

**75 Years of Mystery Unfolds, Part V: Aliases: Sleuthing with a
Pseudonym
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Outwitting criminals with an alias was a staple of the classic Nancy Drew series. Of course, it helped when the crooks were not too bright or the alias too transparent. Poised to sleuth, often traveling to a location outside of River Heights, one would think Nancy Drew might not be as well known as she was in her hometown. Often a situation arose where Nancy needed an alias to keep her identity a secret while she searched for hidden clues. Unfortunately, many of her aliases were discovered and she received phone threats or the people she was fooling received a letter telling them who she really was.

In *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, revised text, “To avoid rousing suspicion, Nancy would pretend to be an actress named Dru Gruen.” (p. 146) This alias combined a different spelling of Drew for her first name and the last name of the Drew’s housekeeper, Hannah. Luckily, Nancy was not trying to outwit the criminals with this alias—she was just prying for information from Gay Moreau’s old theater friend.

In the revision of *The Whispering Statue*, Nancy decides to disguise herself at Carson Drew’s suggestion, and becomes “Debbie Lynbrook” in a black wig. In a case of “dumb criminal syndrome,” while goons of villain Mr. Basswood are searching for Nancy and calling her home in River Heights, no one figures out that Nancy is really Debbie. Mr. Basswood wails after being caught, “Your hair! You were wearing a wig that half-covered your face! You’re Nancy Drew, not Debbie Lynbrook!” (p. 173)

By the time *The Moonstone Castle Mystery* is published, the villains have become a bit smarter. Nancy decides, “Bess, I’d still like to keep my identity here a secret.” They are in Deep River Valley snooping for information from old-timer Mrs. Hemstead at the Brass Kettle tearoom. Nancy becomes “Irene Insbruck,” a character she played in a theater production once upon a time. Nancy manages to get some information from Mrs. Hemstead until an anonymous note is received declaring, “Don’t be fooled. The girl calling herself Irene Insbruck is really Nancy Drew. She’s a detective. Beware what you say to her or you may get into trouble.” (p. 87.) Nancy deviously plays the “I can keep a secret too” routine to gain more information from Mrs. Hemstead, foiling the villain’s note scheme.

Villains have taken self improvement classes in *Mystery of Crocodile Island* and *The Thirteenth Pearl*. *Crocodile Island* involved a trip to Florida and the need for an alias. Bess, George, and Nancy decided to use aliases—Bess would be Elizabeth, Nancy would be Anne, and George refused to be Georgia and settled for Jackie. As Anne Boonton, Nancy and her chums ended up locked in a house by the fake “Cosgroves.” Later, Nancy received a phone threat, “You’re Nancy Drew. We know all about you. If you and your friends don’t leave Florida at once, you’ll *never* get home again!” (p. 89) Near the end of *Thirteenth Pearl*, Nancy and Ned attend a party for the fake “Tanya Rossmeyer” to snoop for clues and “On the spur of the moment, she decided not to use her right name. ‘I’m Nan Drewry’ she added, ‘and this is my friend, Edward Nickson.’ ” (p. 151) As transparent as these aliases were, it was no wonder that they ended up locked in a hallway. Ned’s “profound” comments about the fake “Tanya Rossmeyer” looking decked out like a Christmas Tree may not have helped either.

Whether it was her use of a transparent alias like “Nan Drewry” or her lack of a disguise in using an alias like “Anne Boonton,” most of Nancy’s aliases turned out to be bad adventures in sleuthing.

Sleuthing Tips Learned from Bad Aliases:

1. It’s not a good idea to use an alias similar to your own name! *The Thirteenth Pearl*.
2. An alias works best when combining a disguise such as a wig. *The Whispering Statue*, revision.
3. An alias works even better with dumb criminals. *The Whispering Statue*, revision.
4. If you think up an alias on the spur of the moment, you might get locked in a hallway by your enemies! *The Thirteenth Pearl*.
5. If the person hiring you to do detective work has a blabbermouth friend, you’d be smart to use an alias and a disguise! *The Whispering Statue*, revision.
6. The names of characters you’ve played in the theater make good aliases until someone writes the town gossip a letter telling her who you are! *The Moonstone Castle Mystery*.
7. If your chum suggests that you disguise yourselves with quick tanning lotion and wigs and you disregard her advice, hindsight may hit you big time as you’re receiving a threatening phone call about not being who you really say you are! *Mystery of Crocodile Island*.
8. Aliases work best with nice people who wouldn’t know you from Adam. *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*.

(*75 Years of Mystery Unfolds* is a continuing series of articles dedicated to the 75 year history of the Nancy Drew series, running during 2005 in *The Sleuth* (www.nancydrewsleuth.com/thesleuth.html) and *The Whispered Watchword*. Look for part 6 in the April 2005 issue of *The Sleuth* and part 7 in the May issue of *The Whispered Watchword*.)