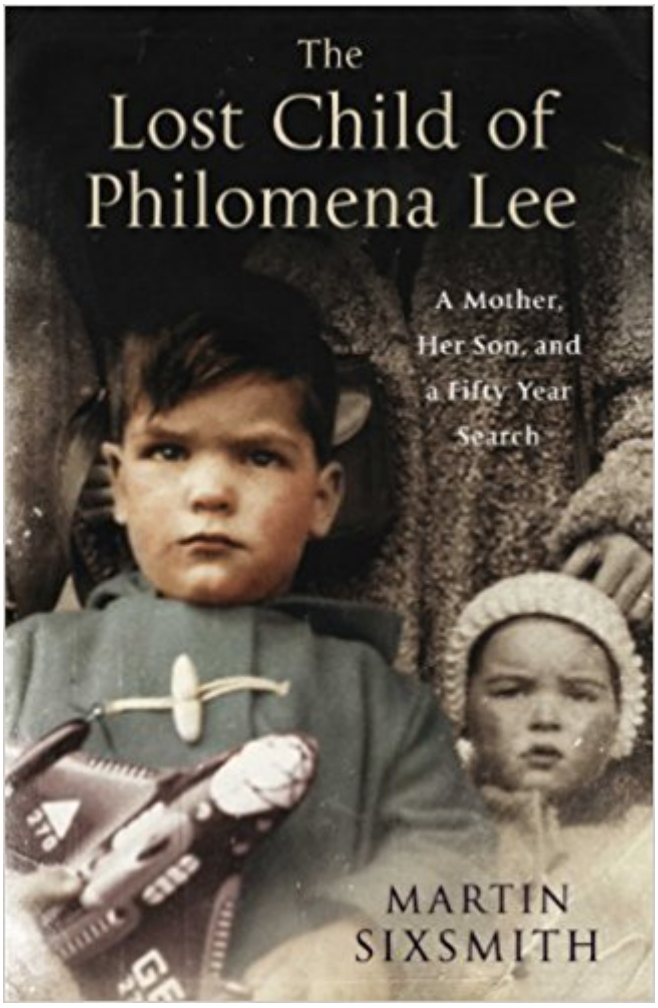
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The Lost Child Of Philomena Lee: A Mother, Her Son And A Fifty Year Search



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Synopsis

When she fell pregnant as a teenager in Ireland in 1952, Philomena Lee was sent to the convent at Roscrea in Co. Tipperary to be looked after as a fallen woman. She cared for her baby for three years until the Church took him from her and sold him, like countless others, to America for adoption. Coerced into signing a document promising never to attempt to see her child again, she nonetheless spent the next fifty years secretly searching for him, unaware that he was searching for her from across the Atlantic. Philomena's son, renamed Michael Hess, grew up to be a top Washington lawyer and a leading Republican official in the Reagan and Bush administrations. But he was a gay man in a homophobic party where he had to conceal not only his sexuality but, eventually, the fact that he had AIDs. With little time left, he returned to Ireland and the convent where he was born: his desperate quest to find his mother before he died left a legacy that was to unfold with unexpected consequences for all involved. The Lost Child of Philomena Lee is the tale of a mother and a son whose lives were scarred by the forces of hypocrisy on both sides of the Atlantic and of the secrets they were forced to keep. A compelling narrative of human love and loss, Martin Sixsmith's moving account is both heartbreaking yet ultimately redemptive.

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Customer Reviews

If you are looking for a book that mirrors the film, this is not it. If you are looking for the real story of a man torn because a nunnery in Ireland forced unwed girls to give up their babies, this is it. It is really about him and his feeling he must have a fundamental "badness" or else why would his birth mother have given him away? This feeling kept him from being truly happy for much of his life. Besides being in a business and culture that more than scorned gays. This is the true story of a gay man who ended up working for the Reagan administration and changed the U.S. to this day defending a gerrymandering suit. All the while his heart was longing to find his birth mother as was hers to find him. This book has deep details about one mans gay life that also reflects the nature of others. Hard to put down and hard to read because the truth of the situation is a tragedy.

I just finished reading the 18 reader reviews of "The Lost Child of Philomena", before writing my own review of the book. And I can’t figure out if everybody reviewing this book read the same book. About half of the reviewers referred to the book as mostly about Philomena, an Irish "Magdalene", torn apart from her child after raising him for three years in a home for unwed mothers in Ireland. The others appeared to have read a different book -and the same one I read - which is mostly about the child, Michael Hess, who was adopted by an American couple in the mid-1950’s. The story is mostly about HIS life in the US and his growing up with the angst that adopted children sometimes have about their origins, as well as his coming to terms about his sexuality and life in college and law school and life in Washington DC as an official at the Reagen and HW Bush administrations and then at the Republican National Committee. Only at the end were Martin Sixsmith and Philomena brought back into the story.Okay, that’s not a problem for the purchaser and reader of the book, now retitled "Philomena: A Mother, A Son, and A 50 Year Search", as long as s/he knows in advance that’s NOT what the book is about. This book is about 75% about Michael, his life, and his family - which IS very interesting - and about 25% about Irish shaming of young pregnant women, the eventual "selling" of their babies, and Philomena’s search for her given-up child. I am going to see the movie, starring Dame Judi Dench this weekend, and I’ll bet that the movie is more about Philomena than her child.I point this out because the movie marketers seem to have taken a book - more about the son - and turned it around and made the movie more about the mother, and then tried to rebrand the book to align with the movie. Either that, or the early reviewers were reading an entirely different book than the rest of us, a book that WAS mostly about the mother and her

search.I also couldn’t quite tell if the book was fiction or non-fiction. If it was non-fiction, then a whole lot of people know what they were saying 50 years ago. Sixsmith writes in the afterward that he interviewed a lot of the characters alive at that point, but then he also put characters together and changed some names. All in all, I didn’t think the book was particularly well-written. I’m hoping the movie is better.

I was deeply moved by the movie Philomena, and I was curious to see what Martin Sixsmith actually wrote after his research. I didn’t anticipate the book would deal mostly with the life of Philomena’s son, Anthony Lee, who became Michael Hess once he was adopted, but I am glad it did. I feel I now know "the rest of the story". He was indeed a "lost child" in more ways than one. In this book Martin Sixsmith reveals details that had been eluded to in the film. Sadly Michael had a difficult life, full of conflicts despite what he made of himself in order to establish a successful career in government and politics. I am not sure he was ever truly as happy as he was those first few years with Philomena at the convent in Ireland. Though forgotten, that time and his biological mother stayed embedded in his subconscious with bits and pieces surfacing from time to time. I was touched by his inner struggles with family, his never- ending search for a sense of belonging, and the challenges of his homosexuality. I didn’t enjoy reading details of the practices among some gay men, but I suppose the telling was necessary to reveal how bizarre and conflicted Michael’s life actually became. His few true friends, those who deeply loved him, never abandoned him and were his saving grace in his lowest times and even after his death. Michael’s story is one of tragedy, heartbreak, and loss, but redeemed in the end as a story of love.

This was the book that inspired the movie but it’s much different than the movie. It focuses more of the story on "Michael", Philomena’s son, that she was forced to give up for adoption in the early 50’s. Much of the book focuses on his homosexuality, that forces him to remain closeted in most of his public life. The book was most interesting to me when it describes Michael, a Democrat and lawyer, working for the Republican National Committee during the Reagan years. The behind-the-scenes political maneuvering that the author describes was very interesting.The book does describe Philomena’s search for her long, lost son and some of the appalling practices of the Catholic Church in Ireland of that era but most of the book focuses on Michael: his struggle with his homosexuality; his struggles with the contradictions between his political beliefs and his job and lastly the terrible way the government ignored the scourge of AIDS.

I read this book after first reading "The Girls Who Went Away". I grew up in this era, where unwed girls went to convents to have their children. No one ever spoke of how they were treated or how hard it was to give up their child. In most cases, no one ever knew they had a child.I was captivated by this story and could hardly put it down. I loved the relationship between the two children. It was a very sad story, but one that needed to be told.

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