

by Justin Crockett

Death is in the shadows, waiting for us all. It's an inevitable trade-off for the life we live, and it's not just a fact for us normal working folk. Try as they might, celebrities have to face the reaper as well at some point. And boy did I get cthe we lose some big ones in 2021.

Hank Aaron slugged his way into the grave. DMX, too. Screech from *Saved by the Bell* couldn't be saved by the, uh, bell. Even the fricking drummer kid from *School of Rock* died this year. With these big names leaving us, it's easy to miss the deaths of some other truly notable people who did amazing things. Here we say goodbye to some people whose endings might not have gotten the biggest headlines.

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January 7: A Manager's Manager



W

Tommy Lasorda, MLB manager.

How?

[Heart attack](#).

His Story:

There was a certain type of baseball manager that existed in the 1970s and 80s that isn't really around anymore. They were spitfires, bumping chests with the umpires and cursing out the media on a weekly basis. Tommy Lasorda of the Los Angeles Dodgers was the leader of them all.

He took over the team in 1976, and started off a franchise run of success that culminated in World Series wins in 1981 and 1988. He also just had fun with the job. He playfully [fought the Philadelphia team mascot](#), he torched a reporter with f-bombs when another player roughed up his team, and he laughed it off when an errant bat made him go ass-over-teakettle in an All-Star Game. Tommy bled Dodger blue. Except for now. Now all of the blood has been drained out of him completely.

February 8: The Longest Lasting Supreme



Who?

Mary Wilson, singer and Supremes group member.

How?

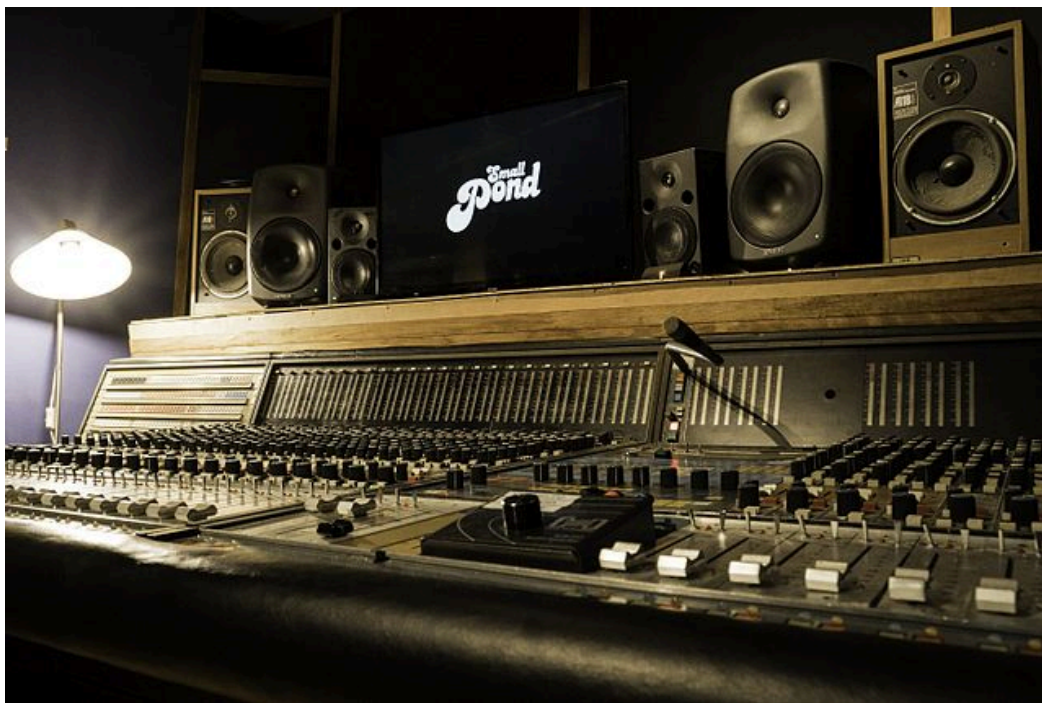
Hypertensive arteriosclerotic cardiovascular disease.

Her Story:

When you think of the legendary group The Supremes, you probably first think of Diana Ross, and that's fair. She had the most success. But she wasn't the longest-tenured member of the group. That honor goes to Mary Wilson, who co-founded the group when she was 15, leaving the housing projects of Detroit behind.

She was there from the first infectious rash of inescapable hits in 1964, all the way through 1977 when the Ross-less Supremes finally disbanded. And it's not like the group fell apart when Diana left -- they still had some hits in the tank. Wilson, however, was probably happy Ross left. In her tell-all book, she writes of diva behavior and Ross actually shoving her to the side of the stage at the Supremes' mini-reunion in 1983.

February 12: A Sound Pioneer



Who?

Rupert Neve, audio engineer and inventor.

How?

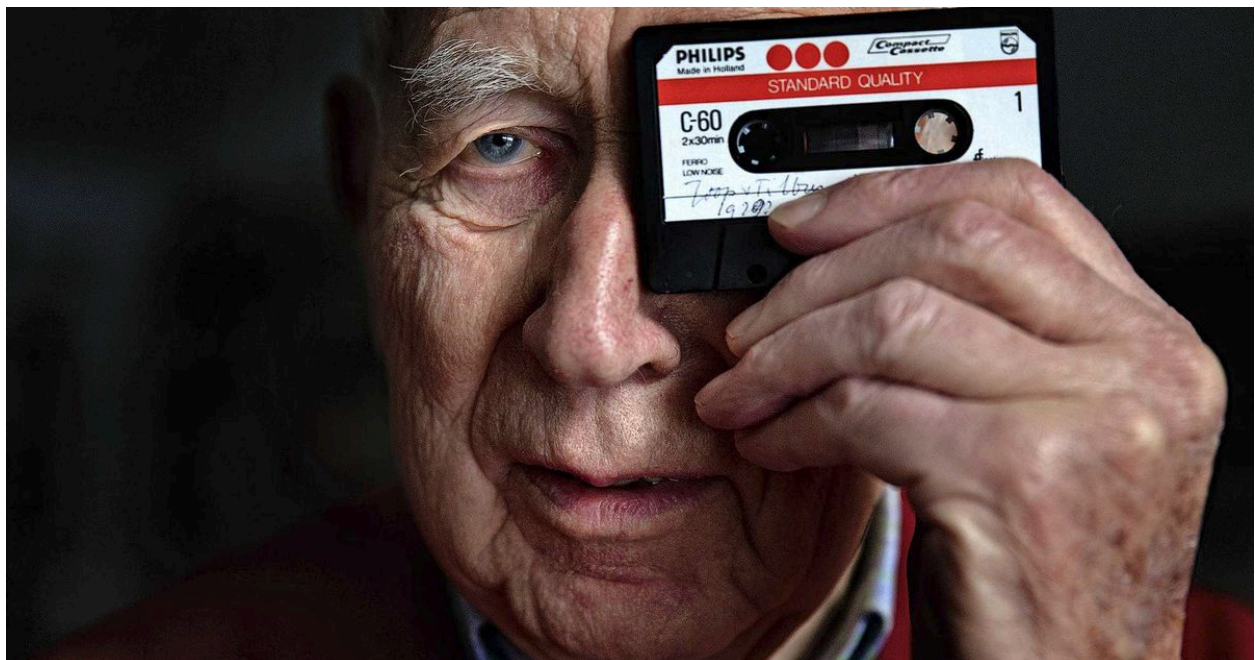
Congestive heart failure.

His Story:

Without getting too nerdy with engineering and audio details, suffice it to say Rupert Neve had a hand in creating some of the most important music albums of all time. He [created the Neve 8028 mixing board](#), which produced a sound unlike any other, and every important band clamored to get into a studio that had a Neve console.

One such studio that had a Neve was Sound City Studios in Los Angeles, which was the subject of a recent Dave Grohl documentary. Fleetwood Mac, The Grateful Dead, Tom Petty, and Carlos Santana are just a few of the artists who made some of their most classic work while plugged into Rupert Neve's nerve center of a machine. So when you think good, raunchy classic rock, think of good ole Rupert.

March 6: The King Of Cassettes



Who?

Lou Ottens, inventor

How?

Undisclosed.

His Story:

There's a pretty straight line throughout the history of music consumption: first there were records, then tapes, then CDs, and now everyone listens to robots singing through a streaming service that plays into their little white earbuds. The hassle of going to a music store and finding like-minded music fans and then stumbling upon a musical gem is now replaced with having access to every bad album all at once.

Back to those tapes, though. Cassette tapes ruled the freaking universe in the 1980s. But Lou Ottens [actually developed those things back in 1963](#). Once they became portable (and recordable), cassettes exploded, especially when the Sony Walkman came out in 1979. Otten even had a hand in the medium that killed the cassette, when he helped develop the compact disc in the same year that his tapes hit their cultural zenith. Way to think of the future while also putting a knife in the stomach of the past!

March 15: One Helluva Character Actor



Who?

Yaphet Kotto, actor.

How?

Unknown.

His Story:

You probably most recognize him as Parker in *Alien*, where he witnessed a chest-bursting xenomorph jump out of his crew buddy's body. But Yaphet Kotto [stole the scene](#) in so many TV shows and movies. He absolutely ran *Homicide: Life on the Street*, he helped Schwarzenegger beat the game in *The Running Man*, and gave De Niro a run for his money in *Midnight Run*.

But he also passed on some truly stunning roles, some of which could have made him a bonafide megastar. He was offered the role of Lando Calrissian in *The Empire Strikes Back*, but so soon after *Alien*, Kotto wanted something more earthbound. Perhaps that's why he also turned down a chance to play Jean-Luc Picard on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. He said it best himself: "Don't pull the same trick twice."

March 23: One Terrible TV Mother



Who?

Jessica Walter, actress.

How?

Undisclosed.

Her Story:

Jessica Walter was an instant legend as Lucille Bluth, *Arrested Development's* absolute shitshow of a mother figure. Her sass and skin-crawlingly awkward wink were enough to carry an actress through an entire career, but she had a [long and fruitful career](#) well before she was ruining any chance that Buster Bluth had at a normal adulthood.

She started out on Broadway, then jumped into the movie and TV world not long after. She made a name for herself in Clint Eastwood's debut as a director, *Play Misty For Me*, which is definitely not the name of a porno. You may also remember her spunky voice as Malory, from the TV show *Archer*, which had its fair share of memorable voices. Jessica Walter was the most cutting and authoritative of them all.

March 23: One Craft Music Biz Lady



Who?

Ethel Gabriel, record producer.

How?

Complications from dementia.

Her Story:

Try to rattle off the names of some of the most famous female record producers, and we'll sit and watch you futilely board the struggle bus. While Berry Gordy, Ahmet Ertegun, and Phil Spector were galavanting around town, females were largely kept quiet in the record producing world. Ethel Gabriel was having none of that.

For over forty years, she was the [sole female producer at RCA Records](#), which was not a small company. She was initially chosen as the head of a little-known division of RCA that was considered destined to fail. It was called the Camden label, and was a budget line of records consisting of re-recordings of bigger-name artists. Ethel Gabriel took that label, and added an orchestra called Living Strings, who would do symphonic versions of huge hits that would then be played in offices, stores, and everywhere else schmaltzy music was played. Thank Ms. Gabriel for making your dental visit a little more toe-tappy.

April 3: The Heart Of The *Playhouse*



Who?

John Paragon, actor.

How?

Heart disease.

His Story:

“Mekka lekka hi, make a hiney hole,” was what most kids heard when Pee Wee Herman’s disembodied head of a friend began his incantation from within his magical box. On *Pee Wee’s Playhouse*, he and his friends would carouse around the coolest clubhouse you could ever imagine. From talking recliners to a globe literally called Globey, the tv show made kids stay kids for just a little while longer.

Jambi was the aforementioned head in a box, the second in recorded film history and way before Gwyneth Paltrow. John Paragon didn’t just play the genie, he [wrote many of the episodes](#) and even got an Emmy for his work. He actually got his start with the famous Groundlings comedy troupe, which also spouted out famed funnypeople like Will Ferrell and Pee Wee himself.

April 28: Apollo 11’s Third Wheel



Who?

Michael Collins, astronaut.

How?

Cancer.

His Story:

Quick! Name the third guy that was on the space mission that first landed on the moon! You got Buzz Aldrin, then Neil Armstrong, then ... Rusty? Grimshaw?? No, you silly butt, it was Michael Collins. In 1969, he did more than his fair share to steer a hunk of metal towards the most popular rock in our nighttime sky.

Sure, Michael Collins didn't actually get to drop his boots on the moon surface, but he maneuvered the command module [exactly to where it needed to go](#) in the vast unknown of space. As the pilot, setting feet on the lunar ground sure as hell wouldn't have mattered much if you couldn't get there safely. Michael Collins was like the bass player of the first successful moon mission: he didn't get a whole lot of attention, but you would totally have known if he wasn't there.

May 7: The First Rockstar Supermodel



Who?

Tawny Kitaen, actress and model.

How?

Dilated cardiomyopathy.

Her Story:

The band Whitesnake had a couple of megahit songs in the 1980s, with “Here I Go Again” and “Still of the Night”. But save for the lead singer, these fellas weren’t as pretty as your Def Leppards or Poisons. But they had an ace up their sleeve when they met [model Tawny Kitaen](#), who proceeded to writhe all over a car hood on the videos for those songs on MTV, straight into every young boy’s heart.

Kitaen wasn’t just a pretty face, though. She’d already appeared in the early Tom Hanks movie *Bachelor Party*, and would do some TV on *Seinfeld*, and then co-host *America’s Funniest People*. After her stint in the music videos, she would go on to marry Whitesnake singer David Coverdale, who presumably took great pains to not rock out in front of her, lest his cars get dented by her antics once again.

May 19: Another Olympic Civil Rights Champion



Who?

Lee Evans, Olympic gold medal sprinter.

How?

[Stroke.](#)

His Story:

The 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City were rife with protests relating to racial tensions that were coming to a head in nearby America. You may remember the fists raised in the air from Tommy Smith and John Carlos, a tribute to the Black Panther that nonetheless earned the two a boot from the Games.

Lee Evans was another member of this record-breaking U.S. track team, and when he won his own gold medal in the relay race, he donned a black beret, another tribute to the Black Panther party. While he didn't get as many headlines as the two who raised their fists in solidarity, he was just as much an influence on the team as a whole. He was also stunningly fast, becoming the first man to run the 400 meter race in under 44 seconds. That record would stand for over twenty years, while his statements at the Games, though not as publicized as his teammates', will last forever.

May 19: A Funnyman With A Mission



Who?

Paul Mooney, comedian.

How?

Heart attack.

His Story:

When you've collaborated with the likes of Richard Pryor and Dave Chappelle, that's not bad company at all. Comedian Paul Mooney wasn't just a comedian, though. He had more to say than jokes, though. Like Chappelle and Pryor, he also had a lot to say about the state of things in the country for black folks, and while that got him labelled as "controversial", it was more just opening peoples' eyes to how things were going for people of color.

He was also a [hell of a writer](#), heading up the writing staff for *The Richard Pryor Show*. He also wrote for some classic sitcoms like *Good Times* and *In Living Color*. You may also remember his appearance on *Chappelle's Show*, especially his "Mooney on Movies" segments, where he would delightfully skewer some of the more garbage output that Hollywood is capable of.

June 3: One Of The Thirty O.J. Lawyers



Who?

F. Lee Bailey, attorney.

How?

Undisclosed.

His Story:

The murder trial for O.J. Simpson was one of the most publicized and divisive events of our lifetime. Perhaps a very strong reason he was found not guilty in the original trial was due to the fact that he had most of the working defense lawyers in the Northern Hemisphere working for

him. F. Lee Bailey was one of the famous “Dream Team”, along with Johnnie Cochran, Robert Shapiro, Darryl Strawberry, the kid from Goonies with the slick shoes, and a potato.

F. Lee Bailey had long [made his name before this trial](#), though. He got a guy off (behave) that allegedly murdered his wife and later was the inspiration for *The Fugitive*. He also chose defendants like The Boston Strangler, so maybe he had a type? Bailey joined the O.J. squad just in time to grill LAPD detective Mark Fuhrman, and caught the policeman in a lie about using a racial slur, at a time when the tide was turning against the prosecution in a big way.