

**‘Bottoms Don’t Come Off’:
Premarital Celibacy Among Christian Black Couples**

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Submitted to the Department of Journalism
School of Humanities
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

December 2021

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It was a relaxing night for Mariah Neal, 22, and Jordan Stubblefield, 23, who were spending time together in Neal's living room. As they were cuddling and watching a



movie simultaneously, they began to kiss. One peck eventually led to a make-out session. The make-out session started to escalate rapidly. Instantly, Neal's heart started to race. As Stubblefield passionately kissed Neal, he started to get excited as well.

Neal couldn't help herself, so she began to unbuckle his pants. He gently pushed her hands away, and they came back to their senses. They then decided to end the night by going their separate ways. Neal was grateful that he denied her.

"If we were to do it, it would be disappointing because it was just a temporary feeling, and you don't want to act on emotions and feelings and forget why you decided to go on this journey," she says.

Neal and Stubblefield are part of a small but dedicated group of Black Christian couples across the United States who are determined to remain celibate until marriage. They are bucking a national trend: Between 2011 and 2015, nearly 89% of ever-married women aged 15 to 44 and

nearly 90% of ever-married men aged 20-44 have had premarital intercourse, according to National Health Statistics. But for Neal and Stubblefield, and other couples including Alexis Teran, 23, and Kyle Mitzgerale, 25; Nathan Jameson, 25, and Tamia Simmons, 22; and lastly, newlyweds Damien Nash, 37, and Kenady Nash, 32, abstaining from sex allows them to fulfill their religious beliefs while avoiding what they call the negative repercussions of premarital intercourse. These repercussions include having unwanted children, having clouded judgment between couples, and being emotionally and mentally attached to a person with whom they couldn't anticipate a future.

With these couples, three individuals have not engaged in premarital sex whereas the remaining four have, which also makes them unusual in American culture. In 2019, around two-thirds of adults (65%) told the Pew Research Center that sex between unmarried couples in a committed relationship is sometimes or always acceptable.

The couples' shared celibacy journey may help their marriages, according to experts. According to Harvard University sociologist Andrew Clarkwest in a [2006 article in the Journal of Comparative Family Studies](#), "As a group, African Americans who marry are highly religious and hold relatively traditional attitudes towards pre-marital sex and cohabitation. The prevalence of such traits results, in part, from high selectivity into marriage. African Americans who marry differ substantially from those who remain single in ways that are generally associated with a lower risk of marital disruption."

These couple stories are crucial since they shine a light on a group that knows they are out of step with the dominant American culture but have decided to do the contrary anyway. They believe sharing their journeys may also help any person or couple who are willing to refrain from sex but need some tips. Additionally, they hope to encourage couples who are part

of the smaller percentage that are practicing celibacy until marriage. The couples share their story of how they met. They also share what helps them to refrain from temptation, and most importantly, they go in depth to share the reason behind their commitment.

History of Not Doing It

Premarital sex has always been common in America. In fact, in the late 18th and early 19th century, it was an expected step toward marriage. “For many couples sexual relations were part of a serious courtship,” said Jack Larkin, a history professor at Clark University, in a 1988 UPI article headlined [“Historian: Early Americans Led Lusty Sex Lives.”](#) “Into the 1820s almost all Americans would have subscribed to the commonplace notion that sex, within proper social confines, was enjoyable and healthy and that prolonged sexual abstinence could be injurious to health.”

The expectation of premarital abstinence only came into vogue during the Victorian era in the mid-1800s, Larkin noted in his book, “The Reshaping of Everyday Life in the United States, 1790-1840.”

By the late 19th century, according to [“Sexuality in Nineteenth Century America: Behavior, Ideology, and Politics,”](#) historian Estelle B. Freedman notes, “increasingly autonomous young adults engaged in prem-marital sex and used contraceptive devices, indicating a new willingness to separate sexuality and reproduction.”

In the 20th century, premarital sex continued to be the norm. In “Trends in Premarital Sex in the United States, 1954-2003” published in Public Health Reports, Lawrence Finer, director of domestic research at the Guttmacher Institute, found that as of 2002, “even among

those who abstained until at least age 20, 81% had had premarital sex by age 44. Among cohorts of women turning 15 between 1964 and 1993, at least 91% had had premarital sex by age 30. Among those turning 15 between 1954 and 1963, 82% had had premarital sex by age 30, and 88% had done so by age 44.” Even though premarital sex is a common act now, Finder makes it clear that it has always been normative.

In past years, for a variety of economic and cultural reasons, America has tried to promote abstinence until marriage by creating programs to recommend Americans to wait until marriage to have sex. By 1982, the federal government had funded \$2 billion on the “sex-education” program, but these programs had to go by the rules of Eight-Point Definition with the “exclusive purpose of teaching the social, psychological and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity,” according to Planned Parenthood, which argued the Eight-Point Definition advocated a sex shaming standard outside marriage. In 1996, Congress passed The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act that included a funding of \$50 million every year in federal funding for sex education programs. These programs taught “abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage is the expected standard” norm and “sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects.”

In 2010, abstinence-focused sex education programs were halted, but reestablished in 2015-2017 when the funding to these programs increased. The programs didn’t change the young people’s sexual activities, according to Planned Parenthood.

DAMINEN NASH AND KENADY NASH

Georgia couple Damien Nash, 37, and Kenady Nash, 31, got married on Sept. 22, 2019. His hometown is Dekalb, while Kenady comes from Gwinnett, 25 miles northeast.

They are both self-employed. They own Completely You 365, LLC, a company that produces materials, books, courses and content on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram to help individuals be “completely and authentically you in Christ healthy and authentic 365 days a



year.”

They attend Victory Church, a multicultural non-denominational Christian megachurch located in Norcross, Georgia. They have both been Christian throughout their entire life.

Damien was a virgin. He decided to be celibate at an early age because of his religious beliefs. During his teenage years, he saw some of his community who were engaging in sexual activity and perceived the repercussions. He discerned the attachment that his friends who were engaging in sexual activity had, since he heard them talk about it continuously. He then decided

to make an oath with his mother. He told her that he would make it to the altar without having sex. Also, he had family members who had sex before marriage, and had babies, so he didn't want to carry that mindset into the next generation. Having children out of wedlock was against his biblical beliefs that he shouldn't have sex outside of marriage.

“God created sex to be between a husband and a wife in marriage,” he said. “If I don't have sex, I can't have a baby.” Damien shared a biblical story written in the book of Genesis 16. A man named Abraham had a child outside marriage with a woman named Hagar. After she had the child, there was a conflict between Abraham's wife, Sarah, and Hagar. Damien did not want to have such an experience. He did not want to bring a baby into a dysfunctional home. “The baby can be used as a pawn for manipulation or even be looked at as a burden instead of a blessing,” he said. Another reason why he refused to have children outside marriage was that he did not want to repeat cycles in his family: his dad had a baby out of wedlock and the baby died. For that case, he wanted to save himself from unnecessary trauma.

Additionally, he didn't want to be a statistic. The percent of births that occurred outside of marriage increased six percent for non-Hispanic black women between 1990 and 2016 from 63 to 69%, according to the nonpartisan Child Trends research organization.

According to the Pew Research Center, “Nearly half (46%) of men ages 15 to 44 with biological children reported that at least one of their children was born outside of marriage, and 31% reported that all their children were born outside of marriage.” Yet, among Black men, the numbers were far higher: 72% have had a child outside of marriage, according to Pew.

Damien added that he did not want to be another African American male who had a baby out of wedlock.

He also didn't want to marry a woman just because they had a baby together, since the woman might not be mentally, emotionally, and spiritually compatible with him.

Another reason why he decided to become celibate was that he had friends who would still have their ex-partner's sexual engagement replay in their mind. For that case, if the new partner doesn't meet their past partner's expectations, then they're not satisfied. When Damien discerned all these consequences, he decided to be persistent in his decision.

In 2015, Damien released his first relationship book, "#Completely Single." This book was to guide people in their singleness, as well as himself. But Damien felt like he was being a hypocrite because he was not practicing what he was preaching in the book.

He was chasing women instead of pursuing the right woman made for him. "I was chasing women, not in a bad way, but I was chasing different women that were not my wife," he said. At that time, he was also struggling with pornography. As he was trying to find himself in leadership and serving at his church, he traveled to Rome for a mission trip with the church. On the trip, he said he witnessed God's presence. He saw people getting healed through prayers. He was also included. He had a leadership role that led young people. However, one of the members in the leadership team prayed for him and told him that he could sense that he had a desire to get married. After the prayer, he felt a change and felt that he was ready to get married. That same year, he met Kenady, who was a leader for a small group in his same church. He found her to be a beautiful black woman, but he never pursued her because he had a desire to marry a Puerto Rican or any exotic woman. He was chasing two women on Facebook, but it never succeeded, so he decided to surrender his future relationship to God. In February 2017, when he was on Facebook, he saw Kenady's Facebook account. He messaged her, and they started chatting from that moment on. After two weeks, he asked for her number. She deleted her Facebook but

reactivated it few minutes after. She messaged him back to tell him that she couldn't give him her number because of plenty of reasons, which she was not willing to tell him.

Kenady had been through a lot in the past. When she was in college, she lost her virginity due to rape. That caused her to live a life of brokenness and recklessness, which included drinking, since she was trying to seek validation, comfort, love, and acceptance. In 2014 after she graduated from college, she decided to get baptized and rededicate her life to Christ at her spiritual home of Victory Church. As she started serving as a leader of a young adult service called Fusion, she met Damien. When she met Damien at that time, she was also chasing different men and wasn't studying him either. But she was comfortable to give her number to these men, since she didn't want to be serious with them and was only seeking the validation and comfort that she needed. However, when Damien asked her for her number in February 2017, she didn't want to give her number to Damien, since she perceived that she could be serious with him.

Damien did not give up. They chatted and talked through Facebook continuously. When they were talking on the phone through Facebook one time, he clarified to her that he was not trying to have sex with her. Kenady was delighted to hear that. "I was like, 'Oh my God, I love him,'" Kenady said. It worked out well for her because she had also decided to become celibate until she was married. Yet, Damien still insisted to ask for Kenady's phone number, but Kenady would just give with her digits partially.

On April 8, 2018, he took her out to Stone Mountain Park. Stone Mountain Park is the most visited tourist site in Georgia, which includes natural attractions. As they walked up the mountain, he pulled out a card that said, "Going up mountains can be hard, but it's easier when you travel together, and will you enter this courtship with me?" Kenady was extremely excited

and agreed to go on the journey with him. However, she handed him a card, which had the last four digits of her phone number. At the end of the letter, it said “the date 4.8.18, not only today’s date, but the last four digits of my number.” They concluded that God wrote their love story.

Their definition of celibacy is to intentionally have a purity mindset instead of a lustful mindset. This includes no foreplay. Because they were determined to commit to their decision, they decided to build a boundary to not kiss till they get married. Also, they didn’t listen to music that promoted sex. “What you feed is what you are going to grow, and so instead of feeding the flesh, we fed our spirit,” Kenady said. “We’re reading the word of God, we’re praying, we’re worshipping, and not making any provision for the flesh.” They didn’t go to each other’s houses alone, and they had double dates with other couples. They surrounded themselves with like-minded people in church. They had family and friends who were constantly checking on them to make sure that were abstaining. “We needed that accountability,” Damien said. They were also involved in other activities that distracted them from having impure thoughts, such as a project called the Purpose Project, a book about their love story, so they were constantly meeting at different public places to write the book.

Though, they had been progressing well in their decision to remain celibate until they got married, the couple felt like the 30 days prior to their wedding were the toughest days throughout their entire journey.

“It’s like your flesh knows that you’re almost there, but you’re not,” Kenady said. “It was as if we’re married, but we’re not, we’re just almost.”

Damien alluded to it that he did not know what the problem was, but those days were not the easiest. “I had to put her in the back seat like an Uber driver,” he said. “Yes, it got real,”

Kenady said. They had to cease some conversations on the phone that they felt like it was tempting.

Kenady emphasized that what helped them during those days was that they had their mind set on making it to the end by being pure and honoring God, so that was on the forefront in their desire. “We just had to do what we had to do to get to the altar,” Damien said.

They added that the benefit they got for excluding sex in their relationship is that they had peace. Kenady elaborated that when she’s in sin, a part of her feels guilty that what she is doing is not appropriate, so she would always try her to suppress that. However, they feel like because they extracted sex from their relationship before they got married, they had peace. “We had an overwhelming peace and protection for our relationship,” Kenady said. “Because we're honoring God, God was honoring us as well.”

ALEXIS TERAN AND KYLE MITZGERALE



Alexis Teran, 23, is from Texas. She attends One Community Church, a non-denominational church at Plano, Texas. She is a YouTuber and founder of Christian Girl Next Door Inc, a ministry to help young women and girls beautify their walk with Christ. She attends Dallas College in Texas.

Kyle Mitzgerale, 25, is in a master's program at New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine at Arkansas State in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Mitzgerale's spiritual home is called Church-Sagebrush in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He was born in Tennessee but moved to Texas in 2014 after staying in Albuquerque, New Mexico for 5 years. However, when he finished college in Hampton, Virginia and was completely living in Texas, he decided to try some dating apps, since he didn't know people in Texas. As he was exploring different dating apps, he encountered a Christian dating app called United Young. He signed up for the app, but his application was not getting approved, so he decided to try different dating apps once more. He then decided to check back at the United Young dating app. After emailing them, he discovered that they mistakenly missed his application, so he was finally approved after three months. "We actually almost did not meet," Mitzgerale said.

Yet, around that time dating someone was not on Teran's mind, so when Mitzgerale messaged Teran, "it wasn't anything serious," she said. They were just getting to know each other. They exchanged contacts after chatting on the app for two weeks, and they started going on dates. On their first date, they both shared their beliefs about celibacy until marriage. In July 2021, after their third date, they decided to pursue a relationship.

Teran has had a sexual past since she once dated a non-believer in Christ. Since her beliefs about premarital sex were contrary to his, she compromised by having sex with him.

After that relationship, she decided that it was important for her to honor herself and her future husband, so she decided to become celibate.

Another reason why she decided to become celibate was that she said she realized that when couples have sex at an early stage in their relationship, it tends to block other conversations. However, Mitzgerale was the first person she practiced celibacy with.

Mitzgerale, on the other hand, is a virgin. It was a decision he made when he was young because of religious beliefs. He also mentioned that God was a huge part of his decision because if he was not a Christian, he would be having sex. So, his decision to remain celibate came from the Biblical verse 1 Corinthians 7, which states, “to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.”

Mitzgerale explained celibacy as “showing physical affection, but we set boundaries that we’re not going to cross, just to stay away from the hot water.” They said it was difficult in the beginning, since they didn’t have boundaries, but as soon as they set the boundaries it got uncomplicated.

Teran saw the difference when she got into a relationship with Mitzgerale. Teran and Mitzgerale’s decisions have helped them to build an emotional intimacy and intellect with each other. “We really get to know each other on a deeper level than those couples that tend to have sex right away,” Teran said. Mitzgerale added that he gets thoughts of having sex, but not acting on them is what helps him. He added that he doesn’t really care about the consequences that come with having sex before marriage because his decision is because of God. “But I think that the reason why God doesn’t want us to do it is because it comes with a lot of baggage,” he

added. They don't spend nights at each other's house. It was only once that Teran spent a night at Mitzgerale's. However, they didn't sleep in the same bed.

"Bottoms don't come off, it's never like a bottom-free day," Mitzgerale said "Hands stay away from the fun part. It's a funny way to say it, without saying it". Alexis refuses to sit on his lap, since she said it is tempting.

MARIAH NEAL AND JORDAN STUBBLEFIELD

Mariah Neal, 22, is from St. Louis, Missouri. She attends an interdenominational church called New Life. Jordan Stubblefield, 23, is from O'Fallon, Illinois and attends the same church as Neal.

In September 2018, Neal and Stubblefield's church had a gathering called a Life Group where the young adults got together to talk about God. Stubblefield has been at the church for 17 years, while Neal has been at the church for 15 years, ever since she moved to Illinois from St. Louis. Even though she has always been at the church, she never attended the Life Group before. Around that time, she was struggling with smoking weed. However, when her friend invited her to the Life Group, she was deciding whether she should smoke or attend the Life Group. Since the Life Group was beginning in 10 minutes, she decided to attend the Life Group instead. "I was like I will just go to the Life Group and smoke after," Neal said. As soon as she walked in the church, Stubblefield jumped up and offered her a chair. Even though they both have been in the church for years, they still did not know each other well. Neal said she knew of him, but didn't know him, so that day was when she noticed him. After the Life Group, Stubblefield went to chat

with Neal. As they were talking, she informed him about her struggle with smoking, and Stubblefield told her that he will help her recover by praying for her. So, they prayed and exchanged numbers. They started talking as just friends from then on.

In February 2019, she texted him, “I know this sounds crazy, but I know that you’re my husband.” When Stubblefield asked her how she knew, she replied that he had certain qualities that only God knew she wanted that in a man. He then responded that if God was trying to show her what to look for in a husband, it doesn’t organically make him her husband. When he asked her about when she knew, she told him that it was the moment he offered her a chair. “I was already skeptical when she told me that, so when she said she knew from the moment she saw me, I was like, this is not God that told her that,” Stubblefield said. Neal said she wasn’t telling him that intentionally because she was not looking for a relationship, since she was freshly out from a relationship at that time. Yet, Neal said it was awkward after that conversation, but they remained as friends and never brought up that topic again. After that, they still hung out, but never went to each other’s house.

On Nov. 30, 2019, Stubblefield took Neal to a local amusement park and during their date, he asked her to be in a relationship with him. She excitedly agreed and they became official on that day.

Their definition of celibacy is having no sexual relations. Neal became celibate in October 2019. Prior to her making her celibacy decision, she said God had given her the desire to stop having sex before marriage, while she was in a bad relationship that involved cheating. Yet, whenever she had sex in that relationship, she would feel extremely bad. She said she felt empty and did not feel like herself. Additionally, she felt like she didn’t have anything else to give, since she was giving her body to people who didn’t “appreciate or value” it. After that

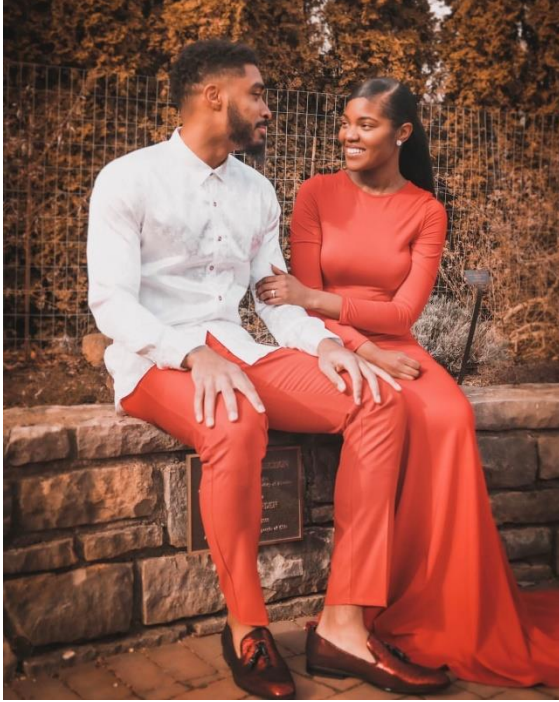
relationship in 2018, she decided to start practicing celibacy. However, she would make it for some months, but she would fail. She officially became celibate a month before she got into a relationship with Stubblefield.

Stubblefield on the other hand, became celibate six years ago, after he graduated high school; he felt like he didn't know who he was, so he decided to live for God, and that included not having sex until marriage. However, in the beginning of their relationship, it was harder for Neal since she was still new to her celibacy journey. Neal said she wouldn't have been able to make it if it wasn't because of Stubblefield's help. All those moments that he prevented the sexual intercourse from happening has caused her to grow so much because she no longer struggled like she did initially.

They try to stay away from extreme make-out sessions. They usually stay at a common area at Neal's house where people pass by to go to the kitchen and bathroom. They try not to lie in bed alone. They also are both living with their parents, so it makes it easier.

NATHAN JAMESON AND TAMIA SIMMONS

Ohio couple Nathan Jameson, 25, and Tamia Simmons, 22, attend Church-New Day CLGI, located in Columbus, Ohio. Jameson is a life coach, stable family coordinator for the YMCA, in



which he's obliged to ensure that he meets the needs of families and children through direct contact with families and supervision of the Stable Families Services Coordinators.

Prior to Jameson going on his celibacy journey, he first laid his eyes on Simmons in 2015. They met through Jameson's best friend, who appeared to be the youth pastor at their church at this moment. His best friend was like a brother to Simmons. At that time, the church went out to eat at Buffalo Wild Wings located in Ohio, so his best friend invited Jameson. That was the moment when Jameson and Simmons saw each other for the first time. However, it was not an appropriate time for them to be together, even though they found each other attractive. "I always thought she was cute and attractive, but we came from two different worlds," Jameson said. They couldn't go far as in being in a relationship at that time, since Simmons was in church, but he wasn't. They lost in touch until January 2020. During the time Jameson and Simmons weren't in contact, Jameson got into different relationships with women. Whenever he had sex with them, he realized that he was getting a strong attachment with women that he

couldn't see a future with. He elaborated that because the bond is so strong, it becomes a primary source of being in a relationship. He offered an example of a partner yearning to have sex with their significant other at a specific time. Because of the strong attachment he built with these women, he was losing interest in engaging in premarital sex.

The breaking point for him was the moment he realized that he almost had a child with a woman that he did not want to be with forever. He said that it was a wakeup call to him. He thought that he was being irresponsible since he was supposed to be waiting until marriage. He alluded to it that if they had the child, then that would have altered their lives, since it is a destiny decision. So, waiting until marriage to have sex to Jameson is very significant, since it prevents unwanted children. At that moment, he decided to find a solution to eradicate the act. In April 2019, he went to a church called New Birth. He heard the pastor, who is his best friend and now the youth pastor at New Day Church, preaching about soul ties. He then discerned that the emotional and mental attachments that he was building with these women were the soul ties that he was preaching about. He began to pray to God to help him to abstain himself until marriage. From that moment, he decided to begin his celibacy journey.

In January 2020, the youth pastor asked him to preach at New Day Church. Simmons was at the church on that day, so she asked him whether he was going to sing, and Jameson said "maybe," even though he didn't. They exchanged contacts after the sermon. In March 2020, they had their first hung out, and they got into a relationship on May 30. After six months of dating, they got engaged on Nov. 30, 2020.

Simmons on the other hand, grew up in a Christian home, so she remained a good girl. Her main reason was for abstaining from sex until marriage was the Biblical injunction to avoid premarital sex. So, she decided to exclude that at a very young age.

Jameson and Simmons kiss, but they have boundaries. They fast and pray. Her involvement in church activities has also helped her to stay committed to her decision. She's a worship leader, and she doesn't want to give a wrong spirit to the congregation, since she listened to a sermon saying how there's a spirit behind everything that you do. For instance, if one is speaking, they're giving out the spirit to the people as well. So, whenever she gets tempted, she remembers that her pastor will probably call on her on Sunday, and she doesn't want to give out the wrong spirit. However, Jameson added that one must know their boundaries with their partner. He elaborated that some people can't take a kiss on their neck. They lose control when that happens. In that case, the couples have to refrain from that. They also have people to hold them accountable, so they have pastors and mentors that help them.

On May 30, they got married. From February, the journey was tough, but they made it. They did things to keep them busy. He had to extract things to get himself from temptation, such as staying away from Twitter, "there's a lot of temptation on twitter, so I had to cut it out," Jameson said. They also don't regret their decision.

All four couples share a realization that God was their primary reason for their determination. Unwanted children, clouded judgments, and being emotionally and mentally attached to the wrong person were the other reasons why their decisions were made. They all believe that creating strong boundaries is the best strategy for every couple to incorporate in their relationship to succeed in this journey. "You just have to know what the other person's trigger is, and don't overdo them," Neal said.

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INTERVIEW- Zoom Video Call

Mariah Neal and Jordan Stubblefield- Feb. 5, 2021, and Oct. 7, 2021

Nathan Jameson and Tamia Simmons- Feb 8, 2021, and Aug. 22, 2021

Alexis Teran and Kyle Mitzgerale- March 7, 2021

Damien and Kenady Nash- Sept. 16, 2021