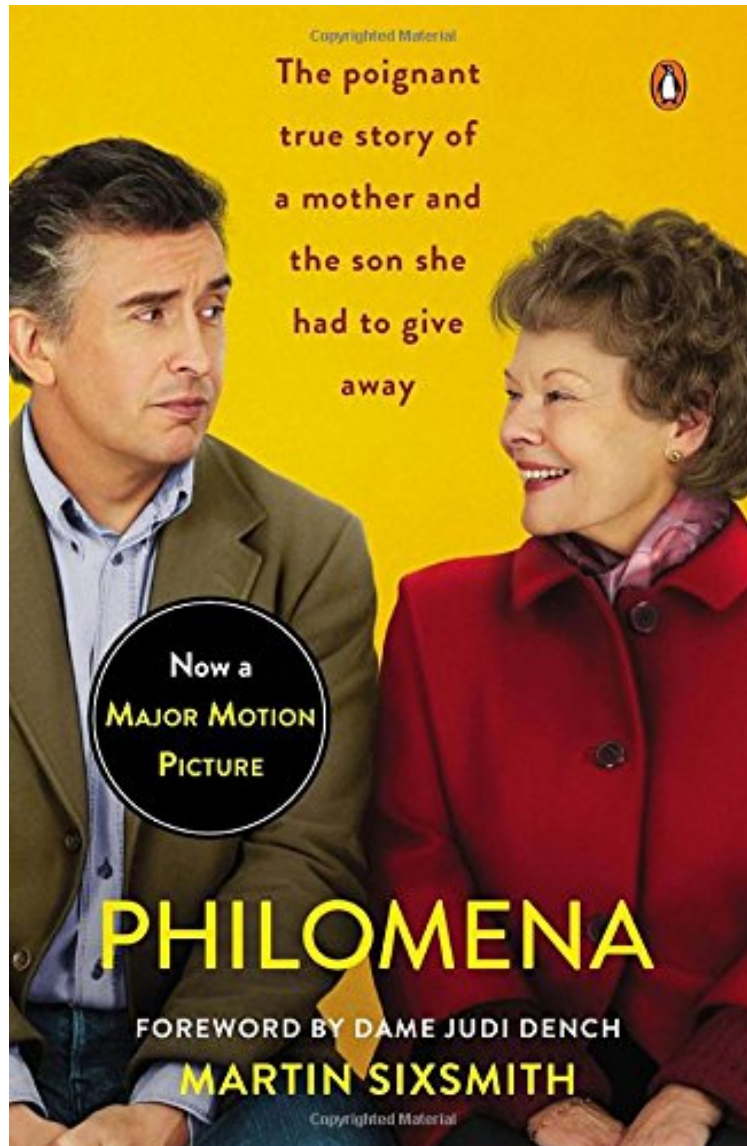


Philomena: A Mother, Her Son, and a Fifty-Year Search (Movie Tie-In)

Martin Sixsmith

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Martin Sixsmith : Philomena: A Mother, Her Son, and a Fifty-Year Search (Movie Tie-In) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Philomena: A Mother, Her Son, and a Fifty-Year Search (Movie Tie-In):

481 of 507 people found the following review helpful. This book is fictionBy BrennaghAs 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. 124 of 135 people found the following review helpful. *Plodding...the film was better* By Ravenous Reader 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. 119 of 124 people found the following review helpful. *The Movie Is Only a Slice of the Whole Pie* By Eric Selby 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 Sixsmith (played in the movie by Coogan) book is to the movie. I want to take issue with that assessment. The movie which is wonderfully done 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 Prynne 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 don'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 Michael'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: *Philomena* and a second titled *Michael*. 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.

New York Times Bestseller
Now a major motion picture starring Judi Dench and Steve Coogan and nominated for four Academy Awards: the heartbreaking true story of an Irishwoman and the secret she kept for 50 years
When she became pregnant as a teenager in Ireland in 1952, Philomena Lee was sent to a convent to be looked after as a fallen woman. 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, Philomena'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 exposé 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.

The extraordinary story of an extraordinary woman . . . Philomena's tale is special. . . . It reveals a remarkable human being with astonishing fortitude and a truly humbling willingness to forgive. . . . I hope Philomena's heroic search and her courage in allowing her story to be told will bring comfort to all who have suffered a similar fate. Judi Dench, from the Foreword
A searingly poignant account of forced adoption and its consequences. Kirkus's (starred review)
Riveting . . . Sixsmith chillingly recounts . . . this mother-and-son saga. Publishers Weekly
Emotionally compelling. Library Journal
A powerful testament to the strength of the bond between mother and child. Shelf Awareness
Heartbreaking . . . a story that needed to be told. The Independent
Delves into a woman's grief with restraint and sensitivity. Independent on Sunday
The touching story of a mother's fifty-year search for her son. Sunday Times (London)
About the Author
Martin Sixsmith is the author of several fiction and nonfiction books and is a former BBC journalist and director of communications for the British government. He lives in London.
Judi Dench is one of the world's most celebrated actresses and has received numerous awards for her work, including eleven BAFTA awards, two Golden Globes, a Tony Award, and an Academy Award. Her most recent films are *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* and *Skyfall*.