

13 People Who Faked Their Own Deaths

People often fake their own deaths to get out of trouble, whether they're escaping a threat, debt, or a prison sentence. Check out these notable cases

Lauren Cahn, RD

Aimee Semple McPherson

On May 18, 1926, Canadian-born evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson disappeared while swimming at a Los Angeles beach. As rescue teams searched for her, one team member died, and a grief-struck follower of the charismatic religious leader drowned herself in despair. Five weeks passed, and McPherson turned up in Mexico, claiming to have gone off the grid in the course of fleeing would-be kidnappers. The kidnapping story seemed shady and was investigated as a possible fraud. However, it remained unresolved until McPherson's *actual* death in 1944.

Lisbon, Portugal. Or so he made it seem. Three weeks later, he turned up alive and well in Berlin. Turns out, it was all an elaborate hoax that he'd planned with an acquaintance, the poet Fernando Pessoa. His motives remain unclear, but it's possible he did it to get away from a woman with whom he'd been traveling and with whom he'd grown bored. Is it any wonder Crowley's been called "the wickedest man in the world"?

Juan Pujol Garcia

When World War II ended in Europe, British spy Juan Pujol Garcia, with the help of his MI5 handlers, faked his own death by malaria in order to keep a surreptitious eye on Germany. His wife never believed it and wasn't surprised when he turned up four decades later, having been outed by an investigative reporter, Nigel West. Garcia was nicknamed "Agent Garbo" (because of his esteemed acting skills) and is one of Europe's most celebrated spies. Read about 16 of the strangest unsolved mysteries of all time.

Reverend Philip St. John Ross

When the Reverend Philip St. John Wilson Ross, an English vicar, drowned during a seaside holiday in August 1955, his wife and congregation mourned his tragic death... until two years later, when he was spotted in Switzerland with another woman, Kathleen Ryall. He had faked his death and was living with Miss Ryall under the assumed names Mr. and Mrs. Davies.

Aleister Crowley

In September, 1930, Crowley, a self-proclaimed prophet and founder of the religion Thelema, jumped off a cliff near



Lord Lucan

Richard John Bingham, the 7th Earl of Lucan, was a relative by marriage to Diana, Princess of Wales. Lord Lucan, as he was commonly known, disappeared in November 1974 following the murder of his children's nanny and the assault of his wife, who immediately identified the attacker as Lucan. His abandoned car was eventually recovered with an empty bottle of prescription pills inside, making it seem as if Lucan had killed himself. But it's been widely rumored that Lucan faked his death, with the assistance of his wealthy and connected friends.

John Stonehouse

British politician and member of Parliament John Stonehouse drowned in Florida in 1974—conveniently, it seemed, since he was heavily in debt. Two months later, he was discovered in Australia where he was living under an assumed name. At first, it was suspected he was Lord Lucan because Lucan had disappeared earlier that year. In 1976, Stonehouse was convicted of fraud and related offenses and served three years before being released on parole. Check out 8 of the most bizarre historical coincidences.

Takashi Mori

In 1995, Takashi Mori, a 47-year old Japanese man living in the Philippines, faked his death with the help of his 21-year-old son, so that his family could collect on his life insurance policy, which was worth at least five million U.S. dollars. They then hurried off to Japan to live on their ill-gotten gains. Nine months after his "death," Mori was discovered to be living in Manila. He was arrested for insurance fraud, along with his son and wife who were deported from Japan.

Patrick McDermott

Patrick McDermott was the boyfriend of actress and singer Olivia Newton-John. On a

fishing trip to Mexico in June 2005, McDermott disappeared. Although he's never been seen again, the circumstances of his disappearance have led to speculation that McDermott faked his death to avoid substantial debts, including child support payments to his ex-wife (not Newton-John). Check out these 14 other infamous celebrity death hoaxes.

John Darwin

Pictured here with his wife, Anne, John Darwin apparently drowned while canoeing in the North Sea in 2002. In reality, the Darwins were looking for a life insurance payout. In 2007, Darwin turned up in a London police station, pretending to have amnesia. Unfortunately for him, someone found a photo of the couple in Panama, where they were looking to buy property. The Darwins were sentenced to six years in prison for fraud and related charges. Anne ended up divorcing John and wrote a book about her experiences called *Out of My Depth*.

Samuel Israel

Former hedge fund manager Samuel Israel had been convicted of running a Ponzi scheme and was to report to prison on June 9, 2008. Instead, Israel abandoned his car alongside the Bear Mountain Bridge in upstate New York, the words "suicide is painless" written in the dust on the hood. Given the circumstances, the authorities didn't believe for a second that Israel had killed himself. He hadn't. Instead, he was hiding out with his girlfriend in an RV parked off a nearby interstate. He turned himself in after a month; Israel is still very much alive and in prison. Here are 15 more of the unluckiest criminals ever.

Stephen Kellaway

While on a visit to Russia in 2008, Stephen Kellaway and his wife tried a risky scheme:

She reported him dead and then returned to their home in Britain and presented the Russian death certificate she'd obtained for her husband. Two years later, Stephen came forward, admitting his death had been faked in order to duck an investigation into insurance fraud (he had made an insurance claim on his business, which he then used to pay for his wife's breast augmentation surgery). The *Daily Mail* reports that Kellaway was inspired by John Darwin's faked death. These are the craziest pop culture conspiracy theories of all time.

Lenin Carballido

This politician pulled off quite the electoral feat: Lenin Carballido was elected mayor of a village in Mexico in 2013, three years *after* he had "died" due to complications from diabetes. When his election news spread, police began investigating and determined he'd faked the death to escape rape accusations dating back to 2004.

Arkady Babchenko

In 2018, Russian journalist Arkady Babchenko dramatically faked his own death with the help of Ukraine security services. A contract had been taken out on Babchenko's life, so the security forces planned an "assassination" in his apartment, with a fake assailant and loads of pig blood. At the morgue, Babchenko cleaned up and watched the news of his death on television. Once the threat was eliminated, Babchenko revealed the truth. "We are happy that Arkady is alive and that his attempted murder was prevented," a media watchdog group told the *Guardian*. Nevertheless, "everybody now feels manipulated." Don't miss these 15 mysterious celebrity deaths that are still unexplained.