

BBC World Service – Witness – Advanced

The Death of _____

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02gyp5v>



1: Do you know who the person in the pictures is?



YES	NO
Who is it? What do you know about him? Why is he often described as infamous ?	Who do you think he might be? Why do you think he is often described as infamous ?

_____ fold _____

2: Read the following information about Al Capone and discuss the meaning of the highlighted words.

Born: Alphonse Gabriel Capone, January 17, 1899, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.

Died: January 25, 1947 (aged 48), Palm Island, Florida, U.S.

Resting place: Mount Carmel Cemetery

Nationality: American

Occupation: **Gangster, bootlegger, racketeer**, boss of a Chicago **outfit**.

Religion: Roman Catholic

Criminal charge: **Tax evasion**

Criminal penalty: 11-year **sentence** in Atlanta U.S. Penitentiary and Alcatraz

Spouse(s): Mae Capone

Children: Albert Francis "Sonny" Capone (1918–2004)

Vocabulary

3: Match the words in bold to their definitions:

- a. Well known for some bad quality or for negative actions. – **Infamous**
- b. A husband or wife, considered in relation to their partner. - _____
- c. The illegal non-payment or underpayment of money owed to the Government. - _____
- d. The punishment assigned to a defendant found guilty by a court, or fixed by law for a particular offence. - _____
- e. A group of people undertaking a particular activity together, especially a group of musicians, a team, or a business concern. - _____
- f. A member of a gang of violent criminals. - _____
- g. A person who illegally transports alcoholic beverages. - _____
- h. A person who engages in dishonest and fraudulent business dealings. - _____

LISTENING 1

4: You are going to listen to a BBC podcast about the death of Al Capone. In the podcast, Capone's niece, Deirdre Marie Capone, talks about her memories of her uncle. Read the sentences below and try to predict the answers?

- a. Her memories of her uncle are mostly positive/negative.
- b. She was/wasn't aware of her uncle's occupation while he was alive.
- c. Few/Many people showed their respect for Al Capone during his funeral procession.
- d. After his death, her connection to Al Capone caused/didn't cause problems for her and her family.

5: Now listen to the podcast and cross out the incorrect option in each sentence and discuss your reasons with a partner.

LISTENING 2

6: What can you remember? Try to complete sentences a-n. For the answers that you cannot remember, try to predict what type of word you will need i.e. a noun, a number, an adjective etc.

- a. Al Capone was involved in the infamous S_____ V_____ D_____ Massacre.
- b. The day that Al Capone died was also Deidre's _____.
- c. Al Capone was in his _____ - _____ when he moved to Chicago?
- d. He soon became a member of the F_____ P_____ G_____.
- e. Many people viewed him as a modern day _____.
- f. Al Capone and the outfit were responsible for opening up the first _____ in America.
- g. Deirdre describes Al Capone's face as _____ and a little _____ on one occasion when she witnessed him doing business in her living room.
- h. At that time, nobody in America had been sentenced to _____ in jail before.
- i. He had to have _____ injections in prison to treat a case of syphilis that he had contracted before he went inside?
- j. Deidre didn't think that her uncle was being _____ properly in prison.
- k. He died from a massive _____.
- l. She describes her experience of her uncle's funeral as _____ - _____.
- m. Deidre lost her job at an _____ due to her relation to Al Capone.
- n. Deidre didn't tell her children about their _____ because of her own experiences.

7: Listen again, check your answers and complete the gaps for the sentences you can't remember.

Discussion Questions

- a. Why did people compare Al Capone to Robin Hood?
- b. Do you think people who make a living from crime should be revered?
- c. Was it fair for Al Capone to receive such 'harsh treatment' when he was sentenced?
- d. Can you think of any other infamous people; living or dead?

Answers

1: The person is **Al Capone**. The answers will depend on the students' knowledge. The biographical information in exercise 2 will clarify this information for the students. If students do not understand the meaning of *infamous*, direct their attention to the definition in exercise 3.

2:

- a. Well known for some bad quality or for negative actions. - **Infamous**
- b. A husband or wife, considered in relation to their partner. - **Spouse**
- c. The illegal non-payment or underpayment of money owed to the Government. - **Tax Evasion**
- d. The punishment assigned to a defendant found guilty by a court, or fixed by law for a particular offence. - **Sentence**
- e. A group of people undertaking a particular activity together, especially a group of musicians, a team, or a business concern. - **Outfit**
- f. A member of a gang of violent criminals. - **Gangster**
- g. A person who illegally transports alcoholic beverages. - **Bootlegger**
- h. A person who engages in dishonest and fraudulent business dealings. - **Racketeer**

LISTENING 1, Question 4:

- a. Her memories of her uncle are mostly **positive**.
- b. She **wasn't** aware of her uncle's occupation while he was alive.
- c. **Many** people showed their respect for Al Capone during his funeral procession.
- d. After his death, her connection to Al Capone **caused** problems for her and her family.

LISTENING 2, Questions 6 & 7:

- A. Al Capone was involved in the infamous **Saint Valentine's Day** Massacre.
- B. The day that Al Capone died was also Deidre's **birthday**.
- C. Al Capone was in his **mid-twenties** when he moved to Chicago?
- D. He became a member of the **Five Points Gang**.
- E. Many people viewed him as a modern day **Robin Hood**.
- F. Al Capone and the outfit were responsible for opening up the first **soup kitchen** in America.
- G. Deirdre describes Al Capone's face as **hard** and a little **scary** on one occasion when she witnessed him doing business in her living room.
- H. At that time, nobody in America had been sentenced to **11 years** in jail before.
- I. He had to have **mercury** injections in prison to treat a case of syphilis that he had contracted before he went inside?
- J. Deidre didn't think her uncle was being **nourished** properly in prison.
- K. He died from a massive **stroke**.
- L. She describes her experience of her uncle's funeral as **life-changing**.
- M. Deidre lost her job at an **insurance company** due to her relation to Al Capone.
- N. Deidre didn't tell her children about their **heritage** because of her own experiences.

Transcript

Narrator: Hello, and welcome to 'Witness' from the BBC World Service with me, Ashley Byrne. It's January 25th, 1947 and the American Gangster Al Capone has died. For years he ruled the streets in America's windy city Chicago. He'd become the country's best known criminal, allegedly involved in the infamous St. Valentine's Day Massacre. But for one little girl, he was just Uncle Al.

Deirdre: I am Deirdre Marie Capone. I was born on January 25th, 1940. My grandfather is Ralph Capone, Al Capone's older brother and his business partner. I can still hear the sound of his voice. I can still smell the cigars that he smoked.

N: Al Capone died on Deirdre's 7th birthday at his home on Palm Island, Florida. He was 48.

D: Al Capone and I used to cook spaghetti sauce together, we called it gravy. We used to sing. I travelled with them. I did everything with him. He dressed up as Santa Claus and I would sit on his lap and I've got a picture of me sitting on his lap. He taught me to swim he taught me to ride a bike and I can still hear the song that he taught me to play on the Mandolin. It was 'shababa shawawa shamama, in colane, kookalogoomba, shababa shawawa shamama...'

N: Al Capone became known as a fearful gangster in prohibition America of the 1920's and early 30's. He moved to Chicago in his early twenties where he was a member of the Five Points Gang. He soon became a bodyguard for the head of one of the cities criminal syndicates, supplying illegal alcohol and he eventually took over the bootlegging business himself. But Capone's close relationship with the mayor and local police meant he escaped prosecution and despite a reputation for ruling through fear and violence, he was viewed by many as a modern day Robin Hood.

D: When the stock market crashed in 1929, Al Capone and the outfit opened up the very first soup kitchen the United States had ever seen. They fed people for months.

N: But the St Valentine's Day Massacre of that same year damaged Al Capone's Reputation. Seven people were shot dead in cold blood following a clash between rival gangs, and even Deirdre admits that her beloved uncle Al had a scary side.

D: So one time I was with him and we were in the kitchen; we were singing Italian arias and listening to the radio and my aunt Mafy, Al's sister, came and said that there was somebody at the front door that wanted to see him. He went into the dining room and he took his suit coat off the back of a chair, put it on, put a cigar in his mouth, went into the living room, and of course I followed him, and then he motioned to his sister to have these gentlemen come in. And I just stood in the corner and watched my uncles face, and it turned into somebody that I did not know; hard and almost scary to me because it's like I've never seen him look like that before. And then they left and they went out the door and my uncle just sat there and then all of a sudden he looked at me, he winked, and then got this big smile on his face and he just became the person that I knew and he came over and took my hand and we went back into the kitchen and we started singing again.

N: Al Capone was never prosecuted for any gang related activities. When the federal authorities did finally catch up with him it was for tax evasion. In 1931, at the age of 32, he was jailed for what was then a record breaking eleven years. Many thought that his harsh treatment was to take account of other crimes he had been suspected of but they couldn't prove. Prison wasn't kind to Al Capone. He spent several years inside the notorious Alcatraz jail where his health suffered, not least because he was being treated for a case of syphilis he'd contracted on the outside with regular mercury injections. Even after his early release his health continued to go downhill. Just before his 48th birthday on January the 17th 1947, he took a turn for the worse.

D: We didn't think that he was going to survive because he was in a very weakened state when he did get out of prison because of the mercury injections and just being in a cell and not being nourished properly. So I went and I held his hand, an, you know, there are people in the room and they are praying and, you know, the priest was there. Two days later, he was up and around and playing cards and... he rallied.

<https://eslmaterialsdeveloper.wordpress.com/>

N: But Capone only managed a few more days.

D: He was getting ready to go out and swim on January 25th and he collapsed, and he had a massive stroke and he died. Al Capone died on my 7th birthday and all of the newspapers, world over, ran all the alleged things that the Capones did. And of course I was seven years old, I was able to read, and I'm reading all of these stories, and I couldn't believe it.

N: Deirdre has vivid memories of her uncle's funeral.

D: Al Capone had a huge funeral. I remember going into the funeral home and the flowers were everywhere and people were coming up and... He was the first person very close to me that died. I think for a child to walk in and see somebody that they knew in a coffin was pretty life-changing for me. It's kind of scary and you see all the candles going and people are praying and moaning, and of course back then it was very much part of Italian heritage that people would actually come and mourn. I mean, they would wail in the seats, and it was startling to me as a little girl.

N: Capone was buried in a family plot in the Mount Olivet Cemetery in Chicago.

D: Well it was a very long funeral procession and it was a winter day, you know, so it was a cold Chicago day, but people lined the streets, you know... men would take their hats off and hold them down. And I was, of course, in the car with my father, in the very first car. We took the body down the streets of Chicago to the south-side, to where he was buried. He also had a high mass set for him in Chicago and the media didn't know about it. They were still in Florida thinking that the body hadn't gotten on the train yet.

N: After his death, Deirdre and her family tried to play down their links to Al Capone but the connection was soon causing problems.

D: The big Chicago papers, they came out and said the children at St Philip Neri School made their first communion and Deirdre Capone, with the entire Capone family in attendance, made hers. Well my classmates knew me as Deidre Gabriel, but how many Deirdres do you think were in that little class of, you know, 40 children? I was ostracised.

N: Deirdre lost her first job at an insurance company when she was 18 after the bosses found out that she was related to Al Capone.

D: And he said, "Are you any relation to Alfonse Capone?" and I said, "Yes, he was my uncle." and he said, "I'm sorry, you cannot work here, you're fired!" and I said, "Yeah, but he's dead. Yes he was my uncle but he's dead." and he said, "Doesn't matter."

N: Deirdre eventually moved away from Chicago. She got married and told her husband about her Capone connection but they both decided to keep it from their children.

D: I never told my four children their heritage because I saw what that did to other people, you know, I saw what it did to me.

N: Now in her mid-seventies and finally relaxed about her Capone connection, Deidre spends a lot of her spare time giving talks about what it was like to live in the shadow of Al Capone. And this addition of 'Witness' with me, Ashley Byrne, was a 'Made in Manchester' production for the BBC World Service.