

First Time Author Sells 21,000 in Ten Months [Edit](#)

By [Mark Paul](#) | November 9, 2020 |

How an Unknown Author Sold 21,000 Books in Ten Months & Optioned the Book for a Hollywood Movie Deal.

Racehorses are born knowing how to run. But, unlike Seabiscuit on the track, I had no idea what I was doing when I first decided to write a book.

Thirty years ago, I had experienced a true-life, frightening, adventure involving both a Mexican drug cartel and the Kentucky Derby. I was dying to share my story with an audience and had always planned to write a book. When I finally sat down at my computer to write the story...I was compelled to get to the finish line with a winning manuscript.

My memories of the adventure needed a refresh, and I knew I'd have to do other research about the 1988 Kentucky Derby. In developing the story about a billionaire owner of an NFL football team, a famous racehorse trainer, and one of the richest men in Mexico who was suspected of being a cartel leader, I knew if I got the facts wrong, I could be sued—or worse. I spent three months doing research.

At first, I chose to write as a first-person narrator. After all, it was my story. It didn't work, and I tore up my first draft. I started writing again, using third-person point of view, and was delighted to feel freer; I got myself out of the way. I studied the genre of creative non-fiction and knew it would work. For inspiration, I watched every gambling movie ever made and hated them all because each had a depressing ending. My book had to be fun; I wanted to recreate the colorful gamblers and other deranged characters I'd met during the adventure!



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What a joyous five months I spent writing the first draft! Bouncing out of bed at 5:30 am, seven days per week to write in the quiet of the dawn, I was giddy, happy, and joyful to be doing something creative after decades of working in real estate. I was doing something new! I was so enthusiastic I wanted my friends to read the story! Who was the first reader? My wife, of course. From her I learned my female characters needed rewrites to depict their real-life personalities in more powerful ways. So, I rewrote, again, and again. Through her wisdom, I got the book out of my man cave and into the light of day. I spent days writing the characters and dialog for the women of my story and shared them with her (to bask in the brilliance I had created). She still told me that my female characters remained one-dimensional, especially the leading female, Ava, who was a smart and feisty character in true life. I rewrote, again, and again.

The next readers were my golf buddies. They liked it! Except they told me I could not punctuate and apparently had never seen a comma before. I rewrote, again, and again.

I live in Los Angeles—where movie people are like mosquitos in Minnesota. I gave the book to a friend who is a prominent movie agent and producer. He actually read it! He asked if he could share it with professional script readers but warned that they would be brutal with their candor and advice. (OK, it was not really advice; more like aggressive, blunt trauma criticism).

One month later, I received their verdict: the manuscript is tragically flawed. It had a pulse but should be destroyed to avoid damage to the reading public. The producer was kind, however, and met with me for an hour to discuss the fact that I did have a great story...told from the wrong perspective. I had written a good story about gamblers. If I wanted a book that only appealed to gamblers, I had

done a decent job. I could sell 200 books and get back to my day job. But, if I wanted a book and perhaps a movie that everyone would want to read, the story had to be about the real heroine: the spectacular female racehorse, Winning Colors. She'd proven herself in a world championship against the male colts in the 1988 Kentucky Derby! He advised me to "make her the Sun that all the gamblers, and trainers, and Mexican cartel members orbited around." If I could write that story, men and women readers all over the world would be excited to read my book! Oh, and the professional script readers also told me the women characters in my book were *still* poorly written. I rewrote, again, and again.

Three months later, I made the wise decision to hire a professional editor. I was introduced to Mary Holden by another new author and sent the manuscript to her. She loved the story and was enthusiastic even as she gently told me how my writing needed to become more professional and showed me the way to become a better writer. I rewrote, again, and again.



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Now I had an edited first draft. What to do next? I had no idea. I asked a real estate marketing expert to prepare a draft book cover. I had some great photos of the 1988 Kentucky Derby, of Winning Colors, and the newspaper stories about the cartel murders. I took the manuscript to Kinko's and printed 25 copies, with color photos. I passed them out to more readers. Another good friend who loved the story shared it with a successful Hollywood cinematographer who gave it to a well-known producer. They loved my emotional story, felt my characters had a lot of heart, immediately optioning it for a movie.

Now that I had a finished, well-edited, revised manuscript in final draft, I needed a publisher. The book was sent to 40 publishers, of which 30 ignored it, eight declined it, two read it, and of those two, one said it needed to be rewritten "to be more literary."

I decided to gamble and self-publish. I found Stephanie Chandler and Authority Publishing. I bought Chandler's book, *The Nonfiction Book Publishing Plan: The Professional Guide to Profitable Self-Publishing*. I liked her professionalism and I hired her. She was the ultimate pro and knew how to do everything for publishing the eBook, paperback, and hardcover, and improving the book cover and book title. She also directed me to Findaway Voices to create an audiobook and sent me to www.authorbytes.com to create the book's website: <https://markpaulauthor.com>

The creation of a book video trailer for *The Greatest Gambling Story Ever Told* turned out to be a positive idea. I now had 57 seconds of video to share and market on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), my website, and other social media venues. I have had over 300,000 downloads.

In late January 2020, the book appeared on amazon.com. Only two books sold on the first day. Then I researched Amazon's "Keywords" by studying YouTube videos for hours. I bought some ads for the book on Amazon. I spent 30 hours the first week learning the system, and 20 hours every week for the next two months refining those ads.

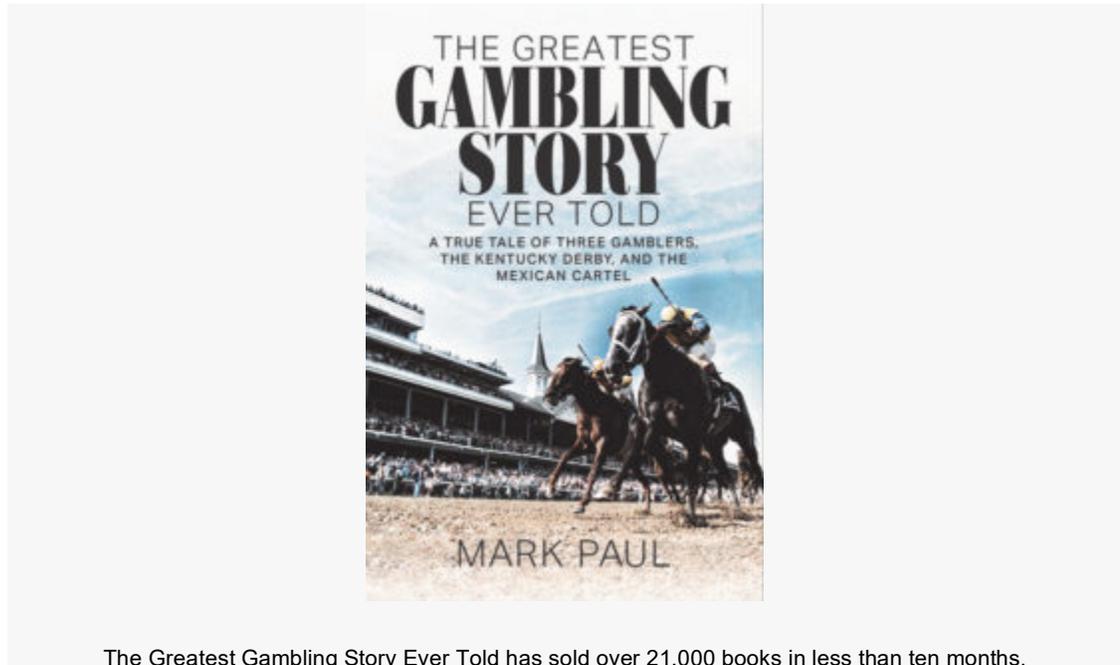
Selling this book was my new goal, but I had no idea if I would be successful. My hope was to sell at least 1,000 books, but I feared seeing weak numbers. And I might have—had I not used the ads—because they worked. In the first month, January, 162 books were sold; 740 in February; 1,113 in March, 3,067 in April. By May 2020, an additional 4,920 books sold for a total of 10,000 in under five months.

Then suddenly in month six my sales crashed, as many of the marketing things I was doing, just stopped working. My Amazon ads ceased their effectiveness, so I re-wrote them, adding the new reviews I had obtained from the LA Times and other well know publications and persons. Still my Amazon ad word sales were now only generating 20% as many sales as in the first six months. I still do not know why. However, the other marketing efforts I had started began to ramp up. I ran video ads using my Book Trailer on YouTube, and this worked. I had my media person run Google display, and video ads on [Facebook](#). I ran ads on horse racing web sites, and ads on [Twitter](#). I reached out to podcasters and was featured on six podcasts shows that I posted on my author web site. And I just kept selling books! I sold another 11,000 books in the next five months.

Last month the Hollywood producers sent me the script treatment and visual storyboard. I opened it up with trepidation. What would they do with my manuscript? It was an out of body experience first viewing how Hollywood would reenact my life story. They amped up the action, love scenes, and frightenedly recreated Mexican Cartel executions. I loved it!

Here are nine things I learned during my two-year writing and publishing journey:

1. Write a book for passion, not money. Writing is one of the greatest joys I have ever experienced. To unleash your creativity is to discover new things about yourself.



2. Writing and publishing is an expensive hobby. The book is now profitable, because I was fortunate to sell a lot of books after a big cash up-front outlay.
3. Hire professionals! You need pros to design your book cover and interior, to edit, release, and to encourage you every step along the way.
4. You must have great graphics for the book's cover and a unique, compelling title.
5. Ask friends if they are willing to beta read and critique your book as it goes from edit to edit. You cannot do this in a vacuum. You need feedback from smart, engaged, and honest readers.
6. Market, advertise, and promote your book every day!
7. Have a good story and great characters. Be a vivacious storyteller and have a payoff for the readers in the end.

8. Do not be afraid to self-publish or hire a paid publisher. I succeeded because I had the freedom to aggressively promote the book myself. And, I love controlling my own content and making my own marketing decisions.
9. Commit fully. You must tell everyone you have a great book and you are going to be a successful author. If you do not believe it, why will they?

I am working to find other creative ways to inspire people to read *The Greatest Gambling Story Ever Told* because it is so much more than just a few days at the races!

Mark Paul – Author – *The Greatest Gambling Story Ever Told*

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