



## A SORE SUBJECT: DO YOU HAVE ANY SMOKES

By [Jordan Gass-Poorè](#), Texas State University

The pigeons will eat David DeRosa's dead foot skin and he fears his disease will cripple them. Like him.

DeRosa has peripheral artery disease, a circulatory problem that puts him in a wheelchair. He also has an attitude problem, and he's not sure which is worse.

His thick and torn toenails, yellow and taloned, lay like a tree's bark on DeRosa's toes.

Shreds of dead skin hung from the soles of his purple feet as they hovered inches from the concrete at the homeless shelter.

DeRosa picked at this skin with dirty fingernails and flicked it on the concrete, much to the dismay of the shelter's founder, Sean Cononie.

A few pigeons cooed softly around DeRosa's wheelchair, looking for their next meal.

Within a week, DeRosa's ankles will be even more swollen, Cononie predicted.

The shelter spends about \$2,000 a month on bleach pads, equipment and staff to save DeRosa's lower legs and feet from the chopping block, he said.

If DeRosa had money to pay for health insurance — he's in the Medicaid program — he would probably be placed in a private healthcare facility because of his mobility issues, Cononie said.

"I like him; everybody in the shelter hates him. The hospitals say that want him out," he added.

Two male shelter employees hosed DeRose down in an open-spaced lounge area as he sat hunched over in his wheelchair.

He recently returned to the shelter after another brief stint in the hospital because of peripheral artery disease.

A growing number of gawkers gathered around DeRosa, who more closely resembled a wet cat than a man.

Water droplets dripped from his long, stringy salt-and-pepper hair. His pasty back faced the crowd until a shelter employee turned his wheelchair.

It didn't matter that the crowd could see his penis because his legs and feet attracted more attention.

"Cover up your little peepee," Cononie said.

The exhibitionist in DeRosa came out when the soiled towel on his lap was stripped away and dumped in a nearby plastic trash can.

He wasn't ashamed of his penis or his legs and feet, the open sores of which were formerly home to writhing maggots.

DeRosa wanted his lighter

Personal hygiene played second fiddle to DeRosa's nicotine habit — this is a man who's known for wiping himself with a rag of feces.

"Do you have any smokes?" he asked Cononie gruffly.

The habit's been a tough one for DeRosa to kick and is partially the reason why he's lost feeling in his lower legs and feet.

He's overweight, has poor circulation and doesn't try as hard as he should, Cononie said.

It's a very complex case, he added.

In preparation for a healthcare employee's visit to wrap his wounds in gauze, DeRosa was helped into a pair of Cononie's oversized Fruit of the Looms. Cononie joked that his underwear contained the "essence of ball sweat."

The spandex band in DeRosa's donated gym shorts sat below his sagging breasts.

Hours passed.

He grinned, happy to be back in the shelter smoking cigarettes.

White gauze circled his lower legs and lime green socks snuggled his war torn feet.

His clean, dry hair contrasted starkly from his appearance before he saw the wound care specialist.

"He's a miracle worker," said DeRosa, pointing at Cononie, who sat in a golf cart a few feet away.

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