

Book Review: Inheritance
By Dani Shapiro

As someone who was adopted at birth, and through the miracle of a simple DNA test found instant family (the source for my book “Bloodline”), I was intrigued to read Dani Shapiro’s memoir “Inheritance” when it became the selection of the month in my local book club.

I can’t say it didn’t hold my interest, but there’s a lot that bothers me about this story. Or at least the author’s approach to her discovery.

At age 54, author Dani Shapiro learns through a DNA test that her half-sister (her father was married twice) is not her half-sister at all. Additional research reveals that her father, now deceased for many years, wasn’t her biological father. Even more in-depth exploration brings to light she is the product of artificial insemination, a fledgling field back in the 1960s.

Shapiro’s world is rocked. She begins to question virtually everything about who she is, believing that her past is no longer her past. Her heritage as a Jew? Gone. Her family? Not really her family. Her culture? No longer hers.

Having had my own world ‘rocked’ about seven years ago, I completely understand how Shapiro suddenly felt this instant void in her life and became desperate to fill it. It’s not a good feeling, at least not initially. But to rant repeatedly about not knowing who she is, well, I found that a bit too dramatic. After all, while circumstances surrounding her conception and lineage have changed, she’s still the same person.

But that’s not her initial reaction.

Shapiro launches into a massive search to uncover the details of her birth, and in the process, learns where the donor sperm originated. To her credit, she seeks guidance on how to

handle this discovery and subsequent approach to the man she believes to be her biological father. But then she discards the advice and marches off on her own crusade.

This is what turned me off the most: her very self-centered approach. She fails to recognize that hers is not the only life impacted by this discovery. And her reaction when the donor rebuffs her initial advance is akin to a 4-year-old throwing a tantrum when they don't get their way. She becomes a spoiled, 54-year-old child.

I also take great offense to Shapiro's repeated reference to "the discovery that she wasn't who she thought she was." Give me a break. My DNA test results may have anointed me a brother to more siblings than I ever would have imagined, but I'm still me. My parents are still my parents. And my culture and heritage haven't changed. Just broadened, perhaps.

"Inheritance" is well written and an interesting read, and certainly everyone handles this level of discovery differently. But Shapiro is a very unlikable individual, and that takes away from what the book might have been. Three out of five stars.