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Ex-PM John Diefenbaker sired 2 boys, families believe

Latest twist to the 'Diefenbaby' saga

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Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, who was from Saskatchewan, may have several direct descendants across the country. (Chuck Mitchell/CP)

Twice-married former Canadian prime minister John Diefenbaker — always believed to have been childless — may have fathered not one but two sons, leaving progeny scattered across the country, The Canadian Press has learned.

It's a labyrinthine tale of adoptions, broken and reconstituted families whose quest to uncover their roots turned up "Dief" as a common thread, with a gold locket and DNA tests lending credence to their stories.

About 10 years ago, in Western Canada, the three Goertzen siblings began searching for their biological father, Ed Thorne, who had split from their mom four decades earlier.

Former Saskatoon cop's dad a 'Diefenbaby'?

Stan Goertzen, 52, a retired 32-year member of the Saskatoon police service, found Thorne in Kamloops, B.C. He made a startling discovery.

"He says, 'Oh, and my biological family has found me, too,'" Goertzen said of Thorne, who died soon after.

"That's the first time I found out he was adopted."

Separately and coincidentally, Ruthann Malmgren, now of Rockyford, Alta., had also been looking for Thorne on behalf of her mother, Mary Rosa LaMarche,



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who years earlier had given him up for adoption.

LaMarche had been Diefenbaker's housekeeper in Prince Albert, Sask., in the late 1930s, Malmgren said.

At the time, Diefenbaker was having marital difficulties, according to Simma Holt's biography of his first wife, Edna Diefenbaker. His eye apparently rested on his housekeeper, whom Malmgren described as "free and easy."

In 1938, LaMarche fell pregnant and was promptly sent to Bethany Home in Saskatoon. Little John was born in February 1939. His birth certificate did not list a father.

Malmgren, 70, remembers her parents were forever fighting. Her dad would say the baby was Diefenbaker's. He would be angry his wife wore a locket with photos of herself and the infant — a locket Stan Goertzen now has.

"I overheard my father, George Malmgren, when he and my mom were arguing, saying that John Diefenbaker was my mother's employer, and I guess they had an affair," Malmgren said.

The baby, John Eric LaMarche, was adopted and renamed Edward Thorne.

Mary Rosa LaMarche, who died about 18 years ago, never did find her son again. Malmgren did.

She tracked Thorne down to Kamloops and, through him, connected with Stan Goertzen around 2003. She told him his biological father, Ed Thorne, was Diefenbaker's son.

"I laughed my tail off," Goertzen said. "I thought, 'You've got to be kidding me'."

Content with having found their dad, the Goertzens, who were raised largely on welfare in Prince Albert, didn't give the apparent connection to Canada's 13th prime minister much further thought.

One question, however, nagged at the youngest Goertzen brother, Lawrence, who long had doubts about whether Thorne really was his biological father.

Toronto man says Diefenbaker his biological dad

Enter George Dryden, 45, who grew up in a Toronto family of privilege only to discover a few years ago that the man who raised him — prominent federal Liberal Gordon Dryden — was not his father.

That revelation prompted Dryden to go on a well publicized quest to confirm long-time family whispers: that he was the product of an affair between his mother, Mary Lou Dryden, and Diefenbaker, a known confidante.



Edward Thorne is seen in this undated family photograph. Thorne's sons believe he was the child of John Diefenbaker and Mary Rosa LaMarche, who was the former prime minister's housekeeper in Prince Albert, Sask., in 1938. (The Canadian Press)

'I laughed my tail off ... I thought, "You've got to be kidding me".'

- Stan Goertzen had a strong reaction after being told John Diefenbaker was his grandfather.



Many people say Toronto's George Dryden bears a physical resemblance to the man he says was his father, former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker. (Colin Perkel/Canadian Press)



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Dryden, who bears a strong resemblance to the former Conservative prime minister, believes previous genetic matching with a known Diefenbaker relative proved the family connection to his satisfaction.

Back in Ostler, Sask., Lawrence Goertzen saw a chance both to confirm whether Thorne was really his dad and to check on the link to Diefenbaker, who led the country from 1957 to 1963 and who died in 1979.

"I got hold of George Dryden and said, 'Can we kill two birds with one stone?'" said Lawrence Goertzen, 48, who does aircraft repairs at Saskatoon's John G. Diefenbaker airport.

Stan and Lawrence Goertzen sent body samples to a DNA lab. So did Dryden.

"I was really expecting the test to be negative," Dryden said, "And that would be the end of it."

The result this month stunned them all.

"We're talking about 99.99 per cent probability that they are related," said Kyle Tsui at Toronto-based Accu-Metrics, which did the tests.

"This is the expected result for an uncle-nephew relationship."

For Lawrence Goertzen, the DNA test confirmed that Stan and third sibling Darrell are his full brothers and ended doubts that Ed Thorne was his father.



Stan Goertzen (centre) is seen with his brothers Lawrence (left) and Darrell in this undated family handout. The Saskatchewan siblings believe they are grandsons of former prime minister John Diefenbaker. Their DNA matches that of George Dryden in Toronto, who believes he was Diefenbaker's son. (The Canadian Press)

Discovering the connection to Dryden halfway across the country — with Diefenbaker apparently the key link — was almost unbelievable.

"What are the chances?" he said. "It's incredible."

Dryden called the test a "very nice surprise, an early Christmas present."

"I got a feeling there might be Diefenbabies running around all over the place," Dryden said.

Stan Goertzen considers his search now over.

"It's like any other Canadian family that might be looking for this type of closure or your roots: I can go back and tell my kids that yeah, grandpa was adopted but we know where he came from," he said.

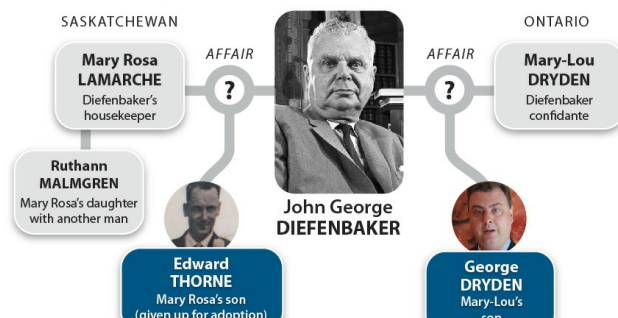
"The only thing that makes this unusual or unique is the fact that Diefenbaker's name has come into the whole picture."

'I got a feeling there might be Diefenbabies running around all over the place.'

- George Dryden, who believes he is the son of John Diefenbaker

DID DIEFENBAKER FATHER TWO SONS?

Former Canadian prime minister John Diefenbaker — always believed to have been childless — may in fact have fathered not one but two sons. Here is a look at the possible links in the family tree:



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Pothead

Thankfully Pierre Turdeau didn't do that kind of thing, or else Justin would have a bunch of siblings trying to get some of his money.

43 minutes ago
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ford4primeminister

if we new the real truth about 99% of all politicians,,lawyers,,bankers,,,only then would we realize how stupid and extremely gullible,,we really are..

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McGUILTY

Perhaps Drydens dad is Ken Dryden ,the Habs old goalie ? George doesn't look like John what so ever !

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OnGuardForThee

Another amoral arrogant conservative!

We need a democratic upgrade. One where the best get to the top vs. tapped secret society members who work for the Queen and their own malevolent interests. Then there is Mulroney & Harper of the Orange Lodge...again...more amoral sociopaths tapped by the Bilbergers at the top! This is the best we got!?

Oh Canada

1 hour ago
2 Likes

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Charles Damery

So, The Prime Minister wasn't an angel, no big deal. It's over 40 years ago. It's not really news, but at least the two gentlemen know who their father was. If they're half as smart as their father, they should get into the Conservative party and kick the crap out of Stephen Harper.

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IKEA Monkey

He "sired" children. How about fathered CBC. The guy isn't exactly a thoroughbred.

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North view

All that has been proven is that these men are brothers. So far there is no proof they are Diefenbaker's sons. Maybe they are, maybe they aren't. If the housekeeper was "free and easy", she could have been free and easy with some other man.

This is a news story only if there is proof. Otherwise, it's just speculative gossip. I thought that the CBC was better than that. This "news" is worthy only of the National Enquirer and its ilk.

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Lee'sBrew

Is it just me, or does George Diefenbaker look like the least likely guy to have one affair let alone two? Not that I doubt the evidence presented.....just sayin' is all....

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Vancouver1980

No great legacy... Diefenbaker was probably Canada's worst PM up to that point, only to be surpassed by Mulroney and later Harper.

1 hour ago
8 Likes

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NWRokk

"may have fathered not one but two sons, leaving progeny scattered across the country, "

Huge exaggeration to say two children= children scattered across the country, even if one were on the west coast and one on the east Less hyperbole, please, CBC..

1 hour ago
5 Likes

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oskar577

@NWRokk

Please look up the word "progeny".

39 minutes ago
0 Likes

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DaisyMae

@NWRokk - well, progeny can mean more than just children - it can mean descendants, as in children of children. So, two children (that we know of), with their children already spreading around about

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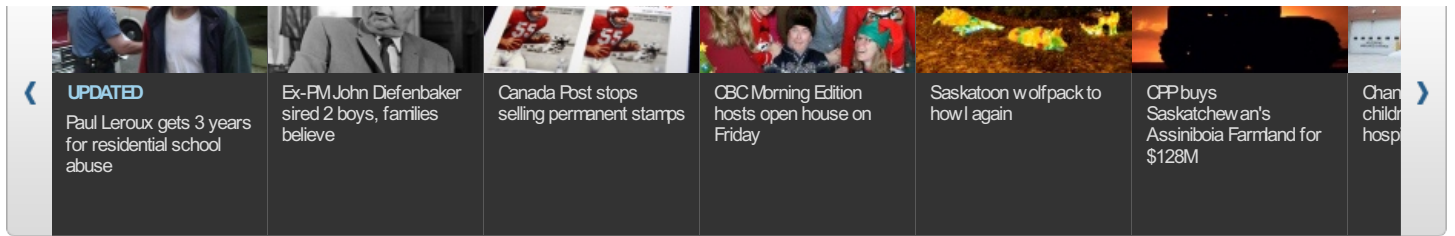
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