



(Left) A Christmas special of *Call the Midwife* will be broadcast in December. Series three will be shown next year. (Below) The real Jennifer on one of Neil Wheadon's CTC tours. She regularly brought her grandson on cycling holidays in order to get to know him better – and vice-versa



# JENNIFER WORTH

THE TV SERIES 'CALL THE MIDWIFE' IS BASED ON THE MEMOIRS OF THE LATE JENNIFER WORTH, A KEEN CYCLIST AND CTC MEMBER. NEIL WHEADON KNEW HER

**C**all the *Midwife* has been a BBC success story, attracting 12 million viewers on Sunday nights. For many, Jennifer Worth is a young lady riding the streets of the East End. But for me, she was a cycling grandmother, a member of CTC, and someone who pedalled for pleasure.

She arrived on my first family camping week, which I organised for CTC Cycling Holidays (then CTC Tours). She was accompanied by her grandson, Dan. 'I'd like him to get to know me,' she said as she pitched her tent by Dan's, in readiness for a week of cycling around Somerset.

For Jennifer and Dan, this first week set the template for future years, and for me it was the start of a seven-year acquaintance. Dan was a fun-loving boy who made friends easily. Jennifer, assessing that he was more than happy, would cycle with the other adults for the morning, before disappearing in the afternoon to return with tales of tea shops

and chance meetings. 'Where's Jennifer?' was a frequent question on tour.

She was obviously a lady with much to tell, but she was also a listener. On most evenings, we would sit together as a group at the campsite, unwinding after a day in the saddle. Jennifer would sometimes chat about nuns and midwifery, and one

**"I remember her excitement when she dined with a BBC producer"**

year she revealed that a small publisher had agreed to print her book. As a vet, I joked that she would one day be the James Herriot of midwives, which was somewhat prophetic. A few years later, a larger publisher bought the rights and projected her book into the mainstream.

This wasn't by chance as she was a

fearless self-publicist. I still have her handwritten notes urging me to tell people to buy her books, or at the very least borrow them from the library. Yet the only sign of success was that while Dan still camped to be close to his friends, Jennifer stayed at the local B&B. One year she brought her granddaughter, Eleanor, so that they could share some time together. Eleanor went on to be a midwife.

Jennifer's books grew in popularity. I remember her excitement when she dined with a producer from the BBC who was looking to film her books. That was a few years after she had tackled Mont Ventoux on her trusty white Roberts.

I last saw Jennifer four years ago: Dan had reached 17 and was off to college. It was with much sadness that I saw that she had died of cancer before the first series was aired. However, her initial wish was realised: Dan and Eleanor did get to know her, and she will also be remembered by the many families who cycled with her and were touched by her spirit.