



# A CIGARETTE LOVE STORY

A PREGNANT HOMELESS WOMAN,  
A VIOLENT EX-HUSBAND,  
AND A SANDWICH-MAKING BOYFRIEND

*Stephanie Summer distributes the Homeless Voice in front of Lynx bus station while 6 months pregnant.*  
*Photo by Noelle Haro Gomez*

BY JORDAN GASS-POORE

Flick.

The lighter's flame warmed Stephanie Summers' lips as she relit her cigarette, burned down to a nub.

Embers fell onto Summers' neon yellow T-shirt, the back of which was purposefully tied into a knot to accentuate her bulging stomach. The State Plus Inn resident is 6 months pregnant with her fourth child.

Flick

Summers' fresh cigarette was perched between two fingers with chipped blue fingernail polish in one hand. In the other was a copy of The Homeless Voice newspaper that she was waving to no one near a street corner in downtown Orlando.

Backaches from a kidney infection and pregnancy were supposed to prevent Summers from vending. Then a Stay Plus Inn employee knocked on her door at 7 a.m. and told her to jump in a van with other vendors.

Tenants there choose to hock copies of The Homeless Voice for donations on various street corners in Orlando. The money is divvied 40/60 between vendors and the inn to help pay for food and accommodations.

Cory Anderson, Summers' boyfriend and roommate, handed The Homeless Voice to passersby alongside Summers. In the interim, he arranged wrapped sandwiches on a pile of ice in a red water cooler to keep the couple's lunch fresh.

As Summers popped mini-donuts into her mouth, Anderson encouraged her to eat a sandwich. Later, she replied. Two more packs of mini-donuts remained in a paper bag beside her.

She and Anderson simultaneously, almost telepathically, pulled out identical green packs of cigarettes from the pockets of their blue jeans.

Flick

They took deep drags on their cigarettes as they paced back-and-forth inside the "blue box," a rectangular space delineated by blue tick marks on the brick sidewalk where cash solicitation is allowed.

"I don't like asking for money," said Summers, exhaling a steady stream of smoke from her nostrils.

Copies of The Homeless Voice were stacked beside Anderson. He handed a free copy to an elderly man with a cane that walked by him. Have a good day.

"Nine times out of 10 they'll come back and give a donation," said Anderson, a friendly military brat, of his distribution practice.

This was the couple's first time vending. In their five day stay at the Stay Plus Inn they had previously carpooled with fellow tenants to help navigate the streets of downtown Orlando, Cory's hometown.

But Anderson said they would do anything to help financially support their unborn child, including standing for hours in the sun vending – and selling drugs, and turning tricks.

Whoosh

A bus rounded the corner in front of Summers, who stood in the shade of a small tree with wispy limbs. She rubbed her stomach. No more kicking. Sleep came seldom for Summers and Anderson, now that their unborn child kicked her stomach and his back while they spooned in bed at night.

"It's a boy," Summers said. A Florida doctor told her she was having twins. A doctor at Heart of Florida Regional Medical Center told her she was carrying "one large baby."

This will be Summers' fourth child, the second with Anderson. The Philadelphia native moved to Orlando in 1997. She met Anderson about a year later at an Extended Stay Hotel there, where she was staying with her husband. Summers ran away from her husband, who she said was physically and emotionally abusive, to be with Anderson.

Ding

Summers flipped her phone open and

scanned the text message. It was from her husband of a decade, her soon-to-be-ex-husband. He wanted to know why her brother didn't show up to work on a construction project with him.

"I was wondering how he got my number," Summers said. Her brother had given it to her husband. Anderson pricked at the mention of the men. There was bad blood between them.

The Florida Department of Children and Families gave Summers' children – a 2-, 5- and 9-year-old – to her husband's mother in Orlando. Her husband lives with his mother, she said.

This has prevented Summers from contacting her children, she said.

Flick

Summers' daughter turned 5 on Sept. 1 and she intentionally did not call her to wish her happy birthday because she didn't want her husband to have her phone number.

"I have a 9-year-old and a 5-year-old with him, and I've missed numerous birthdays 'cause every time he gets my number it happens: he'll get drunk, high, we'll get harassed," Summers said.

Neither Summers or her husband are legally allowed to live with the children.

She said her husband tried to hit her and Anderson with a cement block about 16 months ago. So, she said she called the cops. Now her husband's on felony probation, she said.

"Every time he gets locked up his mom drops the kids off [with us]," said Anderson of Summers' husband. The Florida Department of Children and Families cleared Anderson to care for the children at his mother's house, he said.

"If you ask her kids who they're dad is they'll tell you me," he said, beaming. His smile exposed a row of missing and rotting teeth, a reminder of the life he and Summers escaped – a life they want their children to avoid.

"We're clean now," said Anderson.

Except, of course, for the cigarettes.

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