

# Widows Support Network

**Candace Dellacona:** Welcome, everyone, to the Sandwich Generation Survival Guide. I am your host, Candice Dellacona, and I am thrilled to welcome today our guest, Dawn Nargi from The W Connection here in New York City. Welcome, Dawn. Thank you. I am thrilled to

**Dawn Nargi:** be here with you this morning.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah. And likewise, I'm so happy to have you and to share with our listeners all about the W Connection and this amazing community that you started and that you continue to run all these years later.

**Candace Dellacona:** I just wanted to introduce you, Dawn, and I will let the listeners in on the amazing organization that you started and your mission. Dawn is the founder of The W Connection, a large nonprofit that is based in New York City, but thankfully it has expanded all across the country and I think even across the world in some cases, there are some members in other countries and The W Connection is an organization that was founded for widows.

**Candace Dellacona:** And it is an amazing organization that sort of enhances and makes the social connections for widows who are going through the same thing. And your organization has, you know, amazing programs and services it provides. So I'm going to let you speak to that, Dawn, as the expert. So thank you for being here today.

**Candace Dellacona:** Why don't you tell the listeners a little bit about your story and what led you to where you are?

**Dawn Nargi:** Great. Thank you, Candice. Like I said, I am thrilled to be here with your listeners. So I, I wanted to start back in 2007. My husband and I had just gotten married. We bought a great apartment, um, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and everything was going really well for us.

**Dawn Nargi:** We were thrilled. We had a two bedroom, we got pregnant and then things started to happen. My son was two months premature, thankfully. He spent one month in neonatal intensive care, and he was out. But my husband, who I assumed was so connected with me and having sympathy pains, was still having his sympathy pains, even though I had had the baby.

**Dawn Nargi:** We got him to the hospital or to the doctor. We found out he had spots on his liver, kidney, and spleen. They turned out to be cancer. We were told he would have 15 years to live and he died two months later. So my son William was three months old

when my husband suddenly died. So I did bereavement work. I started to walk through the steps of how am I going to handle being a new mom and a new widow and I realized that the best support came from other widows, other women who have been through this process.

**Dawn Nargi:** Right. And that was the impetus to starting the W Connection. And we started the W Connection in 2009. And today, like you said, we are thrilled to have an organization that spans the United States with a few members in Australia. We are very excited about that, and in Canada as well. But, you know, the great thing about the pandemic, the silver lining, the pandemic was that we did get to expand across the United States and, and into Australia as well.

**Dawn Nargi:** Yeah.

**Candace Dellacona:** And it's one of the silver linings for many of us, right? The connectedness. And I think that that's one of the overall themes of the W Connection and sort of who you are, Dawn, as I've gotten to know you and knowing a bit about your organization and its mission and the pillars that you've sort of laid out for the organization.

**Candace Dellacona:** And they are connection and encouragement and education and empowerment, which are four pillars. you know, sentiments that as someone who has lost their life partner, really, I think you've sort of honed in on, on what those four issues really are. And I would love to talk to you about, for our listeners, particularly for our listeners who are widowers, you became a widow, as you just explained, very young age.

**Candace Dellacona:** Young mom, fresh off of Wall Street, your life could not have looked different prior to and after your husband's passing. So, what are the most important issues that sort of arose for you immediately as a widow that you can hail back to and what you find with the organization that come up immediately?

**Dawn Nargi:** Like you said, I did have a job on Wall Street when I was widowed. I had a very demanding job. And I love to rise to the challenges and when I became widowed, I didn't realize that this was going to be harder than anything I had ever experienced.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah.

**Dawn Nargi:** And I think that. Overwhelming grief, those insurmountable challenges, and that fog that you're in as a widow.

**Dawn Nargi:** I sometimes say that when I returned from maternity leave and started to walk down 93rd Street to get to the subway, it felt like I was outside my body looking at

me trying to navigate this path. So I, I think everybody gets that overwhelming. Grief, the other piece that sometimes people don't understand is the other risks and challenges that face.

**Dawn Nargi:** If you think about it, my husband and I were equal earners. So immediately, there was a 50 percent drop in household income.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah, so money immediately.

**Dawn Nargi:** Right, financial immediately. And then productivity, trying to do this very demanding job while raising a child on my own. You know, pretty sure I met any widows.

**Dawn Nargi:** There's issues with You know, doing the job that you had or sometimes going back to work if you're caring for children. There's also the mental health risk with many women feeling increased social isolation and loneliness. And then we learned that there's also physical health risk. One of our board members did a research study talking about the implications of widowhood on our physical health.

**Dawn Nargi:** And yeah, there is an increased physical health risk as well.

**Candace Dellacona:** Which makes sense. So taking each of those issues kind of step by step, right? I think we all live in the world where we have to pay for things. And while you are in a position of working on Wall Street and having worked really hard to get to the position that you are, I'm sure there are widows within the organization where money is a significant issue because The widows themselves may not have worked when their spouse or their partner loved one has passed away.

**Candace Dellacona:** So what do you do for those widows who reach out and are in a real crisis in terms of money? What do you think the first right next step is in general, uh, would you say?

**Dawn Nargi:** When you look at the W connection and you look at the path of widows, we say that There is no playbook. Unfortunately, there isn't this book that says, step one, do this.

**Dawn Nargi:** Step two, do that. And then in one year, you're going to feel this way, right? For every woman, it's different. So my own example, uh, in a lot of ways, I'm finally rediscovering myself, right? My son was three months old when I was widowed, he's now 16 and there are still pieces of me. that I'm trying to remember.

**Dawn Nargi:** So right, so there isn't a playbook that we could hand a widow. Unfortunately, you'd say this is what, what you do. But we talked about that social connection, Candace. So that social connection does a lot for the widow. First, it's the healing power of social connection, being with somebody who gets it. But then, In our meetings, there will be conversations, right?

**Dawn Nargi:** So we have what's called peer led, um, support topic meetings. The facilitator will bring up a topic. Like finances. Right. And one, one widow might say, this is what I've done. And then another widow might say, well, this is what I've done. This is what I've done. And the hope is that out of that group, you are going to find that strategy that works for you.

**Candace Dellacona:** Which is amazing, right? I mean, I think you bring up a really important point, that there is no playbook, there is no one way and having widows come together in this community space to create a tapestry full of advice that along the way will apply to that person, maybe not the first, second, or third person that speaks, but perhaps something will resonate by the fourth person who shares, um, and may know someone in the finance industry to help you refinance a mortgage, for example.

**Candace Dellacona:** So those resources for money and finances are so important. Um, and do you find that for a widow in general, knowing that there is no one way or one playbook, do you recommend that? Widows sit down with an accountant or a financial advisor to sort of get the lay of the land once this, the smoke clears and the fog is lifted a little and you're left with what to do next?

**Dawn Nargi:** Absolutely. So we do refer out to different organizations. So you know, so when you look at our core programs, we talked a little bit about the peer led topic meetings. We also have something called webinars. So, webinars could be on those different risks that I talked about, productivity, health, and you know, uh, caring for your single parenthood.

**Dawn Nargi:** And then, when we do those webinars, it is always with an expert. Yeah, so there's an expert giving advice on particular things like finance and again, if that person resonates with the person attending that webinar, they might reach out to that person. They may say, these are the things that you can do for finances, but yeah.

**Dawn Nargi:** There, there are with finances certain steps that, that do need to be taken and, and that expert who is giving that webinar will guide that member of the W Connection.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah, which is amazing. And then when you talk about being a young mom with your son as an infant and in the past having your husband or thinking

that you'd have your husband to sort of rely on and, and share the, Responsibility of child care and, and that piece of it, I mean, that adds a whole new layer for the widow, right?

**Candace Dellacona:** How do you cover child care and the responsibilities that go on with child rearing alone? So what do you see or what has come out of your peer group meetings for those widows?

**Dawn Nargi:** When you look at the W Connection, again, we talked about peer support and the healing power of social connection. So, our meetings are made up of many different widows from all ages and all backgrounds.

**Dawn Nargi:** But what we did do is we did create one peer led topic meeting for young widows. We felt that there was some different issues that young widows deal with, like Makes sense. Sure. We did develop one peer led topic meeting that is focused on young widows. The other thing that we encourage is the member directory.

**Dawn Nargi:** Once you become a member, you have access to the member directory, and what we've seen happen is Young widows or, or widows who, any way you have a connected, right? Whether you play golf and you want a new golf partner, whether you are a only parent now, and you want a connection with another only parent, what we see is that widows use the member directory.

**Dawn Nargi:** And then they get together with other women with certain special interests, right? Like childcare, like playing golf, like going on vacation. Like just Going to dinner because of the loneliness that they feel. Yeah.

**Candace Dellacona:** What do you see, Dawn, as a widow yourself, as the difference between a widow that has young children versus a widow that maybe never had children or their children are already out of the house and quote unquote raised?

**Candace Dellacona:** Do you see a difference in the mourning, in the coping, in the level of? Healing that they're able to do an amount of time when it's a widow with children who are still being raised.

**Dawn Nargi:** It gets complicated when you look at the makeup of each person. So, I think it depends on that person. When you are faced with a widow, say with no children or empty nesters, they may connect to another widow who is an empty nester, or they may connect to a woman who has a young child.

**Dawn Nargi:** You don't know how somebody is going to act, but what we do is we encourage that they connect with each other, and that you feel that connection.

**Candace Dellacona:** Right. It doesn't mean that because there are two widows with two young children that seemingly from the surface have all of these similarities in their situation, it may not be a connection for them, which makes sense.

**Candace Dellacona:** But when you become a widow and you have children in your home, what have you seen as someone who sort of walked the walk with your, you know, 16 year old? Um, what are the different issues that came up for you that perhaps didn't come up for those? You know, find themselves in, in the widow position without children.

**Dawn Nargi:** I, I think one of the things about having a partner is that confidant, that partner, that person that you go to, to help you solve issues. What I have to do and what other widows have to do, whether they have children or not, is who are the people in your inner circle? Yeah. That you connect with and that you can ask advice, right?

**Dawn Nargi:** Who are the other moms that you connect with and you can say, Hey, uh, my son is having this issue in school. How have you handled it? So again, if your partner satisfied some of these areas for you, who can help you? With those areas, whether it be a financial professional, whether it be another mom who is in that circle.

**Dawn Nargi:** Yeah,

**Candace Dellacona:** I love that. And that goes back to what the W Connections mission is and then the vision, right? So it's a perfect kind of segue to talk about the emotional piece. And the friends that you may need, the professional therapists that you may need. So in creating that circle, what has been your observation for maybe the holy grail of a widow walking this path?

**Candace Dellacona:** Perhaps they're a newer widow. How do they assemble the right people, whether in the W Connection or out of the W Connection? Do you have any anecdotes to share with us? Uh, for either yourself or, or a member?

**Dawn Nargi:** It's very interesting that we're talking about this now because, uh, each month we have a different theme for our topic meetings.

**Dawn Nargi:** Okay. So, this month is about creating a connected life and a lot of the research that we did was through Vivek Murthy, the U. S. Surgeon General's research over healing power of social connection in a sometimes lonely world.

**Dawn Nargi:** The power of this connection and. What we do in this is we, we talk about the importance of connections and then we go and we say, Okay, well, how do I create these connections? And it's, it's interesting, Candice, right? If you go back to your child or even you on the playground at five years old. Yeah. Hi, do you want to be my friend?

**Dawn Nargi:** Well, we don't do that anymore as adults, right? Yeah, not. Hi, I like you. So what we do is we say, Well, how do you create these connections? You're right. You have to show me. Sure. We've done it when we were toddlers. We've done it possibly when we went off to school, college. Yeah. And we talk about how to make those connections.

**Dawn Nargi:** And again, there isn't one playbook, right? So, you're in the meeting and somebody might say. I joined a golf group, a golf club, because my husband and I love golf, so we're going to go play golf together. Or I joined a reading group, or I joined a parent group. So what are the ways to make those connections?

**Dawn Nargi:** It's about people putting ideas, because I don't have all the ideas. I know what worked for me.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah. Well, what did work for you, Dawn? What were the things that you did personally?

**Dawn Nargi:** So, for me, within the W Connection, I actually had another group of women, all with children under four years old, who we all got together once a week, had dinner together, had our kids play together.

**Dawn Nargi:** And for me, that was some sense of normalcy. It was, yeah, women that I had never met. I met them because they were widowed like me and every week we would get together at least once a week and share a meal and hang out.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah, I love that. So it can be over food or a shared interest and you know, even your comment about joining a group of golfers, right?

**Candace Dellacona:** I mean, I think. That probably helps twofold. It makes you maybe feel closer to the person that you lost because you're doing something, an activity that you enjoyed together and you're continuing that and you're finding a sense of community in that, which is really kind of a beautiful, a beautiful thing.

**Candace Dellacona:** I, I spoke recently. with a, an author, um, who wrote a book about the sandwich generation. As you know, this is the sandwich generation survival guide. So widowhood is obviously an issue of the sandwich generation. And one of the things that she talked about that I've seen even in my own life is walking.

**Candace Dellacona:** Like it could be as simple as taking a walk with someone. You're getting outside. Exercise and you're able to sort of chat through things and seek that emotional support. So I love those suggestions of maybe finding something outside of widowhood to make those connections because we are still people, even if we've suffered this loss.

**Dawn Nargi:** Uh, we have lots of programs and services and the one that I'm thinking of right now when you're talking about taking a walk is called our Step Outs. And our Step Outs are quarterly social events. The first one we did is we met in Central Park. We walked up to the Northwoods and then came down to um, a restaurant called Pure Eye on the Water.

**Dawn Nargi:** And the great thing about those is that you're with a group of women who are widowed. And you're walking and enjoying the scenery, enjoying Central Park, but you're also learning about each other and more of an open conversation. And lots of friendships are made there as well. It may be your first social event.

**Dawn Nargi:** That you've had since you've been widowed just the idea of taking that walk together what we call a step out Yeah, great way to connect.

**Candace Dellacona:** I love that. What a wonderful idea for your members and also being around other people that feel Very similar to you and not having to explain what that is. One of the things that we wanted to cover today is the morning piece and sort of re envisioning what your life will now be without your person and the future that you planned.

**Candace Dellacona:** Can you talk a little bit about that process and how the W Connection It helps its members and how you found your way to redefine your future and who you were.

**Dawn Nargi:** Yeah, it's very interesting, right? We look at this a couple of different ways. So if I think about this from my own life, I was a new mom, I lived in New York.

**Dawn Nargi:** I was going to raise my child here with my dog and with my husband. That life is completely gone. The sad thing about that, that whole vision of the life that you thought you were going to have, it's gone. And whether it's the widow who was just about to retire.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah.

**Dawn Nargi:** Husband died, or the widow like me who's, who's just had a child, or, or any widow, even the widow who drives into the office with her partner every day.

**Dawn Nargi:** Your life as you knew it. It's completely gone. We talk about having to create your new normal. Yes. So, again, this is where another topic meeting is called Rediscovering Your Identity. Who am I? Am I this person who lives in New York City? If you think about when you married or when you are with a partner, there's lots of things that you decide together.



**Dawn Nargi:** Yes. We're going to live in Manhattan. Did you both want to live in Manhattan or did one of you want to live in Manhattan? So you really have to go, okay.

**Candace Dellacona:** Back to basics. I mean, wow, you know what Dawn? That's a really great point, where all of these things that perhaps you assumed was going to be, even the backdrop of where your future was going to be, right down to the place that you live,

**Dawn Nargi:** huh?

**Dawn Nargi:** Yeah. Exactly. And it's, you know, Kenneth, when we make these decisions, when we have a partner, We don't go, okay, we're living in Manhattan because you like Manhattan, or we're, we hike on the weekends because you like hiking, or I like hiking. You kind of just do them together. So when your partner is gone, you go Okay, was I doing that more for him or was that something we both enjoyed?

**Dawn Nargi:** And I think rediscovering who you are, whether it was 20 years ago, 30 years ago, 40 years ago when you first got married, is a big part. of this journey.

**Candace Dellacona:** What a universal, I mean, sort of obvious topic, but honestly, Dawn, it hasn't occurred to me before you actually articulating it. And I think the interesting part about what you just said is it's universal perhaps to somebody who's also gone through a divorce in the sense that I guess our society when we marry or we couple up and endeavor a future together.

**Candace Dellacona:** Trying to unravel what part was me and what part was you. And even if you had determined that you did love New York City, perhaps what you loved about it was that you were going to be together with someone. And I guess that rediscovering can also be redefining, right?

**Dawn Nargi:** Yeah, I, I have a funny story. Now that we're talking about it, it's kind of the opposite of, uh, what we were talking about.

**Dawn Nargi:** So Kathy, who was on my board, we were talking together and she's like, Oh, I don't get to go to the movies anymore since John died. And I really enjoy the movies and the theater. And one day she looks at me. She goes, you know, Dawn, John and I never went to the movies together. And I always ended up going by myself with popcorn and a soda and enjoying myself.

**Dawn Nargi:** She goes, there's no reason I can't do that now. So it was very funny, like her coming to realize that it was something she already did on her own and started doing again. It was really just interesting. I just remember the conversations and that stuck out because she's just like. Why can't I go to the movies?

**Dawn Nargi:** I love that. I can't go to the movies on my own.

**Candace Dellacona:** Well, it's sort of like it all got swept up in, in one, you know, fall swoop, right? Where you say not everything maybe was intertwined and going back to parse out the details of the things that perhaps you did do independently before. You know, I think that's a really sort of beautiful anecdote.

**Candace Dellacona:** It's sort of like what Oz said to Dorothy, which was, or maybe it was Glinda the Good Witch, that you were there all along and just trying to figure out. How to carve your path forward. I think as women, we have to do that in many ways, whether or not we lose our life partner, particularly after you have children and you identify yourself in one way or another.

**Candace Dellacona:** And so in, in having these meetups and fostering these discussions within the W connection, has there been one sort of universal sage advice that you've heard or received, uh, over the years? About redefining who you are and

**Dawn Nargi:** finding yourself again. I think one of the pieces that we look at, we have this expression that says we did not have a choice to be widowed, but we do have a choice on how we, the rest of our lives.

**Dawn Nargi:** Now, if you were to say that to me, when I was newly widowed and really in that fog and deep grief. I would have said to you, no, I, I, I don't have a choice, but what I see that is really so amazing, a woman not knowing my organization and deciding to join, doesn't know about anybody in the organization, but decides that I'm going to become a member.

**Dawn Nargi:** And then that woman decides that I'm going to go to one of these meetings.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah.

**Dawn Nargi:** I'm going to go to a step out on my own. So those choices that women make and the effort they are taking to show up and move forward is incredible. And although they may not see it, I could see them doing it, right? So I see them making that choice to join.

**Dawn Nargi:** I see them making that choice to come to a meeting. Maybe not speak the first time. Maybe not the second time, but the third time part of the conversation. And then maybe making that choice to reach out to another member in the member portal. So I, I think a couple of pieces of advice with that. Know that.

**Dawn Nargi:** This journey is so difficult and give yourself credit for those steps that you are taking. It's been a privilege to see women move forward and, and really just reinvent their lives.

**Candace Dellacona:** When you were saying all of that, the feeling that came to me was bravery. Bravery in making those choices and sort of forging out on your own, and trying to find those connections.

**Candace Dellacona:** I know that myself, and I'm sure a lot of listeners feel, it's scary taking on sort of a new role in whatever role it is, so all I can think of is how brave those women are to take those steps and make those choices and join the organizations. And the other thing that I'll say is that We've had therapists on this podcast before, and I've talked to a lot of people as an estate attorney over the years, and one of the greatest things about support groups that I don't think a lot of people who are not members of support groups understand is, it's not about sharing necessarily.

**Candace Dellacona:** It's about hearing other people's stories and not feeling alone.

**Dawn Nargi:** Exactly. I think. Knowing that somebody else gets it, or even knowing that they get it without saying anything,

**Candace Dellacona:** with Having to exclaim, yeah.

**Dawn Nargi:** Right. But, you know, with my group of young moms just being there, they got it. I didn't have to say it was a tough week this week.

**Dawn Nargi:** They just got it.

**Candace Dellacona:** They could probably look at you and, and realize what that is. And there's beauty in that too. That makes you feel connected. That makes you feel seen, understood, supported. What an amazing, beautiful organization that you've created. And this community of women and all of the people that call themselves members of the W Connection.

**Candace Dellacona:** As an attorney, I can't help but Throw in my bit of advice, I, I am not walking the path of a widow at this time, and I, God willing, I, I hope I don't have to think about that for quite some time, but I represent a lot of widows, and one of the things that you and I have talked about, Dawn, is sort of getting one's house in order, um, especially when you are it, as a single person and perhaps a parent, and so one of the things that I always recommend is, As soon as the fog clears and you're able to wrap your mind around it, it is taking care of the legal documents you need to take care of, and it's not as daunting.

**Candace Dellacona:** As one would think, right, Dawn, you know, having those documents in place to make sure that other people can speak for you.

**Dawn Nargi:** Yeah, I think absolutely, Candace, and I want to talk so a little bit about my own story is, Norman And I were newly married. We just had a child.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah.

**Dawn Nargi:** Prior to, I think this is important even prior to anything happening, right?

**Dawn Nargi:** I think I shared with you, we didn't really have anything in order. Yeah. We were pretty newly married. We just had a child. So, We thought we'll get all those documents in order later. Yes. So I, I think when you are with somebody, the importance of having all of your legal and financial paperwork. In order is important, right before and then after I am a big believer in seeking out a trusted advisor, right?

**Dawn Nargi:** Going to an attorney like you to help with that paperwork or going to a trusted financial advisor to help with your finances as well. So having that financial and legal documents in order before anything happens and then seeking out. Yeah,

**Candace Dellacona:** I think there's a lot of shame wrapped up in when people don't have things set up exactly the right way, but as I say to most of my clients and our listeners is that we're all sort of operating in a space where we hope to live a long time, we hope to be healthy a long time, and we're all paying our mortgage and getting to work every day and getting the kids off to school, so it's not surprising that these sort of things fall by the wayside, and after Yeah.

**Candace Dellacona:** One loses a, their spouse or their significant other, there is more of a concentration on making sure that everything is in order, because if the worst were to happen and something were to also happen to you, you want to make sure that you have kids. They're covered and your own health issues, you know, when you have a spouse in New York, anyway, um, a spouse can speak for you from a, from a health care perspective, there are certain rules that allow that, um, nonetheless, having a health care proxy and documents that nominates The person, because it might not be your mom.

**Candace Dellacona:** It might not be your sister. It might be the best friend that you met through the W connection who really understands your ideas about living and dying, because you've been able to share with them much more than you've been able to share perhaps with your family of origin, and maybe that's the right person.

**Candace Dellacona:** So. I definitely encourage our listeners to think about those documents and getting them in order. And one of the great things is you can feel a sense

of accomplishment with having them done. It's going to be a lifelong journey of mourning and helping your kids mourn, but this is definitely something that you can check off your list and not really have to think about it again.

**Dawn Nargi:** No, absolutely. Like, like I said, we didn't have any of that in order before Norman died. And after Norman died, I, I did make sure all of those things that I realized I needed, I started to put in order.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah. It really isn't as daunting as one would think, too. So I encourage our listeners, you know, Google is a great resource to read about those documents in your state.

**Candace Dellacona:** And then, of course, you can contact your local bar association and find someone who's local to you. And it's not prohibitively expensive, so I encourage all of our listeners to go through that exercise. No, but I want to talk a little bit from your perspective, Dawn, so we talk about being the widow and the widow in you and this organization, but as someone myself, and I'm sure a lot of our listeners, we have dear friends whom we love, who are widows, and those of us who haven't gone through it, Looking for ways to support our dear friends or our family members.

**Candace Dellacona:** What are the tips that really made you as a widow feel supported, Dawn, or that you hear your other members talking about? Can you share those things with us?

**Dawn Nargi:** So, I love that you mentioned this, um, we actually have a, uh, article that came out in Women's Day. Oh, yeah. I wonder Issue. So, just three tips in honor of International Widow's Day, which is on June 23rd.

**Dawn Nargi:** And I talked about three things there. One, is if you have a friend that's a widower or a widow. Know that aside from the overwhelming grief, that person is dealing with. So many other losses and risks as well. We talked about the financial loss. We talked about legal implication. We talked about possibly not having a job or having a job that's too much to handle and physical health and loneliness.

**Dawn Nargi:** So one, know that the. Overwhelming grief is there, right? But there's also other things that that person is dealing with as well. The second tip that I gave in that article was we don't know how you could help either. You know, so I remember people come to me and they'd say, what do you need? And quite honestly.

**Dawn Nargi:** I don't know. I have no idea what I need. I know I'm overwhelmed. So I think knowing those things that you can help with. I had a friend come in and just made this, all of her cooking utensils, made a great meal for me, put it all in Tupperware and left because she was an amazing cook, knew that I needed to eat.

**Dawn Nargi:** You know, asking somebody if they want their dog to be walked, right? Like, yeah, that was a big part of it. That night walk that Norman did, I didn't know how I was going to do it every night with the baby. And the other thing that, so again, not asking what you can do to help, but thinking about those ways you can help and execute it.

**Dawn Nargi:** And then the last thing I said is, know that there are times when. The widow is feeling incredibly lonely and sad, and possibly taking that person out for something silly like bowling. Just getting out of all the grief, getting out of the parent care, and then just going and doing something silly. For a couple of hours, just being in that, that present moment, you know, so those were my three tips that I had.

**Candace Dellacona:** All great tips. I think we are all so nervous about overstepping when anyone has sustained a loss, particularly a loss that we don't personally understand. And so I do think it's sort of like a, a common phrase to say, let me know what you need or what can I do? But I guess what I'm hearing from you is you pick the task and say, you need to eat.

**Candace Dellacona:** Let me cook you a meal. I'll bring it on Wednesday.

**Dawn Nargi:** Right. Absolutely. It seems, Dawn, it seems like Canyon needs to go out and I walk my dog every night at nine. I'm going to swing by and pick up your dog. Yeah. Just something like that and saying this is what, especially if you're a person who loves to walk dogs and you have your own dog.

**Dawn Nargi:** Talk about that example so much because It does seem like something so minor, but it's so big. Right, so for the widow who's going, okay, I need to make sure I finished my job, I need to make sure my son is fed, I need to make sure the house is in order, maybe I have some work to do after dinner, and then the last thing about walking my dog, it just becomes too much, so.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah, it could be the straw that broke the camel's back. I mean, too, as women, and a more kind of universal point, I think it's really hard for us to ask for help.

**Dawn Nargi:** Absolutely. I

**Candace Dellacona:** know that that is true for me. I think that we always try to quote unquote do it all and then when you really get to a point where you literally cannot do it all, being able to accept the help from someone is a lot easier when they're laying it out and making it much harder for you to say no.

**Dawn Nargi:** Absolutely. Absolutely. I always tell women in my community and in our meetings we say, ask for help, but I know in my own widowhood. I don't know if I ever asked anybody to do anything for me.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah, but maybe as the community surrounding and loving our widows and the widows in our lives, instead of waiting for the request for help, providing the help without being asked, um, it's a really beautiful act of service and it's certainly a way.

**Candace Dellacona:** to support their grief and acknowledge their grief. I, I think that that's terrific. I also love a widow's journey doesn't define them necessarily and recognizing, you know, back to like who they are and doing something fun that has nothing to do with their widowhood, whether it's bullying or taking a girlfriend out for a glass of wine.

**Dawn Nargi:** Exactly. Those times where you could give yourself a, a break and be in that present moment of that particular activity.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah, I also, I love the, the concept too of just being there to listen and to hear what the widow needs to say and not necessarily providing advice that we're really not equipped to give.

**Dawn Nargi:** Right. It is interesting. We talked about, uh, I think there's an article somewhere on my website on some things people said that might not have been the most perfect thing. And I, I do think people try to. Wrap things up in a bow and go, okay, it's going to be better. And I think while it may make the person saying it feel better, it's not something I know in my own experience that really helped.

**Dawn Nargi:** Just acknowledgement that it is awful. I think when somebody just said, Oh my God, it's awful.

**Candace Dellacona:** And it's not comparable, right? I think the grief and losing a spouse. It's so different from other losses because of the reasons we've already discussed. The financial instability, the mourning of the future, the loss of your life partner to help you raise that child, there's so many layers to it that it's really hard to compare.

**Candace Dellacona:** And then, like, as you say, Dawn, too, from person to person it's so different. Not every widow experience is the same. It's not a playbook.

**Dawn Nargi:** Right. It's very different. That is one thing that we do say at the W Connection. There is no playbook and it's very different for every woman. But what we try to do is find those connections.

**Dawn Nargi:** We try to keep our meeting rooms not too large, somewhere around 20. Hopefully out of those 20 other women in the room, you find somebody that says, uh, Particular thing that's this great nugget of advice, or you find another person. One of my members talks to me about, she is, uh, living in the New York City, city area, and the other woman is on the West coast.

**Dawn Nargi:** Um, she doesn't have any children, but the person on the West coast has, I forget how many children and grandchildren, different areas of the world, different makeup of family, and. They are so connected and they talk about that connection and that bond that they have with each other. So would you. Really interesting, the friendships that come out of the organization.

**Candace Dellacona:** Really, I mean, and friendship being one of the great themes of sort of making your way through life and supporting our widow loved ones and acts of service and things that you can do. And one of the things that I read too is supporting the children of the widow. So the, the, the kids who have lost a parent, because obviously their loss is also super unique.

**Candace Dellacona:** And somebody told me that. You know, being there for the milestones and the big events to make sure that the child has a cheering section just to not only support the widow, but the children of the widow.

**Dawn Nargi:** Yeah. So my son at 16 has decided, um, that he wants to be an actor, which I'm, I'm thrilled about. And he was in the school play, played Kevin G and mean girls.

**Dawn Nargi:** And what was beautiful is the first. night. He didn't really want any of us to come. He didn't know how he was going to be in his performance, but the next day, I mean, the performance was amazing. I went, he was so good. The next day he said, can you invite Aunt Madeline and Aunt Penny, my, uh, sister in laws, my husband's sisters.

**Dawn Nargi:** I called them that night. They came the next day, they're not from New York City, they're just outside in New Jersey and in the suburbs of New York, and they immediately showed up for him, which was beautiful.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah, showing up is, is another great theme and saying the person's name and sharing the stories because as we all know.

**Candace Dellacona:** They're on their loved ones minds all the time. We're not bringing up something they're not thinking about, right?

**Dawn Nargi:** Absolutely. I remember somebody said to me, my husband's anniversary, and they said, you know, well, we didn't want to remind you.



**Candace Dellacona:** As if he needed one.

**Dawn Nargi:** Which I thought was so funny. I think from where I sit, I could understand it, but it is funny that they thought that I wasn't thinking of my husband 24 hours a day, you know, think about it, right?

**Dawn Nargi:** Yeah. Your life is completely changed. Like you went to bed together in the same bed every night. You woke up in the same bed. You maybe walked to work. You had coffee together. So that loss is. Felt for the widow.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah, it's permeated everywhere. The last thing I would love to just chat with you about briefly, Dawn, is the fact that through the journey of widowhood, it doesn't take the widows outta the sandwich generation and on top of dealing with their grief and perhaps their child's grief and figuring out the finances, they also have aging parents and they're trying to raise their kids.

**Candace Dellacona:** So life continues in the sandwiches they say. And so how do you support. widows who are also dealing with aging parents, aging loved ones, and acting in that role as well.

**Dawn Nargi:** Yeah. So from my own story, the nice thing about my family is I'm one of four, and when I became a widow, my siblings took over everything from my parents perspective, which was beautiful.

**Dawn Nargi:** I think they knew that I had a lot to deal with, and again, that doing things That, you know, the person needs. All right. So my family realized that right now I needed to focus on my son and they were really amazing making sure my mom and my dad were okay. Thankfully again, I was a very young widow, so my, my parents were.

**Dawn Nargi:** They were young when Norman passed, so they didn't need much care then. But as they began to need care, my siblings definitely took care of them. But then there were other stories where widows will tell the story that right after their partner died, they went on to take care of their mom or their dad. So the piece that's interesting about that is that here they are just starting their grief journey with their partner.

**Dawn Nargi:** And immediately going into care for their aging parent and then losing their parent. So it's almost as if they had to put their grief on hold. Yeah. Now they have to grieve when their parent passes away. They now have to grieve not only their partner, but their parent as well. So again, different for every widow, but definitely something we have to look at as being part of this sandwich generation.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah. What your siblings did for you is they picked up the slack, right, in ways that you perhaps would have been able to contribute. Before Norman passed away, you simply didn't have the bandwidth to do after he did. So maybe as siblings to a widow or a widower, just being cognizant of the fact that perhaps it's not going to be an equal contribution to the caring for your aging loved ones.

**Candace Dellacona:** I think that's key.

**Dawn Nargi:** Right. And, and they're not going to be You remember I said to a very dear friend, I am not the person I used to be. I, I went through a process of rediscovering and rebuilding my life, but when Norman first passed, I really was a, I felt a shadow of who I was before.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah. I mean, how could you not?

**Candace Dellacona:** One of my clients said something really interesting to me who had lost her husband and then her mother got sick shortly thereafter and she said that one of the beautiful things that came about was being able to support her dad, not as her dad, but as someone who was losing the love of his life. And so making that connection and these sort of yeah.

**Candace Dellacona:** Unorthodox ways that you'd never expect, right? To forge a bond with your own father over the loss of your spouse is really unique. I don't wish it on anyone, but what a silver lining.

**Dawn Nargi:** We've heard a few of those stories there where some of our members have gone into a deeper relationship with their parent once that parent has lost their partner because they've been through it all.

**Candace Dellacona:** Yeah, and understanding our conversation today really sort of ties back into the pillars of the W connection and figuring out ways that we can connect, um, whether we are the widow ourself and trying to connect with other widows or the person who loves the widow and wants to connect with them, encouraging and education in terms of getting the right Resources and the finance people and the legal piece and the empowering piece to find a way to go on and to redefine.

**Candace Dellacona:** So, I have loved this conversation, Dawn. I am in awe of you. I am in awe of this amazing community that you have created out of an unimaginable loss at such a young age. So bravo to you and all of your team.

**Dawn Nargi:** Yeah. I can, as you say those words, I think about, we have, I think at this moment, 42 volunteers. Wow.

**Dawn Nargi:** You know, it is, I am in complete awe of these women who believe. And the mission and vision of this organization so much that they are volunteering their times to, to run these meetings, to reach out to new widows, to run these step outs. So it's also a privilege to me to watch women coming to this organization, you know, one month out, two months out, seeing that there may be, they're not talking into the meetings.

**Dawn Nargi:** To moving all the way through their journey to becoming what we call a, a gym, a gym is a volunteer who gives every month for time or gives every month. donation to the organization. So it's amazing. It's an amazing privilege to see the strength of these women move through their, their journey. And I get to be on the sidelines and watch them become gems.

**Dawn Nargi:** And

**Candace Dellacona:** I love that. What a great. term for them, a title for them. So for our listeners wanting to learn more about Dawn and the W Connection, you can take a look online at [widowsconnection.org](http://widowsconnection.org). We're going to provide in our show notes all of that contact information. If you know of a widow, you want to make a donation towards the amazing cause that Dawn has sort of spearheaded all these years, nearly two decades of finding this connectivity.

**Candace Dellacona:** I really would encourage all of our listeners to do so. And thank you again, Dawn, so much for spending so much time and opening up your heart to us and sharing all of this valuable information, truly.

**Dawn Nargi:** Thank you. It's wonderful to be here with you.

**Candace Dellacona:** Thank you, everyone.