

# INVESTIGATIVE REPORT



## NCRC Discloses Actual Cause in Death Mistakenly Reported as a Fatal Dog Attack

NCRC does not rely solely on news accounts. Whenever possible, NCRC conducts personal interviews with police investigators, animal control officers, coroners, forensic pathologists, veterinarians, health department officials, dog owners, and eye witnesses. We obtain incident reports, bite reports, human and animal autopsy reports, summaries of judicial proceedings, and crime scene data.

NCRC followed up the case of James Chapple who was attacked and severely injured by dogs in February 2007. Reports then and since attribute Mr. Chapple's death, which occurred more than three months later, to complications resulting from the dog attack. The result of our investigation demonstrates why such reports should not be relied upon. Here is what we learned:

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**Date of dog attack:** February 9, 2007  
**Date of death:** May 17, 2007  
**Location:** Memphis, Tennessee  
**Victim:** James Chapple, 58-year-old male

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### Circumstances:

On February 9<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Chapple was walking home when two dogs ran out of an auto repair shop and attacked him. The owner of the business admitted the dogs were "guard dogs," used to protect the auto shop. A passer-by helped rescue Mr. Chapple from the dogs.

### News accounts:

In October 2007, *Reader's Digest* ran a story about the attack on Mr. Chapple and the man who came to his rescue, titled "A Pit Bull Face-off."

The story ends with the statement, "a few months later, unable to rally from his wounds, the frail Chapple died."

On January 28, 2010, almost three years later, in an article titled "Memphis Councilman's Ordinance Would Put Bite on Pit Bulls," the *Commercial Appeal* reminded its readers of the incident, and again attributed Chapple's death to injuries caused by the dogs.

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## NCRC Investigation:

Experience has shown us that any fatality initially reported as a dog bite related fatality should be confirmed from coroners' reports or death certificates to ensure the accuracy of fatality statistics. This is especially important when the victim of a dog attack has died a significant time after the incident. Since Mr. Chapple had died more than 3 months after he was reported to have been attacked by two dogs, NCRC contacted the Shelby County Medical Examiner to determine the cause of his death.

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## Results of Investigation:\*

Manner of Death:	Natural
Cause of Death:	Hypertensive and atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease
Contributory Factors:	None
Health history:	Epilepsy, hypertension, Hepatitis C and Central Cord Syndrome from trauma. (Mr. Chapple had broken his neck four or five years previous.)

\*Source: Shelby County Medical Examiner Report of Autopsy Examination, dated October 10, 2007.