

The Baseball Tragedy of 1920

by Jeff Youngblood

Major League baseball has experienced the sudden and surprising deaths of players, coaches, and umpires many times in its history. Recently we have seen the renowned umpire John McSherry collapse on-field during a game, Darryl Kile of the St. Louis Cardinals, and Cory Lidle of the New York Yankees, as well as the passing of baseball icon Ted Williams. More sadly however, little attention has been paid to the worst tragedy in all of Major League baseball history - the death of Ray Chapman in 1920, when he was struck down by a pitch from the Yankee star Carl Mays.

Carl Mays was born in Liberty, Kentucky on November 12, 1891. His father's name was William Henry, and his mother was Louisa Callie. William was a farmer as well as a Methodist Minister, and it's said that he was a firm but kind father. In that time period it was difficult to find ministers so he would do sermons at different churches. Williams' father and grandfather were Methodist Ministers as well, the same commitments passing from one generation to the next. Between farming and preaching William was a busy man, but made enough money to spare the family from suffrage. Carl remembers little of the early years in Kentucky. He recalled nothing eventful, mostly the fun adventures young boys have with so many places to explore. It was sometime near the turn of the century when the family moved to Mansfield, Missouri. Life continued as it had been, but their worst event happened in 1904 when William Henry died from complications of pneumonia. It was a terrible moment. Carl was young but suddenly compelled to work the farm as best he could. Although there are records that indicate four years of high school, he remembers having to quit school because there were too many family difficulties, such as helping his mother raise seven children. It was then he discovered a strong pitching arm; he hunted rabbits by throwing rocks because they didn't have guns. Ironically, he accidentally killed a calf by hitting it directly in the forehead with a large stone.

After reaching teen years his family moved to Kingfisher, Oklahoma to be nearer his Mother's side of the family. Life didn't change much, but a notable event happened that Mays would never forget. At a favorite fishing spot he was met by a total stranger. The stranger told Carl that the very place where they stood was his favorite fishing spot as a kid too. They chatted a few moments before introducing themselves, and the stranger turned out to be Emmett Dalton. Carl knew from Old West legends that Emmett was the only surviving member of the

infamous Dalton gang. He was in prison for sixteen years and had come home to visit his cherished memories. Emmett would go on to be a lecturer. He made a good name for himself by warning against the horrors of crime, and eventually died with an earned sense of respect. Mays would always appreciate and adopt that attitude.

In Kingfisher, Carl discovered a semi-pro baseball team. He earned five dollars for every win as a pitcher, and learned fast that he was good enough to play for better money, except finding those teams was difficult. He was too poor to travel by ordinary means. Carl was once arrested in Price, Utah because he was caught hitching a free ride on a train. After a stint with the local team there to pay his fine, he was so impressive that he was offered a contract to stay with the team permanently. It was a good opportunity, but Carl went north (on another free train ride!) to Boise, Idaho where he found his first professional team in the Western Tri-State league. In 1913 Mays pitched for Portland, Oregon in the Northwestern league, and it was here that a big problem arose. His arm turned so sore that he could barely use it. He couldn't even comb his hair. The only reason he was kept on the team was his good batting skills. Carl took interest in the former star Joe McGinnity because he was a 'submariner' – he baffled opposing batters with an underhand delivery motion. With the help of Billy Sullivan, another former big league star, Carl developed a submarine pitching style similar to McGinnity's, so good that it became much more effective than his former pitching style. Then he went to Providence, Rhode Island in the International league, where ownership luckily changed hands to become affiliated with the Red Sox. It was here that a Boston scout discovered him.

It was in 1915 when Carl went to the Big Leagues. His arrival in Boston was interesting in that he was accompanied by Babe Ruth. At first Carl was considered a low level pitcher, a reliever, but it didn't take long for him to make an impact. By 1917 he was a 20 game winner. Mays' odd, underhand delivery was especially good because it hid the pitch until it was out of his hand. With a wicked fast ball and a tough attitude he could be intimidating. Mays had very steady performances too. He averaged about 8 hits, 2 walks, and 3 strikeouts per game, and he did this year after year. Carl retired after the 1929 season with some impressive career statistics; 208 wins, only 126 losses, winning 20 games or more five times, a lifetime ERA of 2.92, and a career batting average of .268, which was among the best of pitchers. These numbers represent better performances than

some pitchers in the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Baseball history says Carl had a sullen, 'loner' personality. He wasn't well liked by anyone around the league, even on his own team. He made some friends here and there, but not many. Carl one time explained that he could not understand why so many wouldn't accept him; for reasons nobody could explain, the attitudes toward him were polar. Some were known to speak well of him but hate being in the same room with him. Players thought he was 'odd', rubbed everybody the wrong way somehow, and didn't need friends. He was belligerent at times, insulting players who would commit errors during play. Carl's reputation as a surly, aggressive pitcher happened fast. Pitching habits like throwing 'inside' to move a player back from the plate were taken as vindictive and mean. Carl became known as a 'headhunter' by deliberately throwing at batters too often, sometimes causing direct confrontations. He never backed down from anyone. But this was an exaggeration because the aggressive style of pitchers is as old as baseball itself. Great names such as Cy Young, Lefty Grove, Early Wynn, Don Drysdale, and Bob Gibson were notorious for the same tactics. Today's soon-to-be Hall of Famer Roger Clemens is well known for his 'chin music' pitches, but so aggressive that one time he threw a broken bat at runner trying to score! Still, Mays' vigor was so well known that he and Ty Cobb were almost bitter enemies. Cobb was even more unfriendly than Mays, widely known as the most hated player in all of baseball, definitely not a player to challenge, especially by a rookie. It came to a climax one day when Mays threw several inside pitches, the last to hit Cobb on the wrist. This is especially bad because wrist bones can break easily. At his soonest opportunity Ty Cobb 'paid him back' by using his cleats to cut deeply into Mays' leg when he tried to cover first base for the out! For the rest of his life Carl proudly displayed that scar as a point of pride...

The real truth is that Carl was very self conscious of his lack of education. There were College graduates as well as 'street smart' players around the league and he took it personally when ribbed about being a 'country boy'. Carl was much more intelligent than they realized. These players often took advantage of fame and the good money by enjoying the night life, but Carl didn't. He was very clean living. He didn't drink, smoke, or cavort with women, and spent most evenings quietly at the hotels. Carl lived by the qualities of his upbringing, his way of keeping a level head, and pitching strong enough to keep his job. Baseball in those days was far rougher than it is now. Mays was extremely competitive and felt he could not afford to lose confidence; he had to stick to his guns, as it were.

Unfortunately, not mixing with the boys had helped create trouble.

As a result of his caustic reputation, accolades for his many stellar pitching performances became rare. A good example was the Red Sox World Series Championship in 1918. Carl Mays was the ace of the pitching staff that beat the Chicago Cubs 4 games to 2, Carl winning two of those games. When later traded to the Yankees, Red Sox fans were not sad to see him leave. To this day, Carl Mays' greatest achievement is almost unknown, even in Boston. It was the last time in the 20th century that the Boston Red Sox would win a World Series.

In 1919 Carl's experiences worsened. Having married Marjorie Madden (a student at the New England Conservatory of Music), Carl later described how much happiness they looked forward to. One big project was a newly built home in Missouri for Carl's mother. He made good money as a ballplayer, so a lot of his savings were used to make it the best home for her, an achievement he was proud of. However, disaster struck one day during spring training when it burned down. All the way to the ground. Nothing was salvaged; everything they owned was totally destroyed. Even their insurance paid only a small portion of its true value, which financially wiped them out. It was also true that it wasn't an accident; two mules had been shot and other animals were stolen, with no way to discover who did it. No one ever mentioned if it might have been connected to baseball.

A few days later, another near-disaster occurred when Chick Fewster (a rare teammate who liked Carl), was struck in the head by a pitch from Jeff Pfeffer of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Chick was badly injured. He was paralyzed at first, unable to speak properly, yet improved quickly. He was able to use a wheelchair sooner than expected, and actually returned to the team by the end of the season. This affair was said to upset Carl greatly; his aggressive pitching style was 'tamed' somewhat. It still didn't hurt his competitive attitude, but it was a good dose of reality. What he didn't know was that it was a portent of things to come.

On Memorial Day of 1919, a game was played in Philadelphia. In the 2nd inning the A's started pouncing on Boston and took the lead, 3-2. Excited fans sitting behind the Red Sox dugout started banging on its tin roof. In a short time the din was nerve wracking to the players. It was so irritating that Mays came out of the dugout and threw a baseball into the crowd. It grazed a woman's head then hit a man (name was Bryan Hayes) in the head directly. It didn't hurt him badly, but left a sizeable lump. He went to the A's office immediately after

the game to complain, but was given no assistance. Hayes promptly went to the nearest police station to press charges, and a warrant for Carl Mays' arrest was issued. It could not be served because the Red Sox had already left town. The arrest warrant would remain in effect until his custody could be taken, but Mays refused to accompany the team to Philadelphia. It was Carl's way of refusing to pay any fine. After much harangue the Red Sox finally had to pay the fine because Carl was too important to the team.

Later, a major furor occurred with Carl at the center of it. Since the Red Sox weren't playing well, even with so many good players, Carl's determination to win was going down. On July 13, the White Sox were enjoying their trouncing of the Red Sox. In the second inning, with the Sox up 4-0, Mays lost his cool. Catcher Wally Schang tried to throw out a base stealer at second base but hit Mays in the back of the head. When the inning was over Carl walked off the mound and refused to finish the game. He went to the locker room, showered, dressed, packed his gear, left the stadium, and would never pitch for the Red Sox again. Boston's owner then worked out a trade with the Yankees, which took only two weeks to arrange. All these activities came under direct fire from the American League president, Ban Johnson. The majority of team owners tangled with Johnson in complaint of operational interference. A lengthy series of lawsuits, claims, and counterclaims resulted - the owners ultimately refusing to abide by Johnson's league rules. After months of heated dispute, Court orders allowed the owners much more control over their teams, seriously reducing Ban Johnson's authority as the AL president. All of this demeaned Carl Mays' reputation even more.

If that weren't enough, it was World Series appearances with the Yankees in 1921 and 1922 where Carl was accused and investigated for helping 'throw' the World Series to the New York Giants. The infamous "Black Sox" scandal from the previous year had been like opening Pandora's Box. It had resulted in the knowledge of too many players for too many years taking payoffs to throw games. The new hardline Baseball Commissioner, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, banned these players for life. Such investigations continued, including players with pristine reputations. Carl Mays' questionable situation had been revealed by sportswriter Fred Lieb, and was investigated by Ban Johnson himself. Baseball authority was determined to clean up baseball, but never found evidence to implicate Mays. It was yet another permanent black mark that Carl would never escape.

From then on Mays was treated much like an unwanted guest. For the

next two years Yankees manager Miller Huggins used him as little as possible. In 1925 Carl was traded to the Cincinnati Reds. He had two good years, two bad years, and then went to the Brooklyn Dodgers. After one more year of lackluster pitching, Mays retired. Managers would remember him as one of iron nerves in the most tense conditions, a 'money' pitcher when needed, but career problems were the historical precedents. What Carl regretted most, which would haunt him forever, and he knew it, was that he'd be remembered as the one who killed a batter with one of his pitches.

Ray Chapman was from McHenry, Kentucky (very close to Beaver Dam), born January 15, 1891. Everett and Barbara (Johnson) Chapman were Ray's parents, and they were a well established, loving, tight knit family. Ray's grandparents, Ellis and Martha (Smith), had made Ohio County their home years previously, about the time of the Civil War. In those days, Kentucky had been politically 'neutral' and hosted many unusual conflicts between Confederate and Union forces. If Ellis and Martha were alive today they could probably share many interesting stories from those years. Interestingly, Ray's family was also descendents of a man named Willis Chapman, who was a youngster during the Revolutionary War in South Carolina. It was a key area that hosted many battles between the British and American Armies, which were especially bitter. If it weren't for 'guerilla' style fighting by renegade Militia forces, the Continental army would probably have lost; it would have changed our country's entire history. One can only wonder if Ray's great-great grandfather Willis, even as a child did his part to help his country achieve freedom.

The Chapman family was very down to earth. Weekend gatherings at the grandparent's home were nearly a tradition because they were like family picnics. Grandma's cornbread was such a favorite that other family members could never figure out how she made it so well; they could never duplicate the magic touch of her recipe. During these fun times the children loved to play different games, with baseball at the forefront. Ray had always been a very friendly, upbeat young boy, and when the family would play ball everyone saw his passion for it. Everyone knew he was talented. His grandma was so impressed that she made for him an entire uniform, a cap included.

In 1901, Ray's immediate family moved to Herrin, Illinois (close to

Marion). It is said that his father, Everett, moved there because work in the coal mines was steadier and paid better. Ray worked mining as well, forever to carry his UMW union card in his wallet. But it didn't stop the family from visiting the hometown near Beaver Dam as often as possible. Soon, Ray could proudly boast to his grandparents how he finally went into organized baseball. City sponsored teams were common. As his rise in baseball started, his whole family was kept up to date because if anybody deserved success it was Ray Chapman. By 1909 he was good enough to join a semipro team in Mt. Vernon, Illinois. Ray proved he was much better than average because in 1910 he went to a higher level team in Springfield, then to Iowa's Davenport Prodigals in 1911. At this point Ray became the star of the show. He was the Prodigals iron man, playing every inning of every game, the cornerstone of a strong team. Batting .293 and stealing 50 bases, Chapman was the sparkplug for the team, and they nearly won the championship. Thanks to an affiliation with the Cleveland Indians his well known talent finally got him into the Big Leagues. At first his contract was sold to the American Association Toledo team, but he was called up in 1912 to join the Cleveland Indians. Ray would never play the minors again, and only for Cleveland until his death in 1920.

Ray Chapman established a great reputation because he was consistently, extremely good. He was the best defensive shortstop in the league, always complimented for a wide fielding range and quick hands, making it the one position his manager never had to worry about. Chapman was definitely the anchor for the entire infield. Ray's lifetime batting average was .278 (.300 in his best years), was always the leadoff man or #2 in the batting lineup, averaged about 25 stolen bases a season, scored lots of runs, and was known as one of the fastest runners in the league. For a Tim Murlane charity event, he won the Loving Cup by setting a record for speed around the bases - fourteen seconds. As always happens with professional athletes, Chapman spent some time on the disabled list, but he was so steady, dependable, and upbeat (on or off the field) that he was the sparkplug for any team. Bill James, a noted baseball historian, agrees with many that Ray Chapman should be in Baseball's Hall of Fame.

"Chappie" was one of the most popular players in all of Major League baseball. His humorous, jovial personality was impossible to ignore. Even Ty Cobb (a hated player, with the social grace of a rattlesnake) was as captivated as everyone else. Big name entertainment stars such as Al Jolson, Will Rogers, and William Hart would give him a welcome greeting any time they saw him. An Indians manager once complimented Ray's contagious personality by saying he wouldn't need

to play even one inning to earn his salary. Ray was also a good singer. Being a tenor, he and three teammates inadvertently formed "The Quartette" which sang rather frequently because they were surprisingly good. He would lead sing-a-longs at various parties, and later bought a piano for his parents so they could all sing together. One of Ray's favorite songs was "Dear Old Girl", once singing it to accidentally win a singing contest. He would visit an old friend in Owensboro, Kentucky who would have him sing songs written by the famed Jack McCormick of Ireland, which were very popular parties because everyone was captivated by the sparkle of Ray's presence. Also, during the off-season, Ray was a hometown celebrity like they had never seen before. All of Chapman's neighbors knew when the baseball season was over because he had the humorous habit of whistling tunes constantly. He helped an old friend by selling shoes at his store; clearly the best salesman ever. He would help the Pharmacist by taking care of his candy and soda fountain. Ray was even a member of Herrin's Elks and Masonic lodges, visiting there often. "Chappie" was undoubtedly the pride and joy of his Southern homeland.

It was October 29, 1919 when the announcement was made of Ray's marriage with Kathleen Daly of Cleveland. "Katie" was the daughter of Martin Daly, who had helped the Rockefellers establish the Standard Oil company, then went on to create the East Ohio Gas company. Martin was a self made millionaire by hard work and innovation, helping Cleveland jump from an average population to sixth in the country, with huge increases in industrial productivity. Martin Daly was a very influential man in every aspect of the city of Cleveland, but he was also a big fan of the Indians. Katie would accompany her father to many of their games. It was this association with Cleveland celebrities and public relations events that brought Ray and Kathleen Daly together. Ray's family was skeptical about the marriage, wary that such a difference in social class might cause problems, but he confidently assured them that it happened naturally. Truth was, Ray was so popular that he was irresistible even to powerful people. They were so taken by his personality that Martin arranged with William Smith (president of Pioneer Alloys) to hire Ray as Secretary Treasurer for his company. Smith was glad to oblige, but Daly made it clear to Ray that only an end to his baseball career would make it happen. Before spring training began, an office for Ray at Pioneer Alloys had been completed. Ray brought a friend just to show it off once, and soon there were whispers amongst teammates that 1920 might be his last year with the team. When asked about it Chapman smiled brightly and said, "We'll play this season, then I'll talk about quitting".

Between 1917 and 1920 the Cleveland Indians had become a very competitive team, always finishing near the top. It was 1920 when they were at their best. There was a feeling among teammates that it was their best team yet, with a good chance of making it to the World Series. 1920 was an exciting year for baseball fans too because the American League pennant race was heated. Cleveland, Chicago, and New York were the dominant teams, each needing every possible win because the race was so close. The Indians were in first place, just 2 games ahead of the Yankees. A key series was Cleveland versus New York in mid-August, very exciting to fans because in the prior week the Yankees had swept the Indians in a 4 game series. This was a feeling more like playoff games. The first game of the series took place on August 16, 1920 in New York at the old Polo Grounds stadium. Carl Mays was pitching that day, and he was having a good year. Ray Chapman was having a great year as well.

It was a warm, muggy day with drizzling rain. A sweltering, cloudy day is never good for a great game, but it started well for the Indians. They got a run with the help of a sacrifice bunt by Chapman, leading 1-0 after the first inning. By the fifth they had scored two more and were up 3-0. In the 5th inning on this fateful day, it was Chapman's third trip to the plate to face Mays. As usual he crowded the plate, a habit Carl Mays didn't like, but Ray's normal batting style. First pitch was a ball, the second was a strike. On the third pitch there was a 'crack' sound of the bat, so loud the entire stadium could hear it; drastic enough to quieten all 22,000 of them. The ball rolled toward third base, Mays fielded the ball like it had been a bunt, throwing to first base for the out. But he turned around to see Chapman had collapsed at home plate. The ball had hit Ray in the head, not the bat. It hit him so hard that he stumbled backward, into the Yankee catcher. The home plate umpire immediately yelled for a doctor from the stands because Ray was already bleeding from his left ear. Stunned players, Indians and Yankees both, gathered 'round him but were unable to help. Luckily, a doctor was in attendance and rushed onto the field. He immediately called for ice packs, and after a few minutes was able to revive him. Chapman tried to speak, but he couldn't. After getting to a sitting position, players helped Ray stand up and he walked shakily toward the dugout. Ray was trying to do it on his own, but he collapsed again, and teammates had to carry him to the locker room.

The doctor examined him more closely and could see it was an

extremely serious situation. While waiting for the ambulance Ray tried speaking to his teammate Jack Graney but still couldn't. Jack gave him a pad and pencil to write with but Ray was so weak he couldn't hold the pencil. He saw Percy Smallwood (trainer) in the room and motioned for him. Chapman tried speaking to him but only whispers came out. It sounded like Ray was trying to say, "Katie's ring", but it was his eyes that told Percy he wanted his wedding ring. Ray always gave Percy his wedding ring before games for safekeeping, so Percy slipped it back on his finger. His eyes seemed to say 'thank you'. After arriving at the St. Lawrence hospital, Ray was taken up an elevator to the X-ray area. In the elevator he was having a problem breathing. His good friend John Henry was at his side, fanning him for coolness, when Ray was able to speak. He told John, "Don't call Katie. But if you have to, tell her I'm alright." They were apparently his last words.

The X-ray of his head revealed a startling depressed fracture just above the left ear. Even worse, it was a multi-fracture. There was no report whether the brain had been perforated by bone, or if the skull was putting abnormal pressure on it, but his condition was deteriorating. Since direct contact with the family was only by telephone, it was the team's manager and owner who okay'd the necessary surgery. It began at about 12:30 a.m. and was completed at 1:45. According to the New York Times, a bone incision over 3 inches was made, meaning that the skull fracture was near the size of a fist. Once inside, the doctors observed extensive damage. The lateral sinus was ruptured, and a considerable amount of clotted blood was visible which meant severe hemorrhage. The surgeons also noted that the opposite side of the brain was likely to have suffered similar damage considering the force of the impact. No specific procedures were reported. Afterward, his condition became more stable, but it soon reversed and he never regained consciousness. At 4:40 a.m. on August 17, 1920, Ray Chapman was pronounced dead.

One can only imagine the heart wrenching grief his family must have suffered, not only in Herrin and Marion, Illinois, but his hometown near Beaver Dam, as well as other family and friends in Owensboro, Kentucky. The Daly family in Cleveland was gripped in shock just as badly, especially his wife Kathleen. She fainted the instant she was told of Ray's death not only because of such tragic news, but because she was pregnant with their child. New York City and Cleveland were in disbelief as well. The baseball game that day was cancelled. The

funeral home where his body went was visited by thousands of people. When Chapman's casket reached New York's Grand Central Station for travel to Cleveland, it was over-crowded with mourners. As the casket passed through, men removed their hats, many heads were bowed in respect, and tears flowed. Upon arrival in Cleveland, the city responded as though a President had died. All flags (including all baseball parks) were at half-mast. Untold thousands were en masse to attend Ray's funeral in the downtown area. Family and friends from Herrin, Owensboro, Beaver Dam, and McHenry, Kentucky were in attendance, even large delegations from Elk and Masonic Lodges. The largest Catholic Cathedral in the city was used because the original location was too small, but still so full that every available space was taken. The entire downtown area was so crowded that the Police had to shut it down to traffic completely. When the services were over the immense crowds dispersed very slowly, lingering for several hours. Chapman's body was finally laid to rest at the Lakeview Cemetery.

The Cleveland Indians were devastated as well, shocked beyond belief. No one in baseball had ever seen - before or since - such a hideous accident during a game. Several players were so remorseful that they were unable to attend the funeral services. Chapman's best buddy Jack Graney was so upset that he went into a rage toward Carl Mays and had to be physically restrained. Manager Tris Speaker had a breakdown at his hotel, and remained there because he could not face the public. He was soon to go into a lengthy depression. Mays himself was despondent. He met with reporters briefly to speak of his own turmoil and disbelief. New York district attorney Joyce requested a meeting with him on the morning of Chapman's death, possibly because his reputation was well known, but also because any human death calls for official inquiry. It is said that Mays was visibly upset, his eyes welling with tears, but adamant that there was no animosity between him and Chapman; it was not a deliberate attempt to throw at Ray's head. There was no Kentucky 'feud' like the legends of old Hatfield-McCoy battles, which whispers around the league would soon suggest. District Attorney Joyce did not file criminal charges.

The entire baseball world turned furious. Some teams refused to play the Yankees if Carl Mays pitched. Some demanded that he be banned from baseball for life. A boycott of Mays nearly took place, and even his own teammates lost all respect for him. Fans were near militant, especially Cleveland, and he received several death threats; so many that he had to have police escort. Baseball was able to diplomatically quieten the uproar, but it took time. Many players would never forget what happened to Ray Chapman. Mays would soon be treated to his

own 'chin music' tactics, a reason why he would later be traded to the National League. When Jack Graney was once asked if he thought Carl deliberately threw at Ray's head, Jack's answer was, "Yes, definitely." Many other players thought the same, but the passage of time has concluded that it was an accident.

The bittersweet life of Carl Mays is a mystery. Few details of his personal background were ever reported; little mention of being a Kentucky native, or appreciation of family values since his father was a Methodist minister. He seemed to live life under a permanent dark cloud that sometimes stormed with rain, almost as if it was a long episode of "The Twilight Zone". Carl's maelstrom didn't end with the return home from baseball retirement. He lost nearly all his investment money because of the Stock Market crash, and had to pitch in the minor leagues for two more years. He appeared with Portland, Louisville, and Toledo teams, finishing with a mediocre record. It was also during this time that Carl's mother died. Then, in 1934 his wife died unexpectedly from complications of an eye infection. It was a short time later when perhaps his life finally settled. Carl married a woman named Esther Ugsted, originally from North Dakota. Together they established an elite hunting/fishing resort in tiny Dayville, Oregon, so exclusive that many of his guests were from everywhere in the country. Carl also did scouting work for three baseball teams, one of which, ironically, was the Cleveland Indians.

Mays' favorite pastime was the baseball camps that he conducted regularly for fifteen years. It was said he enjoyed working with kids very much. He was a good hitter besides being a good pitcher, and could give those kids great lessons in all aspects of the game. He would even talk openly about the tragedy of Ray Chapman; he would use it as an example of determination through the worst situations. But as good a pitcher as he was, Carl knew he would never be considered for baseball's Hall of Fame and he was embittered by it. Ray Chapman's death was a traumatic accident, but he had regained his composure and finished his 15 year career with impressive statistics. Maybe he was right. Maybe today he would be called a 'rebel'; willing to live as he saw fit, regardless of the outcome. On the other hand, maybe it is the ultimate example of the old saying, "You get what you pay for". At the age of 79 he passed away in El Cajon, California. His body was moved to Portland, Oregon where he was laid to rest in the Ocean View cemetery. His obituary in the San Diego Union announced, "Carl Mays, Yankee Whose Pitch Killed A Batter In

1920, Is Dead".

The Chapman family never recovered from Ray's death, Ray's mother particularly. She became an emotional invalid. For several years she was a completely different person; non-social, somber, quiet, and withdrawn. She rarely left the house, unable to deal with the outside world. When family members were in need Mrs. Chapman simply wasn't able to be a Mother. Years passed before the agony of his death had become memories of pride. His remaining sister, Margaret, collects mementos of Ray's life and welcomes the ability to speak of her brothers' glory. His legacy still affects those who live in the towns where he was born and bred. In Beaver Dam, Kentucky there has been an effort to create a Ray Chapman memorial. In Herrin, Illinois his name is still well known although very few descendents still live there. Everyone, even those who aren't part of the Chapman family, would love to find a way for others to share the delight of his memory.

The Daly family of Cleveland never quite survived the turmoil of Ray's death, especially Kathleen. However, the nicest lift of spirits happened on February 27, 1921, when she gave birth to a healthy baby girl named Rae Marie. The Cleveland newspaper called her "... a living monument to perpetuate the memory of Ray Chapman". At the age of two she was an active and creative child, which encouraged Katie to keep moving forward in life. It was in 1923 that she married a cousin named Joseph McMahan, who lived in California and worked for an oil company. They had a child as well, a young boy they named Joseph, Jr. It was in April, 1928, when preparing for a trip to Hawaii, that Kathleen suddenly died. It too was very controversial - she poisoned herself either accidentally or deliberately. Mrs. Daly was present when her daughter died, and stated that it was an accident. But newspapers reported that she'd recently been released from a hospital because of a nervous breakdown. Common belief among the Daly family was that Kathleen's breakdown was the result of enduring trauma from Ray's death. Ultimately, the Medical Examiner ruled it a suicide.

Young Rae Marie Chapman was soon moved back to Cleveland to be with her grandparents. The following year a major outbreak of measles took place, and in early April, Rae was stricken with the disease. In those days it was much more dangerous because proper medicine had not been perfected. Complications set in, and she died on April 27, 1929. Rae was only eight years old. Margaret Chapman would later comment that "... the Daly family was wiped out in a short time".

Today, the tragedy of 1920 is not well known. Press coverage at the time faded quickly because newspapers focused on the unfolding, scandalous bribing of the White Sox to lose the World Series in 1919, but Ray Chapman's death was the darkest moment in baseball history. No one in our modern sports media ever speaks of it, it is found only in historical baseball books, each article typically very short. No credit is given either player as among the best in baseball, or their backgrounds, or their amazing ascent to the pinnacle of any sport. Even today the Indians and Yankees have virtually no information regarding the horrible event. Nor does anyone speak of the wonderful, yet bittersweet conclusion to this strange but true tale.

The Cleveland Indians recovered from their dismay and regrouped with determination rarely seen. They honored Ray's memory by wearing black armbands, and no other team could match their fiery spirit. From August 30 to the end of the season the Indians won 27 of 31 games to clinch their first A.L. Pennant. In the World Series they played so powerfully that the Brooklyn Robins (later the Dodgers) were clearly outmatched, losing to the Indians 5 games to 2. During the series Cleveland achieved some remarkable firsts. In game 3, Elmer Smith became the first player to hit a Grand Slam in World Series play. Later in the same game, Cleveland's Jim Bagby became the first pitcher to hit a homerun in a World Series game. Most amazing was game 5 when the Indians second baseman, Bill Wambsganss, became the first player to accomplish an unassisted Triple Play, an event so rare that it's only happened 12 times in the entire history of baseball!

After the final game, with the Cleveland Indians winning their first World Series of the 20th Century, they didn't jump and shout for endless joy as they normally do. It was a little quieter, more somber. It had been the strangest, but most unforgettable season any of them would ever play. The memories of that tragic day would remain with them for the rest of their lives, as clear as the day it happened. In the end, individually, the World Champion Cleveland Indians dedicated their achievement to the memory of Ray Chapman.

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Ray Chapman

January 15, 1891 – August 17, 1920



Ray does some infield warm-up.



“Chappie” (middle) was very popular with his teammates.



Carl Mays
November 12, 1891 – April 4, 1971



Carl taking some warm-up tosses.