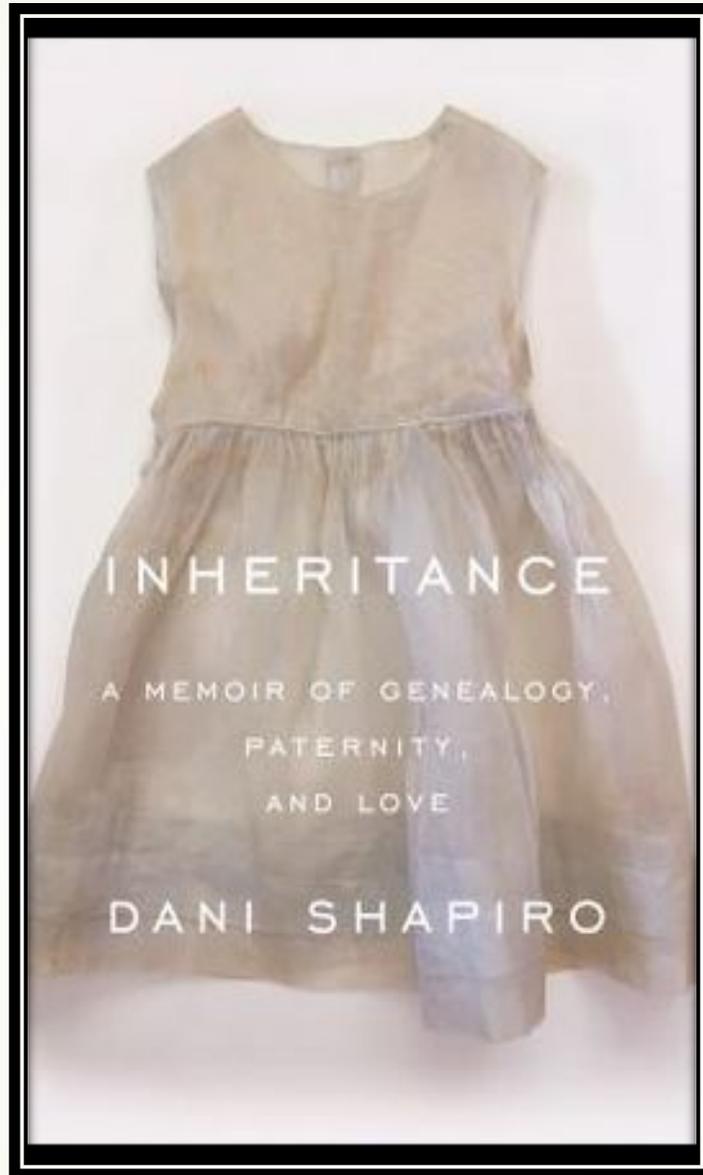




*Inheritance: A Memoir of  
Genealogy, Paternity, and  
Love* by Dani Shapiro

Discussion led by  
Dr. Sylvia F. Abrams





# Why choose this book for Shavuot?

- How did you **experience** the book?
- Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"?
- How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored?

# Who is Dani Shapiro?

**Dani Shapiro**



Shapiro at the 2018 Texas Book Festival



# Author Bio

- Birth—April 10, 1962
- Where—New York, New York, USA
- Education— B.A., M.F.A., Sarah Lawrence College
- Currently—lives in Bethlehem, Connecticut



# Works

## ➤ Memoirs

- *Inheritance* (2019)
- *Hourglass* (2017),
- *Still Writing* (2013),
- *Devotion* (2010),
- *Slow Motion* (1998).

## ➤ Novels,

- *Black & White* (2007)
- *Family History* (2004).



# What is a *Memoir*?

- Why are memoirs so popular?
  - Author calls herself a serial memoirist.
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## Plot synopsis

- *A memoir about the staggering family secret uncovered by a genealogy test: an exploration of the urgent ethical questions surrounding fertility treatments and DNA testing, and a profound inquiry of paternity, identity, and love.*
- What makes us who we are? What combination of memory, history, biology, experience, and that ineffable thing called the soul defines us?



# Themes in the Memoir

- Genealogy
  - Lineage
  - Identity
  - What does it mean to be Jewish?
  - What makes a Family?
  - Secrets
- 



# Inheritance

- The title of this book is Inheritance.
- What does it mean, in the context of the memoir?



# Genealogy



- Popularity of home DNA tests.
- The couple's use of technology to find the bio dad.
- How does the current popularity of finding one's roots create interest in the search for Shapiro's biological family?



# Lineage



- ▶ Much of Shapiro's understanding of herself comes from what she believes to be her lineage. **"These ancestors are the foundation upon which I have built my life,"** she says on page 12.
- ▶ Would Shapiro feel so strongly if her father's ancestors weren't so illustrious?
- ▶ How does Shapiro's understanding of lineage change over the course of the book?



# What does it mean to be Jewish?

- ▶ Judaism is passed on from mother to child—the father's religion holds no importance.
  - ▶ So why does Shapiro's sense of her own Jewishness rely so much on her father?
- 



# Identity



- Chapter 7 opens with a discussion of the nature of identity. **"What combination of memory, history, imagination, experience, subjectivity, genetic substance, and that ineffable thing called the soul makes us who we are?"** Shapiro writes on page 27.
- What do you believe makes you, you?



# Secrets

- On page 35, Shapiro writes, "**All my life I had known there was a secret. What I hadn't known: the secret was me.**"
- What might have changed if Shapiro had known her origins growing up?



# The ethics of reproductive technology

- ▶ How does Shapiro's experience with contemporary reproductive medicine affect the way she judges her parents?
- ▶ What do you imagine future generations will say about our current approach to artificial insemination?



# The effects of discovering secrets upon identity

- Shapiro leaves the reader puzzling over how DNA and reproductive technologies affect a person who discovers her origins in adulthood.
- And we can all wonder how such devastating secrets will affect this generation where newer reproductive technologies have allowed more individuals to become parents.



# How does each of us view our own inheritance?

- Shavuot and our Jewish heritage
  - The corrosive power of secrets in our own lives
  - Staying centered in a time of uncertainty
  - Should we write our own memoirs of this time period?
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# Credits

- Litlovers.com
- Reader's guide – Penguin Random House
- New York Times book review --1/15/19
- Washington Post book review – 1/8/19