the drama of the stories can't be beat. A lot of other reviewers really seemed to dislike the sex scene in the vignette on prostitution, but I didn't think it was out of place (though it was disturbing); she is honest about the conditions of life in that time and place, and coerced prostitution was part of that. Overall, I learned a lot about East London in the 1950's and about the history of midwifery.

Petra X says

I read the companion book to this last year and hadn't been able to get this in the US, but now I am in the UK with my terminally-ill mother I took the opportunity to find it. You wouldn't think that the world of the 50s was so different as it is now, but this depiction of the 50s, of bombed-out London, health care where antibiotics were the new miracle drug and children played safely in the streets because there were no cars is truly another world. This, though, is also the story of a young nurse living in and operating from an inner city convent of nuns dedicated to midwifery, good cooking, the odd glass of wine and full of the most eccentric characters. Its a wonderful book, history, memoir and a full of cockney humour.

Anna says

T? ksi??k? poch?on??am w kilka dni. Napisana prostym, bezpretensjonalnym i autentycznym j?zykiem wci?ga czytelnika od pierwszych stron. Jennifer Worth opowiada o swoich pierwszych krokach w zawodzie po?o?nej. Szlify zdobywa?a pod okiem zakonnic z Domu ?w. Nonnata, który mie?ci? si? w najbardziej robotniczej dzielnicy Londynu czyli w dokach. Pocz ?tkowo spodziewa?am si? szczeg?owych opisów porodów oraz praktyki i nauki autorki, ale ta ksi??ka to co? wi?cej.

Worth opisuje oczywiście porody - wszystkie odbywaj? si? w domu i s? bardzo ró?ne: niektóre proste i bezproblemowe, inne skomplikowane. Podczas wszystkich zaskakuje spokój sióstr, które towarzyszy? rodz?cym w roli po?o?nych. Ich g?ównym celem jest towarzyszenie kobiecie, nawet je?li fazy porodu trwaj? kilkana?cie godzin. Nie d??? do przyspieszania, medykalizacji, strasu, roztaczaj? spokój, pewno?? i poczucie fachowej opieki.

Ci?g dalszy: <http://przeczytalamksiazke.blogspot.p...>

Chrissie says

I see now that this is the first book of a series: <http://www.goodreads.com/series/77112...>

This book is fun. You are told astounding stories about the author's years working as a midwife at the Nonnatus House Convent in the Docklands during the 1950s. You meet the wonderful Sister Monica Joan, a somewhat "crazy" ninety year-old nun, Conchita Warren who will give birth to both her twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth child, the latter premature of only 28 weeks gestation, weighing less than two pounds, born during a thick London smog. You will not be able to put the book down during these chapters. You meet a prostitute and here her story. Heart-wrenching. You come to understand the lives of the women of the East End. I promise, you will laugh and cry.

The structure of the book is anecdotal, but even I who dislikes short stories, was in no way disappointed. The sisters of the convent become as members of a family, each with their own idiosyncrasies. Each child born is a wonder. And Jennifer, the author, is surprisingly honest about her own weaknesses and failings.

I haven't told you a thing about Sister Monica Joan. Her escapades will definitely make you smile and laugh outright. She is something else. The only way to meet her is by reading this book, which I highly recommend.

Ferdy says

4.5 stars - Spoilers

I absolutely love the tv show, it's brilliant. I'm so obsessed with it that I decided to check out the book even though I never read non-fiction. I'm really glad I picked it up because it turned out to be a fascinating, heartbreaking, and lovely read.

Random thoughts:

-Summary: Jennifer Worth's memoirs of her time as a midwife in the East End of London in the 1950s. There's stories of herself, her patients, and the nuns she lives and works with... And they're all great.

-I really enjoyed Jenny's narration, she wasn't particularly nice or likeable but she was engaging and honest. Because Jenny was a nurse and midwife I was expecting her to be more heroine-like... I thought she would be endlessly compassionate, understanding, and helpful. She rarely showed those sort of warm traits, instead she was very much a normal, flawed individual. Most of the time she came across as cold, harsh, and judgmental, she had a tendency to look down at the people she encountered. I didn't mind Jenny's negative thoughts though, I actually found them refreshing in that they were brutally honest. Most people in Jenny's

situation would have been just as disgusted and snobby when faced with tramps, poor housing, and weak/desperate people. If her reaction had been all unicorns and rainbows I would have just rolled my eyes. I quite liked that she was no perfect little Mary Sue who tried to save everyone she came in contact with, like the majority she sometimes went above and beyond to help others but most of the time she just did the bare minimum. I guess it was easy to forgive her more negative qualities as she had just as many admirable qualities, she wasn't all good or all bad... Most nurses/midwives are usually depicted as one or the other in literature. It was good how Jenny's memoirs showed nurses/midwives as humans and not cliches.

-Pretty much every chapter focused on one of Jenny's patients or work colleagues. It was rather amazing the range of people she met whilst working in the East End, they all had such different stories. Some were depressing to read about whilst others were wonderfully uplifting.

Mary, Mrs Jenkins, Conchita's, and Ted/Winnie's story were the most moving and impactful for me. Conchita was amazing to cope with so many pregnancies, and Ted was the best husband and father ever — their stories put a huge smile on my face. But reading about Mary and Mrs Jenkins was so sad and upsetting, they had such terrible hardships and it was clear that they never got a happy ending in life... They deserved much more than what they got.

-Sister Monica Joan was meaner than I expected, she was actually kind of a bully to Sister Evangeline. In the tv show she's far more lovable and everything she says and does seems harmless, in this she was horrible.

-The workhouses were awful to read about, they sounded worse than prisons.

-It did get a bit preachy and religious towards the very end, but I should have expected that since Jenny lived in a convent with a bunch of nuns.

-The 1950s East End setting, atmosphere, and people were captured perfectly. The Cockney dialogue was also done well.

All in all, a wonderful look into the life of midwives and East Enders in the 1950s. I'll definitely be checking out the sequels.

Diane says

I was surprised by how much I enjoyed this book. I liked the setting -- 1950s London -- but I had been wary of reading 300-plus pages about pregnancies and birthing and midwifery. In movies and TV shows, for instance, I *hatehatehate* childbirth scenes. It's always the same: The mother cries out in pain, the father looks anxious, the doctor sternly gives orders, and then presto! A sweet and wrinkled baby is handed to the parents.*

But "Call the Midwife" (which is also the name of the 2012 BBC series based on the books; the original title was just "The Midwife") was thankfully more than just a collection of childbirth stories. I ended up loving the social history of that postwar period. Jennifer Worth moved into a convent and became a midwife in the slums of London's East End, and she had good stories about the women she met and the trials of daily life for the lower classes.

"I regret that I have not been able to get to know the men of the East End. But it is quite impossible. I belong to the women's world, to the taboo subject of childbirth. The men are polite and respectful to us midwives, but completely withdrawn from any familiarity, let alone friendship. There is a total divide between what is

called men's work and women's work. So, like Jane Austen, who in her writing never recorded a conversation between two men alone, because as a woman she could not know what exclusively male conversation would be like, I cannot record much about the men of Poplar, beyond superficial observation."

There was a particularly fascinating (and disturbing) section on prostitution in the area, which Worth had to deal with when she befriended a young girl who had been lured into a brothel. Worth also mentions the horrible workhouses in London, which she learned about while caring for a traumatized patient who had lived there for decades. When Worth asked an older nun about the workhouses, she was told: "Humph. You young girls know nothing of recent history. You've had it too easy, that's your trouble." I think Worth's later memoirs talk more about this, so I expect to hear many more horror stories.

It was especially interesting to see the discussion on how much England's National Health Service changed health care for the people. Worth frequently comments that certain medical procedures had previously not been available or affordable to the lower classes.

Besides the rich history, there were also amusing stories of Worth's fellow nurses and nuns. One of my favorite characters was nicknamed Chummy (played by the hilarious Miranda Hart on the BBC series) and whenever she was involved a story, I couldn't help but smile at her earnestness, which usually manifested itself in clumsiness. There was also a deliciously batty old nun named Sister Monica Joan who says things like: "Mars and Venus are in alignment... The static forces, the convergence of the fluid with the solid, the descent of the hexagon as it passes through the ether. This is a unique time to be alive. So exciting. The little angels clap their wings."

I listened to this on audio, narrated by Nicola Barber, and it was excellent. She does fantastic voices and accents, and I plan to listen to her read the other two books in the series.

*Worth wrote a passage about babies that has stayed with me weeks after I first read it: "The helplessness of the newborn human infant has always made an impression on me. All other mammals have a certain amount of autonomy at birth. Many animals, within an hour or two of birth, are up on their feet and running. Others, at the very least, can find the nipple and suck. But the human baby can't even do that. If the nipple or teat is not actually placed in the baby's mouth and sucking encouraged, the baby would die of starvation. I have a theory that all human babies are born prematurely. Given the human life span -- three score years and ten -- to be comparable with other animals of similar longevity, human gestation should be about two years. But the human head is so big by the age of two that no woman could deliver it. So our babies are born prematurely, in a state of utter helplessness."

Kelly says

I watched the BBC series *Call the Midwife* before I read this, and knew I would not be able to be objective about it. I already knew all the beautiful people in the book before I started. I wouldn't know where to start if I were to enumerate all of them. Some are nuns, some are young midwives, some are courageous mothers doing their best in impossible situations, some amazing fathers providing and caring for their family in horrendous circumstances, and some piteous brave children surviving the unendurable.

My heart was full of joy and sometimes heartache the whole time I was reading, just like when I watch the series. I threw my heart and soul into the book just like I do the show.

Living and working as a midwife in the 1950s in the docklands (East End) of London was hard work...tough people in tough circumstances. Crowded, dirty, violent. However, the midwives were universally respected. *Nurses and policemen always have a rapport, especially in the East End. It's interesting, I reflect, that they*

always go around in pairs for protection. You never see a policeman alone. Yet we nurses and midwives are always alone, on foot or bicycle. We would never be touched. So deep is the respect, even reverence, of the roughest, toughest docker for the district midwives that we can go anywhere alone, day or night, without fear.

Side Notes:

I loved the Cockney dialect. And the appendix addressing her problems in writing it phonetically was really interesting. *I was struggling to express the Cockney accent in written form, until a professor of English literature said to me, "You will not succeed, because it cannot be done. People have been trying since the fifteenth century, but it has never been successful."* I learned about its origins. *Many Cockney speech forms--idioms, grammar and syntax--which today are considered flawed, are, in fact, very ancient speech forms that can be traced back to Tudor times.*

Conchita and Len and their extremely premature baby (their 25th child) - this story about did me in. So beautiful..there are no words. Her love and determination (backed by her lovely husband) defied medical knowledge of the time. Amazing.

Ted's story did me in as well. What a beautiful man. *In the Russian Orthodox Church there is the concept of the Holy Fool. It means someone who is a fool to the ways of the world, but wise to the ways of God. I think that Ted, from the moment he saw the baby, knew that he could not possibly be the father. It must have been a shock, but he had controlled himself, and sat thinking for a long time as he held the baby. Perhaps he saw ahead. Perhaps he understood in that moment that if he so much as questioned the baby's fatherhood, it would mean humiliation for the child, and might jeopardize his entire future. Perhaps, as he held the baby, he realized that any such suggestion could shatter his whole happiness. Perhaps an angel's voice told him that any questions were best left unasked and unanswered.*

Donna says

This was a wonderful memoir of a young woman's new life into the midwifery world. It is quite candid in its approach to midwifery, the struggles of women (mostly the poor), and dawn of modern medicine. It is hard to believe that there were never maternity wards in hospitals until the 1950's.

Birth control, or rather the lack of it, was such a dilemma for women who were single, overworked, poor, ill, and/or exhausted.

Ariel says

I didn't think I had that much interest in 1950's East End London or midwifery but after watching the Netflix show on which these novels are based I can say that I find both to be absolutely fascinating. After watching the first two seasons of Call the Midwife which I love, love, love (I especially adore Chummy) I wanted to know more about Jennifer Worth's life so I picked up this novel, the first in a series of three. The novel did not disappoint. I was pleasantly surprised to find that many of the cases in the book were turned into episodes of the show. While some of the characters that I found endearing like Chummy and Jimmy are only briefly mentioned in the book they get a much expounded upon life in the television series. Even though the show stretched some things to make a full length television show out of a relatively short book, the TV show still feels very true to what was related in the book.

I know some readers took exception with a vividly described scene of a young girl's induction into prostitution. This was also a very memorable episode arc in the show. I think Jennifer Worth is to be commended for showing how gritty life could really be in the East End. While the show never attempts to shy away from the harsh realities that people were living in at the time, it's Jennifer Worth's words that really drive home the spirit of what the East End women really endured. No matter how harsh the realities are, new life endures, and with it, new hope.

The TV show and the book compliment each other perfectly. It is very enjoyable to watch the talented actresses bring to life the memorable people and stories in the book. The casting director did a fantastic job. I highly recommend this series and look forward to viewing season 3 as well as reading *Shadows of the Workhouse*.

Corinne Edwards says

Having given birth with the support of a midwife three times, when I heard about this one, I knew I had to make time to read it. *The Midwife* is the memoir of Jennifer Worth ("Jenny") and her experiences in the East End Slums of post-war London. I think three things come together to make this a very interesting book.

First, the voice of Jenny. She is candid and real - her storytelling doesn't sugar-coat her experiences or her mistakes. She never pretends that the East End was anything other than what it was: a hard place to live where people still found things worth living for. She shares her prejudices with us and shows us how they crumbled as she became more intimate with the people she cared for, both as a midwife and as a nurse. Life in the convent, its routines and relationships - Jenny relates these things with an unaffected and honest candor. Every once and a while the narrative felt a bit jumpy (moving between time periods, etc.), but because I was interested wherever she took me, it didn't bother me.

The second thing is that the time and place is so narrow - we get such an intimate slice of a group of people, their trappings and failures and the things that make them tick. Some of their vices are described in uncomfortable detail and you can imagine how hopeless and degrading life could be. She teaches us to appreciate "Cockneys" and there is even an appendix so we can read Cockney and understand what they are saying :) As much as this book is about being a midwife, I also think it stands well as a cultural study of a group of people that no longer exist in the same sense.

The third thing is the art of midwifery itself and her journey as a midwife. I caught myself smiling while reading some chapters, there is so much joy - and other chapters brought me to tears and had me biting my lip with worry. She was in the thick of the struggle between life and death that all mothers experience as they bring a new one into the world. And I think there is a nice balance between medical information and the more extensive personal stories that make Jenny's neighborhood vibrant, full of characters and their histories. She never pretends that it was easy or glamorous work, and sometimes the conditions she worked in were downright disgusting. I kept having the thought: this was REAL. It was her LIFE. Women gave BIRTH this way, lived this way - medical science was so different and I think this memoir gives a fascinating perspective of a way of life that is no longer, as well as a flavor for the satisfaction that comes from working with pregnant women.

It's not lyrical or dreamy - it's a down-in-the-gutters look at an ages old profession. I loved it.

Alaine says

I'm writing this as I'm just about halfway through so I may revise this later. For now, oh man. I have some issues with this book. I started reading it after I watched all of the first season of Call the Midwife on Netflix. I loved the show and got excited to see they were based on actual books.

Maybe my opinion is tainted by the fact that the author states she was trying to be the James Herriot of midwives. But as I've been reading, I've had the impression in many places that she was trying to copy his style, and failed. James Herriot writes in an easily followed conversational style. Jennifer Worth throws out obscurely large words that I have to look up on a regular basis. I have a decent vocabulary but "internecine"?! Just thrown into the middle of an otherwise conversational style, it's incongruous. I enjoy reading the cockney dialect and learning English terms for things but these ten dollar words look like trying too hard, and they're annoying.

I realize Ms. Worth is a product of her time and I am trying very hard to not judge her unfairly using my time and culture as a standard. But it's difficult to ignore the ethnocentric comments sprinkled throughout the book. She described an impoverished immigrant woman as looking like a Spanish princess. Making the foreign person into something exotic is objectifying, and keeps her in the "other" category. When we got to little Mary, the teenage Irish prostitute, she is described first as a Celtic princess, then as maybe the product of an Irish "navvy" (manual laborer) and then says maybe they're the same thing. Alright. You need to stop right there, lady.

I don't think James Herriot would have had a graphic description of group sex, including blow jobs. I understand this was a section of the book about prostitution but that scene really seemed to not fit the tone of the book up to that point. It felt gratuitous.

The description of the henpecked husband is just one of many examples of internalized misogyny that got on my nerves. Sometimes the lines between class and gender blurred, but it was always clear Ms. Worth felt above these people. You can't ramble at length about how very much a poor, sick woman repulses you and end by saying, "Well, I'm not here to judge." Because you just did, for many pages. This makes for an uncomfortable read.

There is also plenty of romanticizing the past, talking about how no one had to lock their doors and when girls got pregnant, their men rose to the challenge and married them. She doesn't come out and say that she thought it was better that way, but I think it's implied. And that bothers me.

All that said, it is an interesting read and I am having a hard time putting it down. I plan to finish it and read the others in the series. I just have some issues. Giving it three stars because I am actually enjoying reading it for the most part. It's not perfection, I doubt I'll want to re-read it, and it's definitely not James Herriot. James Herriot made it sound like tramping around in a freezing cold barn armpit deep into a cow's vagina was still somehow a good time. Worth does not have that skill.

Edit: This is where I got angry. Really angry. In a passage describing how married women were "free" to cheat on their husbands because a pregnancy wouldn't be as difficult as for a single woman, Worth writes:

I have often felt that the situation is loaded against men. Until recently, when genetic blood tests became possible, how could any man know that his wife was carrying his child? The poor man had no other assurance of paternity than his wife's word. Unless she is virtually locked up, he can have no control over her activities during the day while he is at work.

Those are some seriously loaded words. We are talking about a time and place in which impoverished

women are forced to carry baby after baby because there is no reliable birth control. Husbands simply refused to wear condoms, and wives were expected to submit. Legally, there was no such thing as a rape occurring within marriage, but we know that it happened. We know that there was domestic violence against women and children, and Worth mentions the impossibility of East End mothers leaving home to work. They were up to the gills in children and laundry. It wasn't just life circumstances keeping women down in this time; it was powerful social control, such as happens when women of higher, more influential, classes, make casual comments about locking wives up.

I wanted to read the rest of the series but I think I can probably find another book to read about life in the workhouses.

Watch the show. The show is better.

Sarah says

3.5 stars.

I'm a sucker for babies, birth stories, and midwives tales, so I was all set to love this. I found it kind of lacking in coherence, though. It's a collection of loosely linked vignettes and I think it would have benefitted from a better editor.

Some of the stories kind of stood alone, some connected, and there was not much arc connecting the whole book. I found it interesting -- certainly I learned things about London that I had never known before, and much of it was shocking -- but I was left wanting something more. Some of the stories are actually really difficult to read, because they involve SO much trauma and pain and humans being inhumane to each other. I felt sick at a few points.

I also found myself a little grated upon by certain moments of the author's privilege on display. The passages about her love for fancy clothes, contrasted with the poverty around her, just turned me off. Her trips across town to drink with her well-heeled, clearly well to do childhood friends, also rubbed me the wrong way somehow. I suppose the British class system is on full display in this book, but ultimately not really challenged at all.

Katrina Noble says

It was an incredible read that was marred by an obscenely disgusting chapter right smack dab in the middle that made me have to question whether I should continue or not. I did continue after skimming past the incredibly gross part and was glad that I did because the remaining stories were very interesting/unique and the final few were inspirational. I just really hated that such a wonderful read had to be almost ruined entirely by a poor editing choice. Granted this was based on real life experiences and memoirs of this woman, but the obscene part was taken too far and had little to do with the overall purpose of the book being women having babies/ motherhood. The scene involved a woman getting taken into prostitution and a show girl and although these were real people this midwife encountered I don't think the description needed to contain all the colorful details- just enough to make the reader pity the girl's plight. Anyway...other than that huge blight on the story, the author was a fabulous story teller and I loved the variety of stories she told from her

adventures as a midwife.

Carol says

Post war London with its bombed out buildings and slums is the setting for much of this interesting and entertaining non-fiction read. There are so many incredible stories in this memoir by Jennifer Worth that it is difficult to pick a favorite, but I loved Chummy with her big ole heart, old-fashioned bicycle and her hero Jack who, as you will see, *did* become important in his day. Mary's story of prostitution is sad and touching, but Mrs. Jenkin's surrender to the workhouse is just beyond words.

While most residents of the war torn Dockland's lived in squalor with detestable sanitation conditions and little hope (*OMG the bomb site dump*), there is still a nice mix of happy, and funny stories here too. I will not forget Conchita with her 20+ babies or the hilarious antics of Sister Monica Joan.

I now have a new respect for the Midwives and Nuns of the 1940-50's era.....they were an extremely knowledgeable and formidable breed with unbelievably immeasurable responsibilities.

Amazing life! Excellent memoir!

(one last note: the man they called **(turd)** was aptly named!)

Ayelet Waldman says

I alternated between wishing I'd had this kind of care and thanking God I hadn't.

Elena T. says

Jennifer Worth, classe 1935, è stata infermiera fino agli anni Settanta riportando, come una sorta di diario/biografia, una trilogia dedicata alla sua esperienza come levatrice a Londra, un successo che ha dato atto ad una trasposizione per una serie tv BBC ("Call the midwife", validissima).

Con "Chiamate la levatrice" (edizioni Sellerio) della Worth, il lettore entra nella realtà delle Docklands, fatta di giornate lavorative estenuanti e desolazione quotidiana, ma anche di barlumi di allegria dovuti alle nuove nascite e al Sistema nazionale sanitario in quegli anni in continua evoluzione. Epicentro di tutto, il Nonnatus House, convento di suore e giovani levatrici.

Un'aerea densamente popolata, da Stepney a Limehouse, a Poplar, Mile End o White Chapel – letteralmente sommersa di bambini e con sempre nuove nascite all'ordine del giorno, in quartiere semidistrutto dalla passata guerra, promemoria dei massicci bombardamenti.

A far leva sulle già minate necessità del quartiere sono i bassi salari, i turni di lavoro massacranti, l'economia in lentissima ripresa e .. i matrimoni precoci. Nell'East End degli anni Cinquanta le persone che volevano essere rispettate si attenevano ad una condotta morale molto rigida riguardo le questioni sessuali; le coppie non sposate erano praticamente inesistenti e certamente non esisteva la "convivenza" pre-matrimoniale.

A rincarare la dose, anche una volta dopo il matrimonio, erano i metodi contraccettivi del tutto inaffidabili, dall'olmo rosso, al gin, allo zenzero, nessun consultorio o nessun controllo mirato delle nascite facevano sì che giovani donne dovessero occuparsi anche di dodici o tredici figli nel corso della vita!

Come un interessante percorso formativo, l'autrice ripercorre le vie desolate delle Docklands, fatte non solo di palazzi ma anche di slums/baraccopoli, vicende familiari di una Londra che dalle chiusure e dai bigottismi vittoriani si vide letteralmente catapultata nel bel mezzo di una vera e propria rivoluzione sessuale!

Ed è a tal proposito che, seconda la consapevole opinione della Worth, la donna moderna nacque nei primi anni Sessanta, con l'avvento/scoperta del decennio: la pillola anticoncezionale. Donne non più costrette ad un ciclo di gravidanze infinite ma finalmente libere, per la prima volta nella storia, di essere esattamente come gli uomini e fare sesso per puro piacere.

Le levatrici instancabili emblema di questo romanzo, continuarono dedicando instancabilmente la propria vita al lavoro, non solo per le gravidanze ma anche per le epidemie di colera, tifo e polio e la fresca verve di Jennifer Worth rende "Chiamate la levatrice" un delizioso spaccato di un Paese in pieno sviluppo sociale e riformistico, pieno di sentimento ed empatia per la vita, da tenere saldamente stretto sul cuore. Un gioiello imperdibile.

Juli says

I have had this series by Jennifer Worth sitting on my bookshelves for a year. My sister in law let me borrow the five books -- Call the Midwife, Farewell to East End, In the Midst of Life, Shadows of the Workhouse and Letters to the Midwife -- because I enjoy the PBS television show. I got so tied up in adulting, working, reading new releases for review and other books on my TBR stack, that the books sat there on the shelf. Then I signed up for a 2018 reading challenge.....Beat the Backlist.....that challenges readers to enjoy books published before 2018. I started looking at my shelves....seeing all the lovely books I had intended to read....some have been on my shelves for years waiting for their chance! Since I borrowed the series by Jennifer Worth, I decided Call the Midwife would be first! Knowing how busy the holidays are and to squash any excuses, I found the audiobook version from my local library's digital site. I listened while wrapping presents, putting up the tree, travelling to family's homes, running errands....it all worked out perfectly! The book is just as enjoyable as the PBS show! And the show actually follows the book very closely! Excellent!!

Jennifer Worth was a midwife in the East end of London in the 1950s. She and the other midwives rode bicycles to prenatal exams, deliveries and other midwife duties, providing care for the poor women that lived there. The book has tales about problem deliveries, dealing with STDs, vermin and other concerns, domestic violence, large families and antiquated opinions about childbirth and women. The book is heart-warming, alarming and nostalgic, all at the same time. Just a lovely read! I don't know how women survived before modern medical care, birth control and increased opportunities that we have now. Plus, changes in public opinion on some things -- like teenage and single mothers. Unwed mothers are no longer shunned in our western culture and left with nothing, their babies sometimes adopted out without consent. I hope that sort of horror never comes back!

The audiobook I listened to (HighBridge Company) is just over 12 hours long & unabridged. Nicola Barber narrates. Because of my hearing loss, I sometimes have problems hearing and understanding female voices, but I was able to completely understand Barber's narration. She reads at an even pace with great tone and animation in her voice. I loved the audiobook! I kept seeing Chummy wrecking her bicycle, Fred with his pigs and all the action from the TV series in my head as I listened. :)

I will definitely be reading (or listening) to the rest of the series! Especially since my reading goal for the new year is to read more books off my shelves. The Midwife series might be a bit of a cheat.... I borrowed the books months ago. And I hate hate hate it when people borrow my books and take ages to bring them back. So, I am going to return my SIL's books.....and borrow the books online to read. I'm still counting them as backlist off my shelf, but giving them back immediately because they belong to someone else. :) Sort of a cheat -- but not really. :)

Given the subject matter....this book does talk a lot about child birth, vaginas, STDs, medical procedures, family problems, etc.....and might not be something to listen to in front of very young children, unless you want to be answering questions. lol. My son is 13...walked into the room, listened for a moment and ducked out of the kitchen. I heard him telling his dad "Oh mom is doing the dishes and listening to some book about vaginas." LOLLOLOL If all it takes to keep the men out of my kitchen when I'm working is to listen to books on vaginas.....I'm going to find more! ha ha

All in all, a great book! I will definitely be reading/listening to the rest of the series!

Hayley says

I decided to read this book because I recently watched the BBC/PBS show "Call the Midwife", which is based on the memoirs by Jennifer Worth. I absolutely fell in love with the TV show-- it has a perfect mix of happy and sad, with great characters.

That being said, I actually came away from the book "Call the Midwife" feeling a little unsatisfied. I certainly enjoyed the stories that she told. Some were heart-breaking, some sweet or funny. I enjoyed the subplot about Jenny discovering a profound faith in God (though I found her a little unrevealing about other aspects of herself-- who is this man she loved so much?). The religious subplot is, sadly, conspicuously absent from the TV series.

Unfortunately, I found that overall the book really lacked a cohesive narrative thread. Maybe that is the nature of memoirs. I also felt a few of the main stories -- particularly Mary's went on a bit long. I was a little disappointed that there weren't more stories about the people she worked with. I did enjoy the book, and I am interested in reading the other two-- but I didn't fall in love with it like the TV series.

****Disclaimer**** I have seen many other reviews mention this and I will too. The chapter Cable Street can easily be skipped. It takes a look into the life of prostitution and has a shockingly graphic group sex scene. The detail that the author goes into was unnecessary. I can get the idea without the detail. If you read that chapter just be forewarned that that scene is in there.

Cindy says

Oh, that I could have six stars to give. . .

Having originally been smitten with this wonderful British TV series, I am now head over heels in love with

the book. It's the first of a trilogy which pleases me to no end. I must get my book club to read this.

One of my favorite chapters is about a friendship between Chummy and an adolescent boy. It's barely touched upon on TV. The luncheon party where Jennifer's three male friends are invited to dine at the convent is pure comic genius. The premature baby chapter is another beautiful story, but honestly, I love them all.

Two areas which are explored much more deeply and disturbingly in the book are prostitutes and workhouses.

A profoundly moving book that can be placed alongside the finest of contemporary memoirs such as Angela's Ashes and The Glass Castle.

Andrea Cox says

by Andrea Renee Cox

While I enjoyed the insight into the lives of several midwives during the 1950s, I was disappointed that there were so many inappropriate things in this book. Nudity, expletives, crude talk, graphic sexual content, alcohol, tobacco usage, etc. really dampened my enjoyment of this book. I also didn't appreciate that the author believed older women should be allowed to be crass and rude simply because they'd lived a long life. Since when does longevity grant anyone the right to belittle or degrade other people? In Titus 2, older women are advised to "be reverent in behavior... that the word of God may not be blasphemed."

I was not compensated for my honest review.
