## PATERNITY

## Solving the 102-Year-Old Mystery of My Father's Paternity

Doug Wren uses DNA testing and genealogy site resources to learn the identity of his grandfather



**G** rowing up, I was familiar with the story of my father's birth. Thomas and Annie Duke and their daughters emigrated from England to Canada soon after the turn of the 20th century. Mary, the oldest daughter, married a Canadian and lived in Toronto. Mary's parents and her sister Edith ferried across the Detroit River and settled in the

United States. In March 1918, Mary traveled to Detroit and gave birth to my father. Mary eventually returned to Ontario, leaving her infant son in the care of her mother. On her deathbed a few years later, Annie Duke asked Edith to take custody of the boy. Edith and her husband Robert Wren adopted little George and raised him in Chicago. LEFT: The author with his father, George Wren, in 1956. (Courtesy of author) RIGHT: George, Mary and Annie Duke in 1919. (Courtesy of author)

Even as a child, I knew something was missing. Who was George Wren's biological father? Was he Mary's husband or someone else? I suspected the latter. Dad did not seem to be curious in the least. He died without ever knowing who his real father was.

I've always been interested in my heritage; however, my family and career took precedence over any serious genealogical pursuits for the better part of my adult life. When I retired in 2019 – twenty years after my father's death – I decided to search for the identity of my paternal grandfather.

The first step was having my DNA tested by Ancestry and 23andMe. The next step was studying my DNA relatives once the results were available. On 23andMe, the maternal side of my DNA family tree included relatives with familiar surnames, descendants of my mother's parents and grandparents. On my father's side were two greatgrandchildren of his aunt/ adoptive mother Edith. But I was unfamiliar with the surnames in my dad's paternal branch.

My results from Ancestry provided the names of countless other DNA relatives. I focused exclusively on predicted second cousins, reducing the pool by eliminating everyone related to me through my mother's or maternal grandmother's lineage. Then I checked the profiles of those remaining and saw that four were from Ontario.

The third step involved looking at the family trees of my newly found Canadian cousins. The surname of my paternal grandmother's husband did not appear in any of their trees, which indicated he was not my dad's biological father. I placed all four second cousins under the same set of great-grandparents. Assuming these were my greatgrandparents as well, their son George had to be my paternal grandfather! I zeroed in on George for two reasons: he lived in Toronto at the same time as my grandmother Mary, and I believed Mary named my father after him. But the search for my grandfather wasn't over - George had three brothers and a 21-yearold nephew who also lived in Toronto when my father was conceived. These five men shared the same DNA. meaning any one of them could have been Dad's father.

This prompted a fourth step, finding documents with clues linking Mary to one of the prospects. By that time, I was in touch with Robb, my second cousin and the great-nephew of George, the man I thought was my grandfather. Robb located

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U.S. Census list of residents who lived on the 700 block of Roscoe Street in Chicago. By 1920, my father was living at 723 Roscoe Street with his maternal grandparents and aunts. His mother had gone back to Toronto. (From "United States Census, 1920", FamilySearch)

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My grandfather's manifest card, dated 14 October 1918 and marked "Debarred". When my grandfather made a second attempt to enter the United States, my father was 28 weeks old. (From "Vermont, St. Albans District, Canadian Border Crossings, 1895-1954", FamilySearch)

George's border crossing records, which documented his attempts to visit the States six months after my father was born. Closer examination of the records revealed the proverbial smoking gun. George's reason for traveling – written on each document – was to visit his friend, "Anna Dooke" at 723 Roscoe Street, Chicago, Illinois. I knew that Thomas and Annie Duke were living in Chicago by fall 1918. It seemed likely that Mary, separated from her husband by the time my father was born, was also living there with her infant son. I confirmed the address by checking U.S. census records and learned that Thomas Duke was living at 723 Roscoe Street with his wife Annie, daughter Edith, and grandson George in 1920.

My grandfather may never have made it to Chicago to visit his namesake son and paramour. "Rejected" appeared at the top of one border crossing document and "Debarred" was written on his manifest card. We can only surmise why my grandmother returned to Toronto shortly thereafter, leaving her baby in the care of Annie Duke. Mary left Canada for good in 1930 and moved to California. Six years later my grandfather died and was buried in Toronto's Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

Although solving the century-old mystery of my dad's paternity was fascinating, the part I enjoyed most was discovering my Canadian cousins and emailing with them regularly. Susan lives in Ontario, not far from Robb. Ed became a U.S. citizen years ago and lives in Florida. I am also learning about my other Ontarian cousins, including one who currently lives in Brazil. When the search for my grandfather ended, an unanticipated fifth step began: getting to know my new family.

U.S. Immigration Services Primary Inspection Petition dated 11 September 1918. The writing at the top of the card indicates that my grandfather's appeal was rejected and he was debarred from entering the United States. (From "Michigan Passenger and Crew Lists, 1903-1965, Port Huron, Michigan", Ancestry)



DOUG WREN, a retired public educator, lives with his wife, Heather, in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he writes, works as a consultant, and researches his ancestry.