

Lifetime's MAFS: Second Chances' Vanessa Nelson Breaks Down Looking For Love On Camera Twice

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Love and marriage is what we all strive for in the midst of a successful career. Its not always easy to find despite the pressure from society, family, and even ourselves and the accessibility with online dating and social media DMs. At the end of the day it all seems risky, and you're never quite sure if you will succeed or fail with each new person you date.

Vanessa Nelson, 28, from Atlanta jumped head first into the possibility of love and marriage on television for millions of viewers to see on season three of Lifetime's Married At First Sight, where she married Tres Russell without knowing or seeing him before. The hurdles, difficulties, good times, and realities of marriage played out in front of a camera for them both. They were one of the most successful couples on the show, and it felt like everyone was rooting for them, but after six months they decided to divorce.

The glimmer of love and a long lasting marriage didn't turn out as Nelson expected, but it didn't knock her down either. She's back stronger, wiser, and glowing from the inside out now looking to find love again.

"I definitely learned a lot from getting married, that whole process, and getting divorced," said Nelson. "It was a difficult lesson to learn in front of the world but they were valuable lessons, and they helped me date much better."

Nelson spoke with Applause Africa about what she learned from her short-lived marriage and how it helped her find love today on Lifetime's MAFS: Second Chances, where she dates 100 men to find love. She's sharing the gems she acquired as a result of her marriage, divorce, and literally dating 100 men on camera.

Spoiler Alert: It's more about looking in the mirror than pointing the finger.

Let's get into it!

AA: You're a fan favorite and that's why they brought you back on SC. From watching it I'm just curious what did you learn about dating now after getting married and divorced that helped you with the process this time around?

VN: Even though it didn't turn out as I hoped it would going in I definitely learned a lot. I learned how to communicate better, be more open minded, how to be more open with my heart, and more trusting. Going through that process was very useful with dating 100 guys because it wasn't easy.

AA: Speaking of communication and trust, which are two major things in relationships, what advice would you give to women about their communication if they're looking to have a serious relationship?

VN: The advice I would give is make sure that you're doing more listening than talking. There's a lot of different

ways to listen and let your partner know that you're paying attention. Be active in the conversation without talking so much because you can tend to talk so much that you miss the message. Be aware of other forms of communication like body language and your tone, or how you might come off to your partner and not know it. You might mean one thing, but it comes off as another. They're difficult lessons to learn but it takes practice.

AA: I definitely think we sometimes overlook that part of dating. Another big issue that came up in MAFS were your trust issues. How did you work through that with everything that happened, and now with dating?

VN: It takes a little time, and it takes spending more time with yourself. Really understanding where these lacks of trust might come from, but it also takes you assessing what you're getting from your partner. If there's some red flags or things making you feel like "wow I'm not sure if I can trust this person," then sit back and listen to them. I think I learned how to kind of compare those things.

Make sure they're red flags you should really be paying attention to or if they're things that are getting in the way. It took a little while to get there, but I'm definitely more open with my heart and mind.

AA: You had different types of counselors and advisors during both shows. How did they help you through the process? Do you recommend women who are anxiously wanting to be in serious relationships and marriage to also try it?

VN: They helped guide me through the dating process. They all had their own expertise, and it was invaluable information. One thing I really loved, especially with Dr. Calvin, was while going through this dating process he wasn't telling me what I should and shouldn't be doing. He raised a question and allowed me to work through it myself or I would think about it myself. That was really helpful.

I definitely recommend to anyone out there if you feel like you're kind of hitting some roadblocks when it comes to dating there's nothing wrong with seeking the help of an expert. You'll be surprised at how much you grow from that.

AA: I can definitely see the difference between your first episode of SC compared to MAFS. It was really nice to see the growth in you.

VN: Aaw, thank you.

AA: I wanted to know too because a lot of women who get married young, especially for women of color who get married young may have to deal with divorce. They're debating about fighting for their marriage. What advice would you give to women who are in that contemplative phase of marriage? How did you know whether to keep trying or let go?

VN: Whew girl. Well... first you have to do a real self check to see where you're adding to the marriage and what you're taking away from the marriage. What part is he playing in this falling apart? Then you really need to assess are you being fulfilled spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Really start with yourself, and think about if you can improve it or it can be resolved. It's so easy to point the finger at other people especially in relationships and marriage, but I'm a firm believer that you need to start with yourself.

At the end of the day, if it feels like the connection is just not there, or this person is not fulfilling you in the way you need, I'm a true believer in happiness. There is nothing wrong with going out and finding something that really fulfills your life because you only get one.

AA: You're definitely got back out there, which is amazing, how did you feel when they first reached out to you about doing SC? Were you completely ready or on the fence at first?

VN: I was a little nervous at first because I didn't know exactly what to expect. I didn't know if I really wanted to share my romantic life with the world again, it was so difficult the first time. I had to say to myself, "I'm not going to

get knocked down by love.” I’m a true believer that I deserve everything I want in life so I’m going to give this another shot. I knew there was something of value I could take away from it.

Especially when it comes to black women I see there’s a lot of stereotypes and stigma around how we are when we’re in relationships and who were dating. Part of me felt it was a great opportunity for me to show the world that black women we date just like anyone else, were in relationships just like anyone else, and we love just like anybody else. I’m hoping that people can ultimately learn and take something away from it.

AA: I love how you weren’t that typical stereotype of “a strong black woman,” but you weren’t weak. You were very assertive in your relationship. Even with your triggers being able to say “I have trust issues and this is triggering me,” I enjoyed that aspect of watching you and Tre, but even in the first episode of SC and all the different guys.

Even with the dynamic of your sister and friend helping you, how important do you think that is in dating? Did you do that previously in your dating history?

VN: Previously, if I’m really serious about someone of course I want them to meet my friends and my family. In more natural situations I don’t think friends and family will be so open about saying, “I don’t think this guy is right for you.” They say it after you figured it out. But in this situation it was so helpful to have them because they were telling me, “I don’t think this guy is right for you,” grilling these guys, asking them embarrassing questions, and picking up on little things I did not see. I couldn’t have done it without them, and I’m glad they were able to say what was on their mind because it helped me a lot.

I was more open to what they had to say, and their opinions about the guys during the speed dating and at the mixer because it was so many guys. I couldn’t get the full scope from every guy. There were 100 guys in the room, and this time around I wanted to know straight forward what do you think of this person. They kept it all the way real, and I appreciated it.

AA: There was a part in the show previews where you mentioned, I think his name is Nate- the blackbelt police officer, and you said, “you’re kind of a chauvinist.” I was noticing that too. As you become more assertive as a woman and with all the women’s rights issues coming up. How was it tackling that whole thing of “you’re a great guy, but your views on women is very old school?”

VN: I have to say there’s a type of person for everybody. There’s a match for someone out there, and if a guy is a little more conservative there’s a woman out there for them.

I personally am all about equality. I’m a strong feminist, and I think it’s a true testament to who’s comfortable with their manhood, for a man who wants to be with a woman who is proud to be a woman, and wants the same opportunities as they do. That was definitely something I had to look out for because there were quite a bit of conservative guys that I came across doing Second Chances. I had my ears open and eyes wide for those types of guys because I knew they were not going to work.

AA: I was wondering if you friends ask you for advice now about love and marriage and date ideas. How has the conversation about dating and all that comes with it changed with you and your girl friends?

VN: When I first went to do MAFS they thought I was crazy they were making sure I was all there. (laughs) After, it was kind of like my girlfriends and family were trying to be sensitive around me about what they said, and what they talked about because they knew I was going through something really hard. It was so nice because now I have a new chapter in my life that I can share with my friend and family. They saw I got back out there and was ready to date. Of course, now they think I’m the dating expert and that I have a million date ideas. Even my married girlfriend, she’s on the premier and at the speed date, she’s married with a kid, but now she asks me about date ideas. “You went on all these dates give me some date ideas.” I’m just glad it went from “oh, I know you’re kind of going through something” to “Vanessa is back so lets have fun.” I love it.

They love it and I love that they ask. Seeing that my friends and family, especially my girl friends, want dating advice and ideas from me. When people watch the show- women and guys- they're going to take something away from it and hopefully they apply it to their relationships or even their dating adventure and find something for them.

AA: Your dog is an important part of your life, and a lot of women have dogs and pets. I remember one of the issues you had with Tre was stuff like, "you just looked at my dog sideways." What advice do you have for women dealing with that too? That's like a baby, you don't want your man not to like your dog.

VN: I think especially with smaller dogs they're more attached, and I don't think guys really get that. When they think of dogs they think of like a German Shepherd that's going to run 5 miles with them. (laughs) My dog not so much, but it was important to me to know that whether a guy was an animal person or dog person, and will be comfortable around pets because that had a huge impact on my marriage. I've tried not to be so smothering with my dog, but he's like family to me. So if it comes to a guy I'm going to choose my dog. It is important to me to be with someone who's okay with me having a dog.

A few guys just weren't into pets in general or small dogs, and I tried to still stay open, but these are things you have to talk about when you're about to enter into a new relationship. You're going to spend a lot of time together so you need to know you're both compatible, and your lifestyles match up because I don't want to redo what happened in my marriage. My mind was set on I need to meet someone okay with pets. It's amazing when you ask that question some of the reactions. I'm glad that I did, and that the experts said, "make sure you ask this question."

AA: Overall what are your thoughts on marriage and dating? Are you willing to slow down about marriage now or are you like marriage can happen as quickly or slowly as it happens?

VN: After going through MAFS and getting divorced, all at the age of 27, my outlook on marriage has changed a little bit in the sense that I don't want to feel like I have to rush into it. It's more about me finding the right person, making sure everything is good, and that we're going to have a successful relationship. When I went on SC I didn't have marriage so heavily on the brain, but I was still thinking "can I be with this person," "can we have a long term relationship," and "can I see this leading to it," because I'm not getting any younger, but I also don't want to rush anything.

Watch all of Vanessa's dating adventures and the cute black men she dates on MAFS: Second Chances every Thursday at 10:15 pm on Lifetime. kineticcontent.com



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