



Philomena

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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When Philomena Lee was six years of age, her mother died leaving six small children. Philomena's father couldn't look after them all so he placed the three girls in a home in Limerick that was run by the nuns of the Catholic Church. Philomena was not educated about sexual issues so when she was still a teenager, she met a handsome young man at a fair and had a romantic evening with him, not realizing that there would be consequences.

After signs of her pregnancy occurred, Philomena's father disowned her and she moved into Sean Ross Abbey in Roscrea Ireland. The nuns who ran the home for unwed girls told the girls that they must suffer because they had sinned by having sex outside of marriage.

On July 5, 1952 Philomena had a very difficult labour and birth but her son who she named Anthony was a healthy baby boy. Philomena and he lived in the abbey for three years after his birth. Philomena was told that she should sign a document giving the nuns the rights to place her child for adoption. Philomena signed it knowing that it had a phrase stating that she was never to look for the child.

Philomena, like all the other girls owed the convent one hundred pounds for her keep and because she didn't have any money, she stayed in the convent working in the laundry for two years after Anthony was taken to the United States with his adoptive parents. Philomena hadn't had any notice that he was leaving and therefore didn't have a chance to say goodbye to him. She clearly remembered running up the stairs in the convent and seeing his little face staring out the rear window of a large black car.

When Philomena left the convent, she went to work in a home for disabled children and after two years decided to move again and study to become a nurse. She married a male nurse, worked in psychiatric wards for thirty years and raised their two children. The only ones who knew about Anthony besides the nuns were her father and one brother. She did have a photo that one of the nuns had secretly taken of the child. Every day she thought about him and made attempts to find him herself but was unsuccessful.

Then, after fifty years of keeping her secret, she decided to tell her daughter about Anthony. Jane began searching for him and writing to agencies and organizations in Ireland to gather information but was unable to find what she needed to locate Anthony.

Martin Sixsmith was an English political journalist who lost his job and through mutual acquaintances, Philomena and Jane asked him to help find Anthony. They didn't realize at the time that this story would become a book and then a movie. When the idea of publishing the book was first discussed, Philomena was reluctant but later realized that it might be helpful to other people who had been involved in similar circumstances.

I was surprised by the differences between the movie and the book. The movie is primarily focussed on the search that Philomena and Martin take together. The book, however, is more focussed on the life of Anthony after he was adopted. Both, however, are interesting and sadly reflect a system in the 1950s that was hurtful, shaming and filled with lies and secrets..