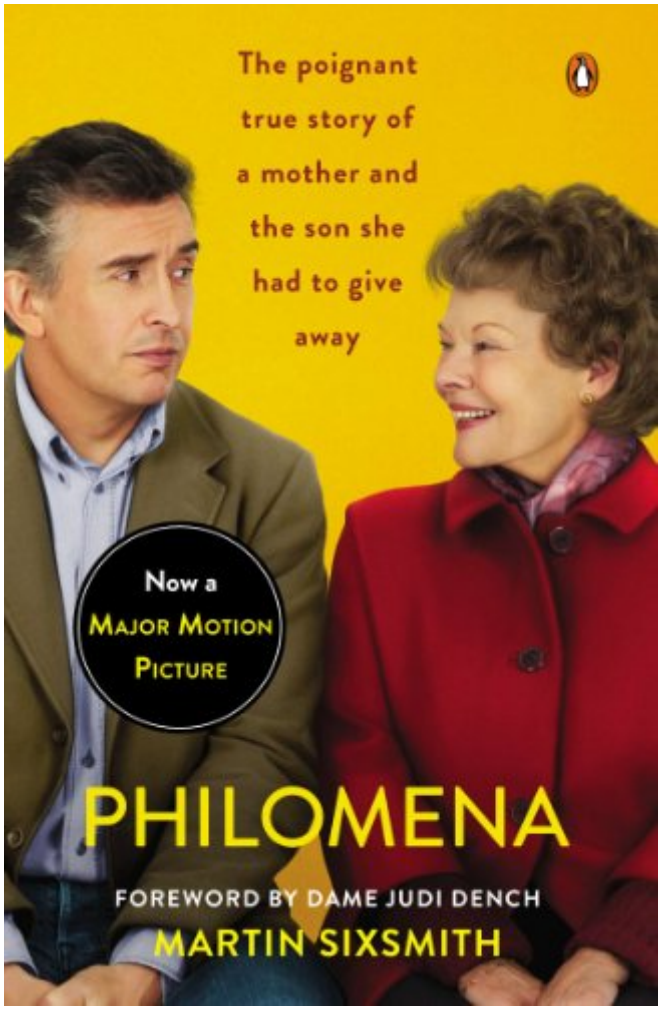
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# Philomena: A Mother, Her Son, And A Fifty-Year Search (Movie Tie-In)




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## Synopsis

New York Times BestsellerThe heartbreaking true story of an Irishwoman and the secret she kept for 50 yearsWhen she became pregnant as a teenager in Ireland in 1952, Philomena Lee was sent to a convent to be looked after as a Ã¢â ¬Å“fallen woman.Ã¢â ¬Â• Then the nuns took her baby from her and sold him, like thousands of others, to America for adoption. Fifty years later, Philomena decided to find him.Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, PhilomenaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s son was trying to find her. Renamed Michael Hess, he had become a leading lawyer in the first Bush administration, and he struggled to hide secrets that would jeopardize his career in the Republican Party and endanger his quest to find his mother.A gripping exposÃƒÂ© told with novelistic intrigue, Philomena pulls back the curtain on the role of the Catholic Church in forced adoptions and on the love between a mother and son who endured a lifelong separation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a person who was interviewed for this book and who appears as a "character" in it, I believe this

book should be categorized as fiction. The Lost Child of Philomena Lee, written by Martin Sixsmith, was originally published in 2009. After the success of the movie Philomena, the book was reissued with a new title. By now, everyone knows that the book tells the tragic story of Philomena Lee, who had an illegitimate child in the early 1950s while living at an abbey run by nuns in Ireland. An American couple adopted her son, Anthony Lee, when he was 3 years old and renamed him Michael Hess. Philomena and Michael were stymied in their search to find each other by the nuns' refusal to give them information before Michael's death from AIDS.About 7 years ago, Michael's partner (called Pete in the book) referred me to a journalist who was trying to pitch a book based on the story of Michael's birth mother's search for her son. Following Pete's lead, I agreed to speak to Martin Sixsmith about my friendship with Michael. He recorded our 2-hour conversation. Pete expected to hear from Sixsmith if the book proposal ever came to fruition.When the book appeared without prior notice to Pete or me in 2009, I was appalled to find that Sixsmith had written a fictional version of Michael's life in which characters engage in conversations that never happened. Because the book received consistently bad reviews in the British newspapers, I decided not to write a review, hoping that the book would fade from view. That is exactly what happened until Steve Coogan read the 2009 newspaper article by Sixsmith and the rest is history.I cringed when I read my "character" engaging in fictional dialogue with Michael. Things only went downhill from there. The dialogue that Sixsmith invented for the conversations Michael and I supposedly had were not quotes from the interview I gave, and I did not agree to my interview being turned into scenes with made-up dialogue. Michael is dead and cannot verify these conversations or, for that matter, any of the conversations he is purported to have had throughout the book.Inaccuracies abound. I met Michael when he hired me to work for him in December of 1977. The book has me engaging in fictional conversations during 1975 and 1976 with Michael about his boyfriend Mark, and even having conversations with Mark about Michael's supposedly dark moods and behavior. I think the author created these events to support his premise that Michael was a troubled and tortured soul because he could not find his birth mother and because he was required to hide his sexuality at his place of work. This was the 1980s and there were very few gay men or woman who were "out" at work.The fiction continues. I did not discuss politics with Michael during this time period and never talked about supporting Carter. Also, Sixsmith has Michael moving in with me to "recover" from too much partying. Not true. The many purported conversations in which I provide advice to Michael about his love life or work problems simply did not occur. Like most good friends, I did a lot of listening and nodding.It is really difficult for those of us who knew Michael to see him portrayed so poorly. He was smart, charming, good looking and thoughtful. Michael always went out of his way to

make his friends' birthdays special. For 10 years, he took my young daughter and me to many, many Christmas tree lots in search of the perfect tree.Michael was a great boss and mentor who taught me so much about legal research and writing and encouraged me to take on difficult and challenging assignments. He was a terrific writer and speaker. These talents and a lot of hard work contributed to his successful career.Pete and other friends have tried to correct Sixsmith's depiction of Michael as a tortured soul in recent articles that appeared in The New York Times and Politico. They stress his long-term relationship with Pete and his multifaceted interests, which ranged from following Notre Dame sports to predicting the best new Broadway musicals to his prodigious gardening.Between the made-up dialogue and almost prurient focus on Michael's sexual behavior, the author has failed to present anything near a recognizable picture of Michael Hess. While I can only speak definitively to the information that I gave Sixsmith and my knowledge of Michael, the book contains other conversations that can't possibly be sourced because the people are dead. If you plan to read the book, be aware that you will be reading fiction and, not very well written fiction, at that.

I really enjoyed the movie version with Judi Dench and Steven Coogan and was a little surprised when a one-star reviewer claimed how inferior the Martin Sixmith (played in the movie by Coogan) book is to the movie. I want to take issue with that assessment. The movieÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •which is wonderfully doneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •is only a slice of the whole. The movie is focused upon Philomena Lee with very little about the son she lost to an American family whereas the book is much more about the one, Anthony, who becomes Michael Hess.The evilness of Archbishop McQuaid in Ireland is not part of the movie. So reading this book has given me a much broader view of what happened, of just how truly horrific this archbishop was and how terrible the Catholic Church was as an institution dealing with unwed mothers and their babies. The Irish government quite literally allowed for the selling of these babies and never allowing the mothers to have their own children. The church treated these young women as though they were Hester PrynneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •marked for life as sinners.The book is primarily about the two children who are adopted by Doc and Marge Hess who have three biological sons. Marge has a brother who becomes a bishop, a very kind man, a real counterbalance to the evil McQuaid. The reader is given a chronological look at the life of Michael within this family, within the American Catholic church, with a lot of dialogue which, of course, has to have been created by Sixsmith. We donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t really know too much about his sources. But I read the book the same way I would read a novel.In the movie we know little about MichaelÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s motivation to see

his biological mother whereas in the book a lot is made of his efforts. In fact as I read the book I thought this: there should be two movies: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“PhilomenaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• and a second titled ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Michael.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• We experience his struggles with his homosexuality in an era when coming out was often dangerous. We experience him as a high schooler who loved singing and performing in musicals. And as an excellent student at Notre Dame and then as a law student at George Washington University. And then his struggles as a closeted Republican during the Reagan years when he was so involved in Washington politics.

I enjoyed the movie, but this book was not really about Philomena. I gave up about 2/3 of the way through and discovered that only the very final chapter or two of the book were about Philomena and her search. As I read the fictionalized story of Michael Hess, it seemed an odd choice for the author to structure the book as a fictionalized narrative. Much of the book is conversational, which by its very nature must be made up by the author since he was not a fly on the wall. I expected the book to be about Philomena and her search, but it finally dawned on me that the author had a political agenda. The movie was wonderful, and left me wondering and wanting to read more. This book did not answer any of the questions I had, and it was disappointing to say the least. I usually finish what I start but my time is valuable and I did not enjoy what I read. It took me over a month to wade through approximately 250 pages. Ugh.

If you are reading this because of the film - don't. Hollywood does it again and although the basic start and end maybe the same the way the content is put it is not. For a great deal of the book it feels like a trip through the gay bars of the United States.

I saw the film on Thanksgiving evening and was captivated by the story so I rushed home and ordered the book. I've given it three stars only because it was interesting, but the film is better. The film tells the story from Philomena's viewpoint while the book tells the story from Anthony/Michael's side of things. There is very little of Philomena's story in the book and that was disappointing. The factual/historical details of the HIV/AIDS outbreak and the government's lack of timely reaction to such a medical crisis was informative, but I would save my money and just see the film instead for a heartwarming story with exceptional acting by Judy Dench.

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