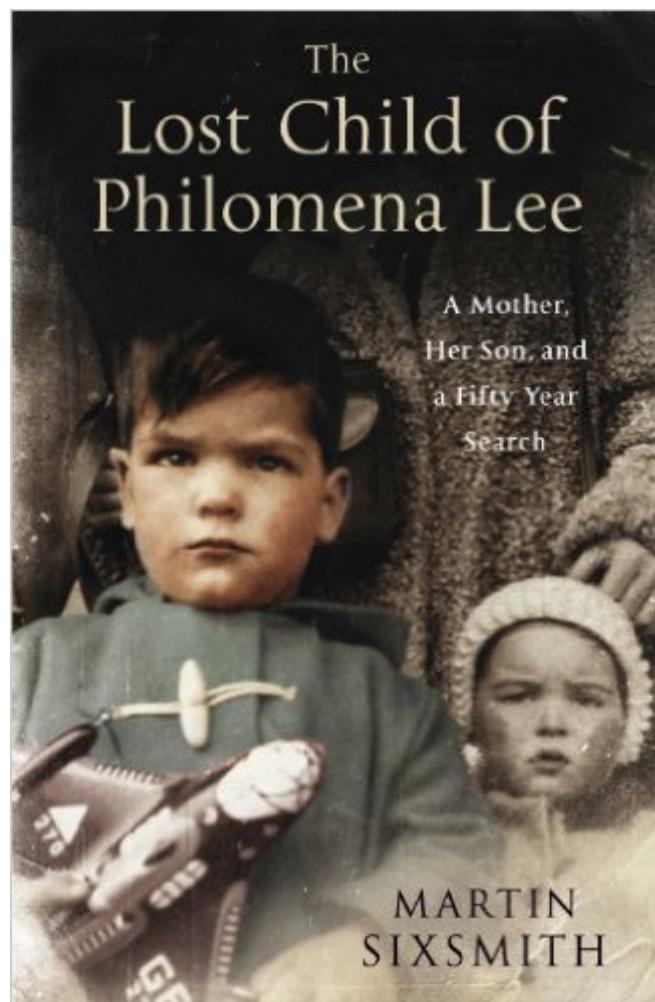


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The Lost Child Of Philomena Lee: A Mother, Her Son And A Fifty Year Search



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 heartbreakingly sad yet ultimately redemptive.

Book Information

File Size: 2711 KB

Print Length: 484 pages

Publisher: Macmillan; Reprints edition (July 2, 2010)

Publication Date: July 2, 2010

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B005GUYWYE

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #77,102 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #13 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Irish #27 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Parenting & Relationships > Adoption #52 in Books > Parenting & Relationships > Adoption

Customer Reviews

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 Reagan 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.

Philomena Lee is young, single and pregnant. She is living in County Tipperary, Ireland in 1952. And she is living with the shame, humiliation and degradation that her pregnancy brings at the hands of the Irish Catholic nuns. Martin Sixsmith's initial chapters concerning Philomena's plight are poignant in the extreme. The heartfelt narrative delivers us to the Abbey where we become that frightened, cowering girl. We know the anguish she is going through, we bear witness to the ostracisation and indoctrination, so we understand why she signed those adoption papers despite loving her son so dearly. This is the first 20 percent of the book. The remainder of the book then focuses on her son's life (born Anthony Lee / adopted name Michael Hess). Sixsmith narrates Michael's torment from being wrenched from his mother, and his inability later on to gain information to reconnect with her. But the overwhelming focus seems to be on Michael's burgeoning homosexuality and his inner conflict. The conflict stems from the hypocrisy he feels at working in the top echelons of the Regan administration (known for its blatant homophobia and

inaction over the AIDS epidemic) whilst he himself is a closeted gay. The book really is a biography of HIS life, and this part really does become too long winded. Sixsmith was an English political correspondent for 17 years. He also spent time working with the Blair government. It seems that Sixsmith, in labouring over Michaelâ™s political career, has taken the book to a place he knows best. And whilst all this is interesting, it is a very long tangent from what the book title suggests it will be all about. Sixsmith does return to Philomenaâ™s quest in the last few pages.

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