

Ted Vernon Stars in *South Beach Classics* Despite Decades of Violent Abuse Claims

BY JESSICA LIPSCOMB

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Courtesy of Robin Ziel

The first punch came without warning, but once it landed, she knew what was next. Petrified, Robin Ziel ran toward the door. With one hand, she fumbled with the knob; with the other, she tried to dial 911.

As she sprinted out into the driveway, her husband, a former boxer, gave chase. Ziel tumbled and fell to the ground. Jumping on top of her, Ziel says, he cocked his fist and smashed it into her jaw over and over. Ted Vernon always went down swinging.

Married for 15 years but separated for five months, Ziel and Vernon had spent the evening at a '50s concert in Coral Springs. Though the statuesque, 37-year-old blonde had moved out of

the couple's seven-bedroom Plantation estate, she and Vernon, a bald, Hawaiian-shirt-wearing New Yorker three decades her elder, remained inextricably tied. In addition to sharing a 10-year-old son, the two worked together selling antique cars and costarred in *South Beach Classics*, a reality show about their business, on Discovery Channel's Velocity network.

Things grew heated that night when, Ziel says, Vernon took a call from another woman and taunted Ziel that he had upgraded. As they arrived home from the concert, she grabbed her keys and a bag of clothes from inside the house. "Have a good night, Mr. Vernon," she said sarcastically on the way out.

Ziel says the comment sent Vernon into a blind rage. He chased her out into the driveway, wrestled for control of her phone, and struck her face so many times she lost count. Finally, he broke the phone loose of her grasp, picked himself up, and walked back toward the garage. "You better get up, bitch," she heard him say, "before I run you over."

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By the time police arrived October 10, 2015, Vernon was gone. Officers found Ziel with a black eye and a swollen, bloody lip at a neighbor's house, where she'd banged on the front door, begging for help. The Broward Sheriff's Office requested a warrant for Vernon's arrest, but fearing his wrath and the damage to their livelihood, Ziel decided not to press charges.

"He told me it would blow up everything we've worked for and humiliate our child," Ziel says. "It was always, 'I will leave you penniless. I will have you ruined.'"

Now in its fourth season, *South Beach Classics* has endeared the husband-and-wife team to viewers around the world. From humble beginnings, the dealership has grown into a multimillion-dollar enterprise as Ziel and Vernon moved to a huge new lot off I-95 and turned their fans into customers. With inventory ranging from antique Ford Model Ts to luxury Rolls-Royces, Ted Vernon Specialty Autos now claims to be Florida's largest classic car store.

Yet the reality behind the reality show is largely unknown to even its most loyal fans. Away from the cameras, Vernon and Ziel have been deadlocked in a divorce case so bitter he now disputes they were ever married in the first place. In court filings, she speaks of "suffering in silence for over 16 years" at the hands of an abusive and deeply manipulative husband.

Vernon doesn't take those allegations lightly. He denies attacking Ziel that day in the driveway and claims she has made up other similar reports to police. "She is a pathological liar," he says. His attorney, Richard Wolfe, suggests Ziel invented her injuries and is simply angling for more money in the divorce.

"Her whole thing is Ted hit her. Ted swears he didn't do it," Wolfe says. "And the only way in which that affects Ted is in the court of public opinion, if Discovery kind of says, 'We don't want to distribute the show.' Look at what happened with Bill O'Reilly."

But allegations of Vernon's abusive behavior have been chronicled in thousands of pages of court filings, Florida Department of Children and Families records, family letters, and police reports dating back nearly three decades. In addition to reviewing a cache of emails, text messages, and videos from Ziel, *New Times* also interviewed and examined written statements from four former employees and a live-in nanny who back up Ziel's claims.

In fact, records show that everyone in Vernon's immediate family, from Ziel to his first wife to all three of his children, have accused him of domestic violence. The abuse grew so bad that his daughter, Alex, says she ran away from home as a teenager and has since relocated across the country, changed her name, and moved into a more secure residence in an attempt to get as far as possible from her father.

"I watched him abuse my whole family and get away with it, and get away with it really well, but people genuinely think he's this really nice guy," says Alex, who is now 27. "When I found out that he had a television show, I was actually really appalled."

Reality shows have been canceled for less: HGTV pulled the plug on *Flip It Forward* after the host's anti-gay statements emerged, and the Travel Channel suspended a series starring Adam Richman after he told a woman to "eat a bag of shit."

So in light of Ziel's accusations, why has Discovery kept *South Beach Classics* on the air? The star of the series says the answer is simple.

"It's all fucking bullshit," Vernon says. "If it was true, if I was such a horrible guy, you think I'd have the show?"



Classic car dealer Ted Vernon has starred for four seasons on the Discovery Channel's *South Beach Classics*.

Courtesy of Ted Vernon

As a kid growing up in Brooklyn, Vernon still remembers a time he came down with a particularly nasty case of strep throat. He was curled up in bed feeling sorry for himself when his dad barged in and told him to get ready for class.

"He says, 'You're sick?' Yeah. 'You're dead?' No. 'Get up and go to school,'" Vernon recalls. "That was my dad: Get the fuck out of bed and show up."

Sitting in his taxidermy-covered office at the dealership in West Little River, Vernon nostalgically cites the story as an example of the tough love he was raised with. But while he still prides himself on his work ethic, some of his other youthful characteristics – namely, his temper – also stuck around as he grew up and started a family.

By his own telling, Vernon was a troubled child. His temperament only worsened as he entered his teens, joining the wrestling team and gaining a reputation for belligerence. He says he bounced between at least seven high schools as he grappled with his parents' divorce.

"I was a rough kid," he admits. "If you looked at me wrong in those days, I'd flatten you."

After graduation, Vernon left New York and moved to Cleveland with his uncle before following his father, a wealthy developer, to Pennsylvania, Virginia, and, finally, Florida, where Vernon worked for his dad as a property manager in Mid-Beach in the '70s.

Itching to get out on his own, Vernon started the car business from his houseboat off Collins Avenue, taking \$1,000 cash and trading \$200 cars, then \$400 cars, and then \$800 cars, storing them on his dad's properties and advertising in the *Miami Herald*.

As the business grew, he dabbled in side ventures, ranging from a boxing career as the "Wolfman" to a stint in Hialeah Park's demolition derby. In 1985, he made his acting debut in a campy horror film called *Scarecrows* after bankrolling a budding filmmaker he knew from Autotrader. On set, Vernon boasted about his \$1.8 million contribution, telling a reporter: "The experience I've gotten is worth the money."

Well into his 30s, Vernon had already made a name for himself by the time he met his first wife, an Austrian hairdresser named Monika Sula. He still remembers walking down the street one day when he saw the knockout blonde walking out of a liquor store. "She was a bombshell," he says. "I was like, 'Who's that?'"

A friend told Vernon she worked at a nearby salon. At first, Vernon thought of making an appointment, but he was bald. Instead, he hatched plan B. "I went in there and said, 'Do you do manicures?'" Vernon says. "And I went out with her, and she was a very nice girl."

In October 1987, Sula gave birth to their first child, a boy they named Mark after Vernon's brother. The two married six months later and moved into a \$461,000 waterfront home in Golden Beach. Their second child, Alexandra, was born in 1990.

Not long into the marriage, though, Vernon began seeing another woman. In 1994, he filed for divorce and was given primary custody of the two children.

He wrestled as "Trillionaire" Ted Vernon, "acting like a complete douchebag."

Despite his busy life as a business owner and single dad, Vernon still found ways to seek the spotlight. He was cast for a few acting parts and landed gigs with his classic rock band, Ted Vernon and the Bulldogs. On nights and weekends, he wrestled as "Trillionaire" Ted Vernon, rolling up to matches in a Rolls-Royce and, he says, "acting like a complete douchebag."

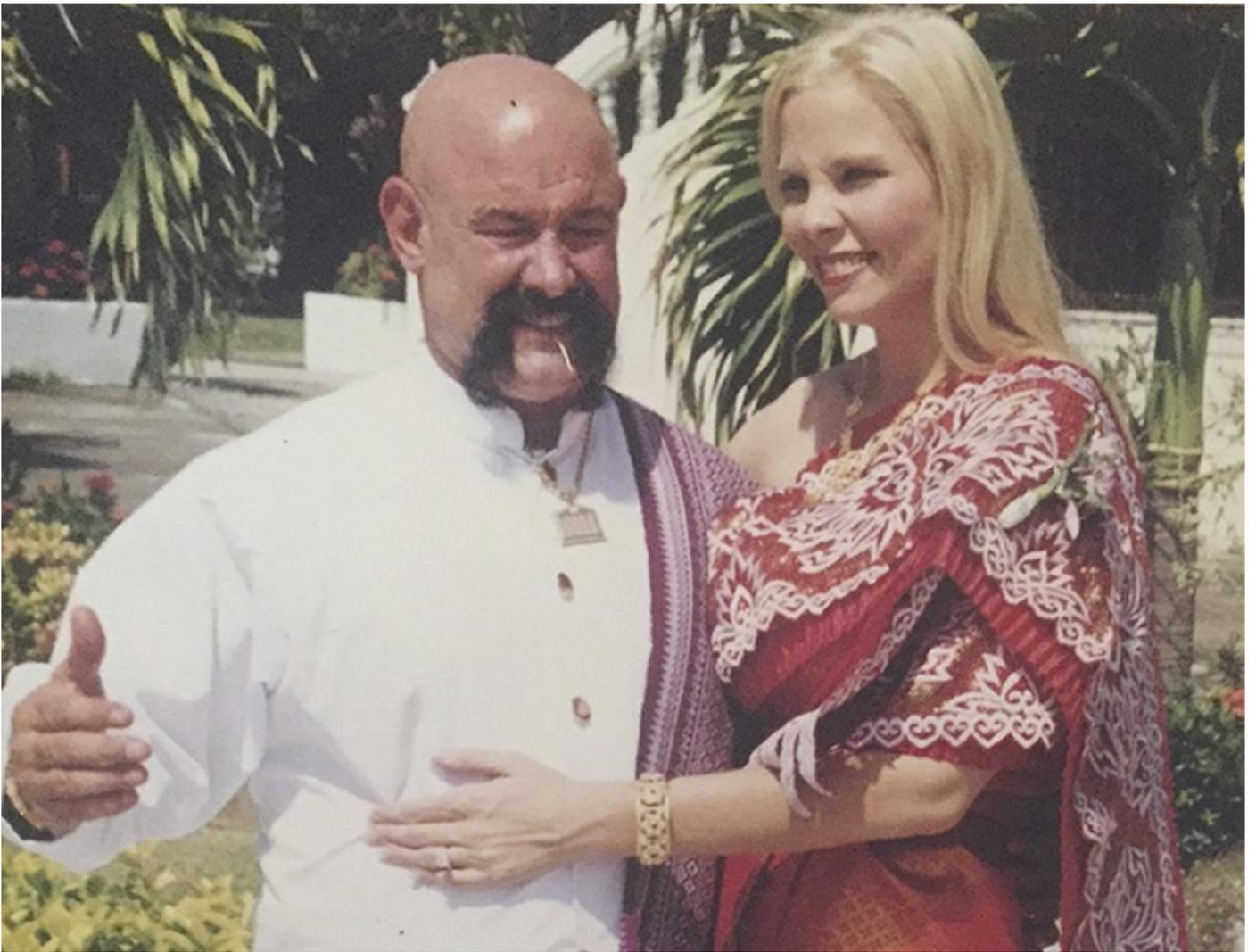
He met his second wife in the summer of '98. Vernon's insurance agent made the introduction, putting him on the phone with Ziel, a doll-faced coed who was helping high-school dropouts study for GEDs.

The two didn't have much in common: She was a community college student who'd just celebrated her 20th birthday, while Vernon was a 49-year-old single father of two. But he kept calling. After just one week, Ziel got a curt phone message from Vernon spelling out his intentions.

"He was like, 'Are you just going to waste my time?' I was like, *Oh my God, this guy is obnoxious*," she recalls. Still, she agreed to meet him at his home to see what he was all about.

Ziel's first impression wasn't much: The house was a mess, and she didn't find Vernon particularly attractive. But as the night went on, he began to win her over. "I know what I look like, but I'm a teddy bear," he insisted. He showed Ziel pictures of his children and of charity work he'd done with sick kids in wheelchairs. All night, Ziel kept thinking about something he'd said in the car on the way to his house.

"He was going to spend the rest of his life with me and marry me," she says. "He had that plan from the day he met me."



Vernon and Ziel wed in a Buddhist ceremony in Thailand in 2000, but Vernon now claims they were never legally married.

Courtesy of Robin Ziel

As she cared for her terminally ill mother one night at her parents' home in Fort Lauderdale, Ziel was jolted by a knock at the front door. Stepping into the house, Vernon headed toward her childhood bedroom and began packing up Ziel's clothing. He loaded the cardboard boxes into the back seat of a limousine, the only car he owned that was large enough to double as a moving truck.

Only a few months had passed since the two had begun dating, but for weeks, Vernon had been hounding her to move in with him, Ziel says. Although she'd initially resisted, she found herself in the limo that night heading back to Vernon's home in Golden Beach.

"I was like, 'I guess we're doing this,'" she says now. "It didn't come off as psychotic, but he was just like, 'Oh, I really care about you; things will be great.'... He doesn't take no for an answer."

Vernon's domineering personality would continue to chart their future. His relentless energy and uncompromising nature helped him engineer their marriage, sell cars, and eventually

land the deal on reality television. But behind the scenes, Ziel says, her husband's controlling behavior devolved into abuse and violence until it imploded into a massive court fight 18 years later.

Ziel always knew how odd of a match she seemed for Vernon, a bearlike man twice her age. But she gave it little mind, having been raised by parents with a 20-year age difference of their own.

Ziel was 10 when her mom filed for divorce. "I think she kind of regretted leaving the marriage," Ziel says. "Family is forever, even when you get a divorce."

Someone called police after Vernon ripped off Ziel's dress during a fight in the showroom.

Growing up, Ziel was an introvert who played piano and spent weekends working at a retirement home. After graduating from Boca Raton High, she took classes to become a nurse or physician's assistant.

She'd had only a couple of boyfriends by the time she met Vernon. Instantly, she could tell he was different: He was confident, charismatic, and, despite his five-foot-seven stature, always the biggest guy in the room. Her parents fell for him too, giving her their blessing. In those first few months, Ziel met Vernon's elderly mother and flew to New York to visit his children at summer camp.

"His daughter, the first day she met me, was like, 'I think I love you. You're beautiful,'" Ziel remembers. "From that point on, it was like an instant family."

Despite her concerns that the relationship was moving too quickly, Ziel accepted Vernon's marriage proposal months later. There was hardly enough time to stop and think if it was something she truly wanted. By that time, she'd started working for Vernon at the dealership and was helping him fight for full custody of his kids while still caring for her sick mother.

"I'm a fixer, and I saw things that needed to be fixed," Ziel says.

When her mother died in early 2000, Ziel finally agreed to fly to Thailand to marry Vernon in a Buddhist ceremony at his friend's apartment. Vernon took out an ad in the *Herald* to celebrate: "Finally got her! The king has got his queen! I am proud to announce the greatest, most beautiful girl in the world is marrying me!" he wrote.

Upon their return home, though, Ziel began to see a different side to Vernon. Riding in the car with two friends a few days before the couple's big first-anniversary bash, Ziel says, she and her husband got into an argument so petty she can't even remember what it was about.

"He started kicking me in the car, calling me names in front of the other people: 'fucking bitch,' 'fucking whore,'" she says. "We had this party to put on, so I just pushed it under the rug. It felt like I made him do it by having an opinion."

She says Vernon continued to call her names and even once broke her hand after throwing a chair toward her, but he laid off when he learned she was pregnant in early 2004. Ziel gave birth to Ted Vernon Jr. that November, but within a few weeks, she says, her husband was back to pushing her around, sometimes with their new baby wrapped in her arms. (Vernon denies all of Ziel's allegations of abuse.)

Starting in 2006, the business took a hit as the couple got into a dispute involving an adjacent shopping center run by billionaire (and now head of Florida's Democratic Party) Stephen Bittel. The two sides wound up in a hotly contested court fight that ultimately lasted ten years, costing the couple hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees.

"I had to come up with 100 more ideas to make money," Ziel says. "The litigation wasn't easy. Ted didn't make it easy. He was volatile, and I couldn't control him."

To outsiders, though, Vernon's explosive temper and searing quips often just seemed like a kooky part of his over-the-top personality. His expletive-filled tirades even helped land the reality show when he took a call from a British producer around 2011. Vernon says he was outside on the phone when an employee took an ill-timed smoke break.

"I don't like cigarette smoke in my face," Vernon explains. "I go, 'Marco, do me a favor and stick that fucking cigarette up your ass and get the fuck out of here. You stink.'"

Instantly, the producer knew he'd struck reality TV gold. The Brit made arrangements to visit Miami – and Vernon promised he wouldn't be disappointed. "Robin was really good-looking in those days," Vernon says. "I said, 'Wait till you see the prop that I have.'"

After shooting a full season, though, the couple learned the network was pulling the show after just two episodes, citing low ratings. The opportunity might have been lost forever, but later that year, Discovery launched Velocity, a channel with car programming. The network used the failed series as a placeholder, only to realize viewers actually liked it. Sensing the potential, Vernon called a buddy who worked in TV production and fronted the money for a new season.

The plan worked, and before long, *South Beach Classics* was being promoted as far away as the Netherlands. Promos showed the smiling couple cruising on the Rickenbacker Causeway in a '56 Buick Special convertible. The network billed Vernon as "the brawn" and Ziel as "the brains" of the operation.

The cameras didn't show everything, though. During filming one day, a customer parked in the wrong spot outside the shop. Vernon grew furious, cursing first at the man and then at Ziel, who had asked Vernon to calm down.

"He was screaming at me: 'You fucking bitch, you fucking cunt,'" Ziel says. "There were seven people there, no one saying a word, all while this is being filmed." The moment never aired.

During another argument, in November 2011, someone called police after Vernon ripped off Ziel's dress during a dispute in the showroom. But when officers arrived, Vernon claimed Ziel was mentally ill and had torn off her own clothes. Police let Vernon go, and Ziel drove home naked, bursting into tears when she recounted the incident to their son's nanny.

The betrayal by police weighed heavily on her mind when Vernon was arrested for domestic violence the following year. After receiving an anonymous call to the family's home in April 2012, Plantation Police found Ziel with scratches and swelling on her face and neck. The couple's 7-year-old son told officers his father had struck his mother in the face and then dragged her out of bed and across the floor. Vernon was booked into jail but released the next day.

Ziel says she heeded her husband's warnings about losing the show and agreed to drop the case if he got counseling. As part of their negotiation, he signed a piece of yellow notebook paper admitting fault.

"Robin didn't do anything wrong," Vernon wrote in the letter, which was notarized by his attorney's assistant May 1, 2012. "The last incident in Miami was my fault as well... I told the police she ripped her clothes off/hit herself, and this was not true."

But despite his promises to reform, Vernon was back in jail nine months later. Police charged him with felony battery after a former employee, Kutay Satiroglu, said Vernon broke his nose during a business dispute. Ultimately, Vernon beat the rap again. The State Attorney's Office dropped the case in February 2013.

As the show continued to grow in popularity, viewers were none the wiser to its star's violent outbursts. With the series acting as free advertising, the car business began pulling in monthly deposits as high as \$1.7 million, Ziel says. In a January 2015 email, the network told the couple it had "only good things to say about *South Beach Classics*," noting the show did well in upscale markets and brought in a diverse audience.

The two continued working and filming together even as Ziel and her son moved out of the house that summer.

But she says the abuse persisted. The most serious incident happened in October, when Vernon pummeled her in their driveway, leaving bruises across her face, she says. In text messages, he warned her not to let anyone see the photos of her injuries.

"You should be very careful who gets these pictures. A leak could shut down the show," he wrote in one text Ziel shared with *New Times*. In another, he invoked the potential loss to their son: "Back off and stop. U will kill the show. U will cost Teddy millions."

Ziel says she finally stopped showing up to work in May 2016 after Vernon threw her phone to the ground during yet another confrontation. When Season 4 premiered nine months later, viewers were shocked to see she had been replaced by a British model famous for her portrayal of Lara Croft in a videogame. Dozens of people posted on the show's fan page asking for an explanation.

"Robin where R you?" one wrote. "Just watched *SBC* and you're not on it. What's going on?"



Behind the scenes, he was arrested for domestic violence against his wife and former costar, Robin Ziel.

Courtesy of Robin Ziel

Under the cloak of night, Ziel let herself into the dealership last June to pack up her things, hoping to avoid a confrontation with Vernon during business hours. She was boxing up clothing, family photos, and folders of documents when she discovered a file marked with her stepchildren's names at the back of a cabinet.

Flipping through the pages, Ziel spotted an old police report. Dated June 15, 1994, it detailed a brutal attack just a few months before Vernon filed for divorce from his first wife.

"Mr. Vernon became violent and struck Mrs. Vernon with a closed fist about the face, chest, and back area as well as attempted to poke her eyes out with his thumbs," a Metro-Dade Police officer had written. "He kept telling her that he was going to kill her and also stated, 'Remember O.J.'" The report said Vernon hadn't been arrested – an on-call state attorney advised he couldn't be charged unless another incident occurred.

The document was Ziel's first confirmation that allegations about Vernon's abuse stretched back into his first marriage. In fact, a review of court documents shows authorities repeatedly passed on chances to prosecute him.

Another report showed that, in 1997, an officer patrolling the family's Golden Beach neighborhood asked Vernon's 9-year-old son, Mark, about the red mark under his eye.

"He was a shitty father," Alex says. "We should not have been allowed to be around him."

"His reply was that his dad, identified as suspect, Vernon, Ted, kicked him there," the officer wrote in an August 15, 1997 report. "When his dad gets mad with him, he uses profanity toward him and he becomes violent by kicking and punching him. During our conversation, the child stated that this is an ongoing practice, and in this officer's opinion, this is a form of child abuse." Police forwarded the case to the Department of Children and Families, but there's no record of Vernon ever being charged.

A year after that incident, Ziel moved in with Vernon. Long told their mother had abandoned them, Vernon's children welcomed Ziel as the first maternal figure they'd had in years.

"She was the only one to really take care of us. She'd braid my hair, buy us new clothes, feed us," Alex says now. "Robin was the closest thing to a mother I ever really had."

But Ziel and her stepdaughter say they also bonded over their shared abuse. When the family moved to Plantation in late 1998, Alex says, she spent the first night at their new home on a mattress in the hallway, watching her father beat Ziel in the master bedroom and then chuck a heavy briefcase toward her and her brother. Ziel says Vernon sometimes targeted them as a group, forcing her to helplessly huddle up the children and beg for it to stop.

Many of those incidents weren't reported to police. Ziel and her stepdaughter say they feared for their lives and tried to avoid making Vernon even angrier.

But in a sworn deposition, a letter filed with the court, and an interview with *New Times*, Alex recalled in detail several abusive incidents from her childhood. She says her father picked on her older brother: shaving his head as a punishment, taunting him to slit his wrists, and once beating him so badly that Mark's blood covered their glass front door. On the way home from a cheerleading competition when she was 12, Alex says, her dad slammed her head into the dashboard after learning she'd gotten demerits at school. Another time, in her late teens, he struck her with a two-by-four to the head, giving her a concussion, when she asked for the remote control to play *Finding Nemo* for her 2-year-old brother, she says.

"He was a shitty husband and a shitty father," Alex says. "We should not have been allowed to be around him."

(Through his lawyer, Vernon denies each of his daughter's accusations, saying she "is lashing back at Ted as they have no relationship.")

As she grew older and began a new life far away from Florida, Alex finally reached out to her mother, Monika, for reconciliation. She wrote a long letter explaining she was no longer angry at her mom for leaving. But Alex says Monika's response helped her understand what really happened.

"Hi! It's your mom," one of the letters read. "Yes, your father abused me. I had to hide it from you. I had to keep you and Mark safe... For years, people knew he was abusing me, very prominent friends. His mother was there when he punched me in the face. She had her friends over for bagels the next day."

The two began a long-distance correspondence that helped Alex make sense of her father's behavior. But shortly after they reconnected, her mother was diagnosed with liver cancer. At the funeral in 2014, Alex says, her father gave a gushing eulogy about his ex-wife and the fabled life they'd shared.

"My mom was troubled and she had her issues like we all have our issues, but she was really genuinely a lovely person, and I never got to have a relationship with her because of him," Alex says. "It's the only thing I really resent him for."



Promos for the show billed Vernon as "the brawn" and Ziel as "the brains" of their West Little River dealership.

Discovery Networks

In a small room inside a 14-story office building in downtown Miami, a videographer pointed his camera toward Vernon and pressed record. The easy questions came first: his name, his address. Then Ziel's attorney began digging in.

"Did you ever throw a chair at Robin Vernon?" she asked.

"Threw a chair at Robin? No."

"Was there ever an incident where Robin's clothes were ripped off of her?"

"Not ripped off. She ripped them."

"Did you tell the police after that incident that Robin was mentally ill?"

"Well, she is."

"Did you ever call her a fat pig?"

"I have," Vernon responded.

The December deposition was just one of several testy exchanges between the couple and their lawyers as Vernon and Ziel fight through six legal cases, contesting everything from

trademark ownership to the legitimacy of their 16-year marriage. A Broward County judge has granted Ziel a permanent restraining order against Vernon, who still denies all of her accusations of domestic violence. The fate of the reality show hangs in the balance as the court battles threaten to drag on for years.

"Did you see the movie *Fight Club*? It's self-inflicted."

In court filings, Ziel alleges Vernon has stolen her tow truck, threatened her lawyer, shattered her cell phones, driven their son while drunk, and ominously shouted that she should start writing her obituary. (He denies all of those claims.) She believes her husband and his lawyer are trying to bleed her dry through legal fees and says she has been "maliciously cut off" from their bank accounts.

Vernon, meanwhile, accuses Ziel of stealing cars from the dealership, breaking into his house to take an iPad and their son's bicycle, forging a Thai marriage certificate on her computer, and purchasing a \$660,000 property with ill-gotten funds. (She, too, denies those claims.) Vernon sought and won a judge's order to stop her from posting about him on social media and at one point even contested paternity of the couple's son.

Despite filing joint married tax returns, seeking personal injury damages on the basis of their marriage, and referring to Ziel as his wife on television and several times under oath, he has also challenged the validity of their wedding in Thailand. (Ziel calls the tactic "ridiculous," saying it's an attempt to erase her identity and cut her off from shared earnings.)

Vernon's most startling accusation came in September, when he accused Ziel of attempted murder, saying she poisoned him in an incident that sent him to the ICU for five days. In a handwritten petition, he said he feared for his life.

"She doesn't act like a normal person," Vernon scrawled out in block letters. "Please help me I don't want to be killed."

Attached to his petition was an affidavit from Felipe Lizano, a former employee who claimed he'd overheard Ziel talking with a doctor boyfriend about how she "intended to kill Ted... to get his business" by spiking his coffee with crushed-up pills. When Ziel's lawyers deposed Lizano, though, he said Vernon had enticed him to give a false statement with the promise of \$20,000.

Vernon's own medical records raise further doubts about the accusation, showing he was discharged with a diagnosis of diverticulosis, a common intestinal ailment. Though Vernon

still believes he was poisoned, his attorney says they have backed off the story for lack of evidence.

Wolfe, an entertainment lawyer who's been friends with Vernon for 30 years, says Ziel's claims of abuse are pure retaliation. During two interviews with *New Times*, the attorney alternately claimed the photos of her bruised face from the October 2015 incident "were old," were "not genuine," and "might have been from plastic surgery." Wolfe emphasized that Vernon has never been convicted of domestic violence and said he believes Ziel lied to police about the abuse. Pressed about the photos of her facial bruising, Wolfe said, "Did you see the movie *Fight Club*? It's self-inflicted."

Wolfe showed *New Times* four statements he had taken from former employees and business associates who claimed Ziel had injured herself or made false reports. Ziel, however, produced text messages and videos that indicate three of those employees did witness verbal or physical abuse toward her by Vernon. The fourth employee did not return a call from *New Times* seeking confirmation of her written statement.

It remains unclear whether *South Beach Classics* will return to Velocity. The network ran Season 4, featuring British model Lucy Clarkson as Vernon's sidekick, from February to April. Older seasons continue to air as reruns.

Although the network is aware of Ziel's allegations, its communication team refused to answer questions about why it has continued to air the show, saying simply that it "does not comment on private or legal matters involving the experts and personalities on our programs." Vernon claims network executives moved forward with Season 4 only after making a trip to Florida to investigate Ziel's accusations.

If that's true, Ziel says, the investigation was either sloppy or willfully neglectful. She asserts she has never been contacted by the network to discuss the situation. "I'm a human," she says. "I think they had the responsibility to contact me, send me an email, make a phone call."

At the dealership, Vernon continues to buy and trade cars from customers around the world. When asked what happened to his wife, he tells them that Ziel was his girlfriend and that they "parted ways."

"No worries," he assures them.

Ziel continues to get questions from fans on her Facebook page, which has 147,000 followers. But she can't legally respond because a court order prohibits her from discussing the situation on social media. While Vernon publicly denies their marriage, Ziel says she's forced to question her role she played in his life and on TV.

"It takes away the sanctity of marriage and family, which is so important and was part of our show," she says. "What was I, a piece of ass? I'm a mother, a wife, a partner... And now I've been silenced from answering."

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