

# Miriah Corso

By Luke Schmaltz, VOICES Newsletter Editor

“There is no love like the love for a brother. There is no love like the love from a brother.” – Astrid Alauda

The strategies for coping with grief are as numerous and varied as the people affected by it. What works well for one person may be the wrong approach for another. Some find, as they navigate the emotional gauntlet of grief, that a combination of strategies is the key to processing the loss of their beloved.

Over the last nine months, Miriah Corso has relied on yoga, mirror flow, her training as a coach, close family and friends, and a variety of other modalities to help her face the loss of her younger brother, Justin, who died of substance use on May 21, 2021. “I always say he is amazing. I know he is physically not here, but he is with me all the time and he’s in me,” she attests. “He would do anything for anybody, give the shirt off his back. He always showed up for me in my darkest of times... always. You couldn’t get mad at him.”

Corso recalls how Justin’s struggle with substance use began over 20 years ago when he was in high school in Swampscott. “His senior class, they are mostly all gone,” she begins “There was a huge amount of people in the town where we grew up, Nahant, who lost their lives to this. They all started with the pills and then it escalated.”

## An Ongoing Concern

After years of undergoing treatment and recovery with varying results, Justin had achieved ongoing sobriety. “He had been clean from heroin for about a year,” Corso says. “He was doing really well. He actually did a course that I did. It was a personal growth and development course that I had done in San Francisco (the Atlas Project). It came to Boston and my mom did it and somehow, she was able to enroll him,” she says. “I ended up coaching this program, so I got to see a lot of what he was dealing with internally. I never knew how much he had been through. There was a lot of anger and sadness he was working through. He felt alone, he felt behind, he always felt like he needed to catch up, so he was always anxious”

Corso recounts how in February of 2020, Justin had been in the Atlas Project but was unable to complete the course. Then, as the pandemic set in a month later, so too did another relapse.

## A Hybrid Approach

Corso explains how, as a highly active person, it is important for her to engage in a variety of exercises and self-care activities as she copes with grief. “You can do the hard things, you can face the hard things, but you can do them with support.”

Corso then describes an exercise where two participants establish a connection by facing one another and simulating one another’s movements while simultaneously repeating affirmations. “I call it mirror flow,” she begins. “We did a three-week challenge. We repeated, ‘I am strong, I am choosing, I am free,’” she says. “Justin had done that, and he was like, ‘Miriah, this is so good, we have to take this into sober homes and we’re going to help people so they will always have this reminder they are choosing.’ That’s one of the things I do often.”

While continuing her work with mirror flow, Corso explains how a typical session of self-care activity could go by practicing a variety of exercises. “Both my brother and I are like the Energizer Bunny. I talk fast and I get excited so, really, I like grounding.” She describes sitting cross-legged in front of a mirror and breathing methodically. “I breathe, I take that breath and connect to my body, I often listen to music, I have a whole flow that I do... and I dance or I move, or I work out.”

## The Power of Preserving

“I have a little spot, it has some of my brother’s stuff, his pictures, and his ashes,” Corso says. “Everyone does it differently, but for me, it’s comforting to see his pictures because it’s a reminder that he’s got my back and that he’s with me. I like to move through it and feel it instead of pushing it off and avoiding it.”

In her spare time, among her many coping exercises, Corso aspires to document her journey by compiling the endless reels of video of her and her brother into a documentary-style film. “I was videoing myself, because I would forget things ... which tends to happen. So, I wanted to remember the hard things and I was documenting the pandemic, my kids and everything I’ve been through. We sold our house, we left, I brought my kids to Florida. I made really bold decisions to fight for our lives in so many ways, like, leaving my job I had for over 20 years. I had been documenting the whole time and even before I went to Florida, I was documenting stuff with my brother. I decided I needed to make something based on addiction in the pandemic.”

## Tough Decisions

In July 2020, Corso says, “he was at my house, and he was not well and needed help. I got a court order to have him arrested and put into somewhere against his will. It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done. It was tough watching him get arrested,” she says. “He was a union electrician, and he was on medication for opioid dependence. But, at the beginning of the pandemic they made him switch medication types which did not go well.”

Corso explains how this eventually led to her brother’s relapse after he was opioid-free for over a year, which ultimately led to his death. “After he passed, I documented everything, even when we got the call that he had died I had my voice recorder on. It was very traumatic,” she explains. Currently, Corso has a massive amount of raw, unedited footage of her and Justin, her public speaking engagements, as well as her personal accounts of coping after Justin’s death.

“He always thought there was something wrong with him, he was always anxious, thinking he needed to be somewhere else and that he wasn’t good enough.”

Corso offers time-tested advice on dealing with the death of a loved one to substance use. “Just be in that moment and feel it, whatever it is. Some people journal, I talked into my cell phone. I videoed myself and what I felt. Also, be patient with yourself and have grace. I had to stop doing the documentary for a while because my go-to is anger and I know sadness is underneath that. I was really angry at a lot of people in my life, mainly because my brother was no longer here, and I was taking it out on them,” she says. “The other huge thing is what you can do. You can do one little thing, like drink water, or eat something healthy. I have been coaching based on the Atlas training I did, and when I focus outward, in service of other people, that supports me.”