

## Widows Had No Choice but to Carry On Alone

By Joanna Molloy

Daily News

September 9, 2011



*Julia Xanthos/ News* Elizabeth Candela with children John and Juliette.

Maureen Dominguez's youngest was 9 months old when her husband Carlos, 34, died at Marsh & McLennan on 9/11, his second day on the job.

Marie Anaya was left with an 18-month-old, a 5-year-old and a 7-year-old when her husband, Firefighter Calixto (Charlie) Anaya of Engine 4 died in the rubble at age 35.

Elizabeth Candela's children were 4 and 7 when her husband, John, a 42-year-old trader at Cantor Fitzgerald, died there on the 104th floor.

They, and hundreds of 9/11 widows like them, had no choice but to carry on alone, to feed, dress and nurture their children.

"There's no pity party here," Candela said. "I tell my kids, these people wanted to destroy us ... We can't let them destroy us. We have to go forward."

"I have to be the greatest actress in the world," Anaya said. "First I have to convince myself, then I can convince the kids. Because when mom's happy, everybody's happy."

"I was frozen for a couple of years, but then I saw things with new eyes," Dominguez said. "You have to shift how you tackle problems."

These women and 350 others like them say they have gained new life skills through the Creative Insights program at Tuesday's Children, a leading 9/11 family support organization.

"This course was actually originally designed for MBA students ... because if you're going to turn a business around, you have to think creatively," said Julia Romaine, who has run the two-month groups over the past nine years with Stillpoint Consulting partner Athena Katsaros.

It's the same with spouses and other relatives trying to cope with such enormous loss.

"We're all born with so much creativity," Romaine said. "It gets covered up by well-intentioned

parents, teachers and clergy who tell you to 'color within the lines.'

"We try to help everyone reclaim their creative potential ... For some, it might mean just putting a meal on the table. For others, it might mean planning a family vacation. For still others, it might mean getting a job, or a new job, or going back to school.

"It's not therapy. Therapy is analyzing the past. We are future-oriented. One woman said, 'My therapist told me to make myself my priority, but nobody told me how.' We give them tools."

One tool that helped author and 9/11 widow Abigail Carter is "Have no expectations." Carter began her book, "The Alchemy of Loss: A Young Widow's Transformation" at Creative Insights.

"When I used to think about going to a party, I would say to myself, you're going to be by yourself, and everybody else is going to be couples, and you're going to have a miserable time. That's an expectation of something awful, but if you have no expectations, you go, and you talk to people and maybe even make friends," she says.

"It's about living your passion," Romaine added. "It's different for everyone. Maybe someone wants to have a wonderful garden. Another wants to learn to sail a boat. Or just have great conversations with your child."

And maybe, having a relationship again.

"That's a biggie," said Eileen Lynch, whose husband Farrell died on 9/11 and went from being one of the first participants in Creative Insights to becoming a facilitator herself. Lynch says participants have told her they have said to themselves,

"You are so selfish. How could you possibly go out on a date when your husband is gone?"

Anaya lives in a small town, where someone once cruelly told her the money she got from the September 11th Victims Compensation Fund "must be nice."

Anaya worried at first what people might say if she started dating again.

"People want you to wear your widow's hat forever," Anaya said. "It took me 10 years to have a relationship with a man who I brought home to get to know my kids. It's good for them to and to see how to treat a partner well, and to be treated well.

"Who's going to teach my son a sport? I need him to teach him how to be a man. It's good to have male testosterone around the house."

"One of the tools they gave us is 'put-ups,' or taming that inner voice of judgment," Candela said. "I was constantly putting myself down: 'My hair's a mess,' 'These pants are too tight,' things like that. Creative Insights says for every putdown, give yourself two 'put-ups' " - compliments. "It gives you confidence to accomplish little goals."

Like getting a master's in biology and becoming a science teacher. Then going back to school again to study sports nutrition. And running half marathons in six states to raise money for Tuesday's Children. And writing the blog Halfcrazedrunner.

All of which Candela, 46, has done since first going to Creative Insights for help.

"When the children were little, and would ask where Daddy was, I would tell them he was in heaven," Candela said. "And they would ask, 'Where's heaven, Mommy?' And I would say, 'it's here, it's all around us. It's just another dimension of here.' I really don't feel John has ever left us.

"We didn't really move on and leave someone behind. We just moved forward."

