



## Books That Were Originally Self-Published

Many famous books got their start being published by the author; some still are. Self-publishing is an early-American tradition. In the early days of the New World, the person with the printing press was often the author, publisher, printer and bookshop. Some people think that most of those who self-publish do so because several publishers have turned them down. That is occasionally true. However, most people today weigh the advantages and disadvantages of selling out to a publisher and make an educated decision to publish themselves. Those who self-publish find they make more money, get to press sooner and keep control of their work.

Self-publishing should not be confused with “Vanity” publishing where an author pays (an exorbitant price to) a publisher to turn his or her manuscript into a book. Here is a partial list:

- *What Color is Your Parachute* by Episcopal clergymen Richard Nelson Bolles. 22 editions, 6 million copies, 11 languages and 288 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Now published by Ten Speed Press.
- *The Christmas Box* by Rick Evans. The 87-page book took him six weeks to write. He published it and promoted it himself. It did so well he sold out to Simon & Schuster for \$4.2 million. It hit the top of the *Publishers Weekly* bestseller list and was translated into 13 Languages.
- *The Beanie Baby Handbook* by Lee and Sue Fox sold three million copies in two years and made #2 on the New York Time Bestseller list.
- *In Search of Excellence* by Tom Peters. More than 25,000 copies were sold directly to consumers in its first year. Then it was sold to Warner and the publisher sold 10 million more.
- *Real Peace*—Richard Nixon in 1983.
- *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield. His manuscript made the rounds of the mainstream houses and then he decided to publish himself. He started by selling copies out of the trunk of his Honda—over 100,000 of them. He subsequently sold out to Warner Books for \$800,000. The number-one bestseller in 1996, it spent 165 weeks on *The New York Times* Bestseller list. More than 5.5 million copies have been sold.
- *The One-Minute Manager* by Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson sold more than 20,000 copies locally before they sold out to William Morrow. It has now sold more than 12-million copies since 1982 and is in 25 languages.
- *Fifty Simple Things You Can Do to Save the Earth* spent seven months on the *New York Times* bestseller list and sold 4.5 million copies in its original and premium editions.
- *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. (and his student E. B. White) as originally self-published for his classes at Cornell University in 1918. Now selling some 300,000 copies each year, more than 10 million have been sold so far.
- *A Time to Kill* by John Grisham. He sold his first work out of the trunk of his car.



- *The Joy of Cooking* by Irma Rombauer was self-published in 1931 as a project of the First Unitarian Women's Alliance in St. Louis. Today Scribners sells more than 100,000 copies each year.
- *How to Keep Your Volkswagen Alive* by John Muir has sold 2.3 million copies since 1969 and led to the establishment of a publishing company.
- *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun* by Wess Roberts sold 486,000 copies before selling out to Warner Books.
- *Embraced by the Light* by Betty J. Eadie spent 76 weeks on the *New York Times* Hardcover Bestseller List, 123 weeks on the Paperback List and was sold to Bantam Books for \$1.5-million. The audio rights brought in another \$100,000. Then she established Onjinjinkta Publishing to publisher her future projects.
- *Sugar Busters!* by four Louisiana doctors and a former CEO sold 165,000 copies regionally in just a year and a half. Then they sold out to Ballantine Books. It spent 192 weeks on PWs bestseller list. There are more than 2 million in print after 49 printings.
- *The Wealthy Barber* by David Chilton has sold more than a million copies in Canada (second only to the *Bible* in Canada) and two million in the US.
- *When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple* has been through the press 42 times for 1.5 million in print. It allowed Sanda Haldeman Martz to build Paper Mâché Press.
- *Mary Ellen's Best of Helpful Hints* by Mary Ellen Pinkham became a bestseller and then she sold out to Warner Books.
- *The Macintosh Bible* by Arthur Naiman has become the best-selling book on Apple products with over 900,000 sold.
- *Dianetics* by L. Ron Hubbard has been in print more than 45 years, 20 million copies are in print and it has been translated into 22 languages. The book started a movement and later a church.
- *Mutant Message Down Under* by Marlo Morgan sold 370,000 copies before it was sold to HarperCollins for \$1.7 million. It was sold to two book clubs and the foreign rights were sold to 14 countries.
- *Feed Me, I'm Yours* by Vicky Lansky was rejected by 49 publishers so she self-published and sold 300,000 copies. She sold out to Bantam and they sold 8 million more. Since then, she has written 23 more books.
- *The Encyclopedia of Associations* by Frederick Ruffner led to the establishment of Gale Research Company with 500 employees.
- *The Lazy Man's Way to Riches*. Joe Karbo never sold out and never courted bookstores. He sold millions of his books via full page ads in newspapers and magazines.
- *Twelve Golden Threads* by Aliske Webb was rejected by 150 publishers. After self-publishing and selling 25,000 copies, she signed a four-book contract with HarperCollins.
- *Life's Little Instruction Book* was initially self-published by H. Jackson Brown. Then it was purchased by Rutledge Hill Press. It made the top of the *New York Times* Bestseller List in hardcover and soft at the same time. More than 5 million copies were sold.
- *The Jester Has Lost His Jingle* by Barbara Salzman was turned down by eight publishers. The glossy hardcover book made it to *The New York Times* Bestsellers list.



- *Let's Cook Microwave* by Barbara Harris sold more than 700,000 copies.
- *Juggling for the Complete Klutz* by John Cassidy has sold more than two million copies and led to the establishment of Klutz Press with more than 50 award-winning books.
- Ben Dominitz published *Travel Free* and then founded Prima Publishing. Prima now has 1,500 titles, 140 employees and does \$60-million a year.
- *How to Flatten Your Stomach* by Jim Everrode was self-published before he sold out to Price\Stern\Sloan. Since then, the book has sold more than two-million copies.
- *Robert's Rules of Order* was first published by Henry Martyn Robert, an Army engineering officer in 1876. It is now in its ninth revised edition. See <http://RobertsRules.com>
- *Red Sky in Mourning* by Tami Oldham Ashcraft and Susea McGearhart was self-published and then sold to Hyperion for an estimated \$500,000.
- Stephen King self-published an eBook titled *The Plant* and sold it online for \$1/chapter.
- *The Guide to Getting it on* was self-published by Paul Joannides was turned down by a number of publishers as being too racy. After being adopted as a text by more than 20 colleges and selling 150,000 copies, many of those same publishers approached him with offers.
- *Diets Don't Work* has sold more than 600,000 copies since being self-published in 1982.
- *Howe!*, published in 1995 by Colleen & hockey great Gordie Howe has sold nearly 135,000 copies in hardcover and raised \$1 million for charitable causes.
- *Dry It! You'll Like It* (the bible of food dehydrating, essentially) by Gen MacManiman is now in its 29th printing since 1973 with 280,000 sold.
- *Life's Greatest Lessons: 20 things I want my kids to know* by Hal Urban was published by Nelson in 1992. It sold 16,000 copies. Urban republished it himself and sold 60,000 copies. In 2001, he sold out to Simon & Schuster for low six-figures.
- Karen E. Quinones-Miller sold 24,000 copies of her self-published novel, *Satin Doll* in 8 months. *Satin Doll* was sold to Simon & Schuster in auction less than one year after it was released.
- Mary E. Morrison had similar success with her book *Soul Mates Dissipate*, selling 10,000 books in six months and getting a six figure deal with Kensington.
- Jane Nelsen self-published, "Positive Discipline" and sold 80,000 copies before selling out to Ballantine, an imprint of Random House. It has now sold close to one million copies.
- Jane Nelsen self-published "Understanding: Four Principles for Eliminating Stress" and sold 40,000 before selling out to Prima, who renamed the book, "From Here to Serenity" and sold another 40,000. Random House sold out to Three Rivers Press, and imprint of Random House.
- H. Stephen Glenn and Jane Nelsen self published, "Raising Children for Success" and sold 20,000 copies before selling to Prima who renamed the book, "Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World." It has now sold close to 300,000 copies. Prima sold out to Three Rivers Press, an imprint of Random House.



- *The Self-Publishing Manual* by Dan Poynter has 190,000 copies in print after 15 revised editions since 1979. The publisher is Para Publishing (Dan Poynter). As a result of this book, Poynter has been called “the godfather to thousands of books.”

Other well-known self-publishers include: Deepak Chopra, Louise Hay, Mark Twain, Ken Keyes, Jr., Gertrude Stein, Zane Grey, Upton Sinclair, Carl Sandburg, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Stephen Crane, Mary Baker Eddy, George Bernard Shaw, Anais Nin, Thomas Paine, Virginia Wolff, e.e. Cummings, William Blake, Edgar Allen Poe, Rudyard Kipling, Henry David Thoreau, Benjamin Franklin, Walt Whitman, Alexandre Dumas, William E.B. DuBois, and Robert Ringer.

**More rejection numbers:**


Dr. Seuss – 23 rejections

M\*A\*S\*H - 22 rejections

Jonathan Livingston Seagull – 18 rejections. It was first published in three articles in Private Pilot magazine.

The Peter Principle – 16 rejections

Kon-Tiki – 20 rejections

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