

# homeless at nyu.com

## How Steve Stanzak's Blog Changed His Life

**How do you attract the attention of major media outlets such as *The New York Times*, CNN, and CBS News? Live in a library and blog about it.**

BY BRYON CAHILL

That's what 20-year-old Steve Stanzak, author of *Homeless at NYU* ([www.homelessatnyu.com](http://www.homelessatnyu.com)), did during his sophomore year at New York University (NYU) when he realized that his college financial aid package wasn't enough to cover his living costs. Without financial support from his parents and sensing his friends' warm welcomes wearing out, the creative-writing student from upstate New York secretly moved into the basement of NYU's Bobst Library.

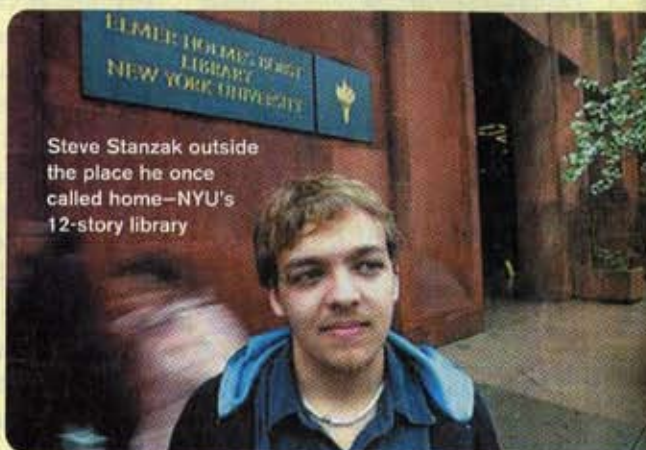
Instead of letting his situation get him down, the self-proclaimed "Bobst Boy" turned it into literary gold. He kept his living situation hidden from the authorities—but at the same time, he broadcast his secret to the world.

"My name is Steve and I live in a library," he wrote in his now-famous blog. "This monstrous building, this patchy behemoth that houses thousands upon thousands of books, also houses me, just another moldy story, filed away in some dark corner to be generally ignored."

### LIVING THE STORY

Steve recorded his experience in vivid detail in his online journal for the next eight months. He described what it was like to sleep on chairs, to take sink showers, to change in bathrooms, and to brush his teeth in spurts of fear.

"I often roam the library, a phantom-man that haunts the stacks, amongst the rectangular ghosts of dead writers," he wrote. "I feel that if I remain among the crinkly voices of these other ghosts that I shall fully become one myself, instead of some kind of half-spirit that only lives with them."



Steve Stanzak outside the place he once called home—NYU's 12-story library

Online, Steve might have been a romantic hero suffering for his art, but in person, he was exhausted, dirty, and in desperate need of a shower. With every word he

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—Steve Stanzak

wrote, he knew that he risked being thrown out of his "home" and possibly even kicked out of school. Still he kept writing, convinced that his unusual experiences as a homeless student were worth recording and that they were, indeed, rich writing material.

"I like to put myself into other people's perspectives," he told *Writing* in a recent interview. "Living inside a story is the best way to tell it."

And tell it well he did. From autumn to spring, Steve held his online audience captive with tales from his crypt.

### THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

Steve's following of NYU students grew daily. When he wrote that he dreamed about "fruity shampoo and white soap," people commented on his blog and offered him Strawberry Herbal Essences and other kinds of cleansing products.

"Amazing," one anonymous reader wrote in response to one of Steve's journal entries. "You're definitely one of a kind. Just when I think you've topped yourself ... there ya go again! I think it's absolutely wonderful what you're doing."

No one, least of all Steve, could have predicted the whirlwind of exposure that came abruptly on April 20 when his cover was blown.

### CAUGHT!

Steve was gearing up for his final exams when the NYU student newspaper, *Washington Square News*, printed a story about him.

After the article appeared, Steve was summoned to the dean's office. That night, he wrote in his blog, "I don't know what this will bring ... it's tough waiting for your doom to descend upon you."

Steve had braced himself for the worst, but to his surprise, the dean referred to his blog as "cute" and offered Steve free housing for the rest of the year. Of course, the rest of the year consisted of only three weeks, but at least



Steve grabs some shut-eye in Bobst Library.

he would be able to finally relax, forget about the library, and focus on his studies, right? Wrong!

### RIDING THE WAVE

Overnight, Steve went from an unkempt man of mystery to a worldwide celebrity. Reporters called from *The New York Times*. International papers such as *The Australian* and England's *The Guardian* got wind of the *Washington Square News* article and tracked him down. ABC News anchor Diane Sawyer invited him to be on *Good Morning America*.

Before the dust from the media frenzy had a chance to settle, literary agents were also knocking on Steve's door. Within weeks, the prominent literary agency International Creative Management (ICM) had offered to help him find a publisher.


ICM is one of the many literary agencies that help new authors get book deals. It also recognizes the value of the blog.

Kate Lee, Steve's literary agent, spends a part of each day mulling over 30 to 50 blogs, searching for the next great writer.

"Most writers are not getting published in magazines or literary journals," says Lee. "For some more unconventional voices ... blogs can be an entryway into the game."

Thanks to her, writers of blogs such as BuzzMachine ([www.buzzmachine.com](http://www.buzzmachine.com)) will soon see books with their names on the covers in stores. Steve may be next on the list.

Whenever he thinks about how he has gone from an unknown, invisible student to a writer on his way to a book and movie deal, Steve shakes his head in disbelief.

"My blog has really changed my life," he reflects. "Living in the library has strengthened my belief that there are an endless number of stories to be told. You just have to look for them." 

*Editor's note: This fall, Steve returned to his junior year at NYU and a comfortable bed.*

—Tyler Hilder/The New York Times

—Steve Stanzak