

pal tells enquirer:

'AMERICAN DREAMS' MOM PLUNGES EX-BOYFRIEND INTO GAMBLING NIGHTMARE

■ Gail O'Grady loses \$500,000 of his money, then won't admit he fathered her child, says pal

"AMERICAN DREAMS" star Gail O'Grady's gambling addiction has plunged ex-boyfriend Chris Byers into an American living nightmare, says a pal of Chris.

First she split with Byers, a crew member working on her NBC show, after gambling away \$500,000 of his money, then she refused to list him as the father on the birth certificate when their son Michael was born, a friend tells *The ENQUIRER*.

Now he's fighting to prove that he's the boy's father.

O'Grady has kept Byers' identity a well-kept secret, but a friend of his wants the world to know the truth about their roller-coaster romance.

"It's just awful what Gail did to that poor man," said the friend. "He didn't have a lot of money to start with, but by

the time she was through with him, he told me he had taken out a mortgage on his own home and charged up his credit cards — all to finance her gambling.

"She went through hundreds of thousands of dollars, and then she began borrowing from Chris. He told me before he knew it, she had convinced him to loan her close to \$500,000.

INSANE WORLD

"He told me Gail dragged him into her insane world of gambling and he was so in love with her, he followed. But he finally came to his senses.

"He wanted her to stop all the madness. It was causing a huge strain between her and Chris."

The 41-year-old actress has long been known as a Las Vegas high roller. The *ENQUIRER* reported a decade ago that she was

forced to file for bankruptcy — even though she had a steady role on "NYPD Blue" — because she owed casinos and creditors over \$225,000.

Gail admitted that she had a gambling problem and swore off Las Vegas.

"My life is a mess, but I've learned my lesson. I never want to hear the words Las Vegas again," she said.

CAN'T STOP

But the friend insists that Gail simply can't stop playing.

"I think she's completely addicted to gambling," said the friend. "She'll go to Vegas and play the slot machines and video poker like there's no tomorrow."

O'Grady recently appeared on the Bravo channel's "Celebrity Poker Showdown."

"When she starts to lose, all she can say is, 'My luck is about to change! I can feel it!' And no matter what anyone says to her — including Chris — she won't stop," said the friend.

The four-times-married actress met Byers in 2002 when he was a crew member on her show. A few months later, he moved into her Los Angeles home.

"Gail desperately wanted to get pregnant — and last year, she got her wish thanks to Chris. She was ecstatic, and so was he," said the friend.

"But by that time, they were fighting over money. Chris was fed up with her



STRAITLACED IMAGE: Gail O'Grady plays a squeaky-clean All-American 1960s mom on "American Dreams."

gambling and he wanted her to reimburse him for the money he'd lent her."

According to the friend, her romance with Chris ended early this year when Gail was five months pregnant.

"Chris believed she was cheating on him," said the friend.

Devastated, he turned to another woman — and when Gail found out, she gave him the boot.

"I think they were both to blame for the cheating," said the friend. "But Chris felt used, he was broke, and he just couldn't take the craziness any longer."

Gail didn't even tell him that she had the baby until two weeks after he was born in May and then she tried to keep the dad's identity a secret.

DEMANDS DNA TEST

The friend said Chris is heartbroken over not seeing his son Michael as much as he wants and is filing court papers demanding a DNA test and visitation rights.

"The last year has been a nightmare for him," said the friend. "All he wants is that Gail pays him back and that he's allowed to be a real father to Michael."

When contacted by *The ENQUIRER*, Byers refused to comment.

— ROBIN MIZRAHI



"JUST AWFUL": A pal says Gail convinced Chris Byers (inset) to mortgage his home to finance her out-of-control gambling.