

Susan Phoenix's husband Ian, a Detective Superintendent in the RUC, was among the 29 people killed when the Chinook carrying them from Northern Ireland to a security conference in Scotland slammed into the Mull of Kintyre on June 2, 1994. For years Susan felt desolate with grief but now, thanks to angels and clairvoyants, she tells **Gail Walker** how she's spoken with Ian again — and finally moved on. She has two grown-up children, Nicola (37) and Niven (32)

HOW THE ANGELS BROUGHT MY DEAD HUSBAND BACK TO ME

You had a wonderfully happy marriage.

Ian and I had such an intimate and loving relationship from day one. I was working as a military nurse and Ian was a Paratrooper. We met on one of my first visits to the NAAFI Club in Aldershot. Meeting him was like being hit by lightning. I'm English, he was a fiery Irishman from Co Tyrone and it was perfect.

Between 1968 and 1994 you lived first at Aldershot and Malta, in military married quarters, then moved to Belfast when Ian joined the RUC, and finally to a farmhouse in Co Antrim. But life in Northern Ireland during the Troubles must have been difficult.

In many ways we just accepted it as normal and got on with it. Ian and I were both very adaptable people, plus we probably thrived on some of the pressures and excitement.

Ian also felt it was his mission to bring peace to his own country because he really loved Ireland. Of course, there were times when we both wanted to go off, live in another country and grow potatoes.

That's probably why we ended up moving to our house in the country. It was ramshackle when we moved in but we did loads of work on it. And if Ian was stressed when he came home from work, then he'd go off into the garden or go jogging. I loved growing vegetables and keeping goats.

You heard of Ian's death in one of the cruellest ways.

Yes, I had driven Ian to the airport for the flight on the Chinook. I always liked to take him to the airport if I had the chance to do so. I kissed him goodbye, then had dinner with my daughter before starting to drive on home. Just as I hit the dual carriageway at Greenisland I heard about the crash on the news on the radio. I can still remember the awful feeling, and the way people in the outside lane were looking at me with what I call those 'sucked lemon' faces. I was screaming and crying and driving all over the place and they obviously thought I was mad.

It was a long time before I could pass that part of the road again.

Your grief was all-encompassing, a kind of desolation.

It went on for months and then for years. I don't actually recall when that feeling of being utterly bereft stopped.

I remember one morning a few months afterwards I was at home and went out onto the terrace in my dressing gown. I was sobbing and Nicola came over to me. She and Niven felt so responsible for making me happy again, and she was looking at me with such compassion. She said: "Oh Mum, I have just realised you will never be happy again." I replied: "No."

'Hollow' is the word that sums up how I felt.

But worse was to come. Within six months of Ian's death both your parents died. Shortly afterwards you decided to move to France. Why was that?

I'm not really sure. I'm not good at thinking things out, I just do them. I just knew that I needed to be out of the country.

Initially I applied to do Voluntary Service Overseas — I've always had this feeling throughout life that we are here to make a contribution — but they never replied so obviously that was not meant to happen.

I also found coming back to Ireland so difficult whenever I'd been away. When my parents died and I travelled to England for their funerals, on each occasion I went on to France for a while, the first time with Nicola and the second time with Niven.

One day I found a house that seemed a good idea at the time. I knew no one there, but it was a re-focus.

Also I was writing a book about Ian's life and work, Phoenix: Policing the Shadows, and I knew the British government would not approve of it, so I probably felt more at ease in France. The Government would never have expected that I, a mere widow and a mere woman, would have known so much about the security forces' work in Northern Ireland. I had no qualms about doing the book, however, as I knew Ian would have wanted it all to be known. The book was his last job and one that I just happened to be doing with him.

The book was a distraction but your grief remained.

Yes. The book kept me going through the third year after Ian died. I was living on adrenaline, dealing with the Press and all the publicity. I mean, little 'ol' me appearing on The Richard and Judy Show! But after all that was over I went down the tube completely.

So what finally started to turn you around?

A lovely girl called Mandy gave me some wonderfully healing aromatherapy and reflexology. She also mentioned that I might want to attend an angel workshop. My immediate reaction was that it sounded a bit too much like religion to me. I'm not a religious person in the conventional sense. I do believe in a Higher Power, but I think the religions of the world have done more harm than good.

Okay, so you find yourself on this angel workshop. What happens?

Well, there were people there from all walks of life — some struck me as a bit scruffy, a bit



Susan Phoenix: 'People always scoff at what they don't understand. There was a time they also scoffed at people who said the world was round'

hippy, though everyone was lovely. A lady called Diana Cooper was taking the course and as I looked at her all I could see were these shapes behind her. I can see them now in my mind's eye — Darth Vader types in greyish shadow standing together at the back of the room.

Surely, you must have questioned your own state of mind?

Oh yes. I thought I was cracking up. I had read about how people go mad from grief.

And what happened next?

I asked the woman beside me, Ann, a clairvoyant from southern Ireland, if she was seeing anything, and she was seeing everything that I was seeing. She also gave them the name that Diana had mentioned: the Ascended Masters.

Later, Ann offered me a healing. I said 'yes' although if she had asked me to jump off a roof I would probably have agreed to that too — that's how I felt then.

But it was then that she found Ian. His voice could be heard clearly. He was saying: "You did not have to let me go so soon."

What did that mean?

He meant that because I had let him go I had left myself isolated and alone. Since he'd died I'd told myself that I would have to be independent. I suppose I was picking up on Ian's philosophy that you must always go forward. There was a military term he was fond of using: "Keep low, keep moving." I believe he would have felt that I had the strength to cope with all that came my way and to do so without help. It was just that, with the book, I hadn't kept low.

So, you felt he was close at hand again?

It was wonderful, knowing that his presence was still there. This lady, Ann, did not know Ian at all and yet she started to tell me how she could feel an overwhelming sensation of love all around her, and that she was enjoying the feeling. I thought: "Here he is, back for two seconds and chatting up another woman."

Intriguingly, though, it was a clairvoyant from Belfast, Joanne Maguire, who brought you into what you believe was even closer contact with Ian.

I'd asked Diana Cooper to run an angel workshop in France. That started on April 1, 2002. That first day we were sitting there and I started to feel really weird — this sudden feeling of energy and warmth. I shouted across to Diana: "Are there any clairvoyants here who can see what I'm feeling?" Diana immediately went: "Oh my God!" and other people said: "Wow." They all saw this golden energy all over me and reaching up to the ceiling.

And then this Belfast accent shouted out: "And there's someone standing beside it."

I said: "What does he look like?" And this person, who turned out to be Joanne, described Ian perfectly.

Then, when we broke for lunch, Joanne came rushing over to me and said: "I've someone here wants to talk to you."

There was certainly no way that Joanne, who is 30, could have known Ian. His first words to me were: "Say happy birthday to Derek." That was a reference to a new friend of mine, Derek.

I'd thrown a party for him on Easter Day. Before the guests had arrived I'd taken a photo of the prepared dining table. The next day when I reproduced it on my computer screen, there was a distinct presence on the chair where Derek had sat.

There was also another form sitting behind Derek's chair. Later when I showed the photo to Derek, who is very cynical, he said that the first shape was his guardian angel and the other was Ian.

Now, a year later, here was Ian saying happy birthday to Derek.

What else did Ian say? He mentioned my daughter-in-law who was from southern Ireland and who he had never met.

It was wonderful to know that he had seen and approved of our son's choice.

He also mentioned a blue car to me which meant nothing at the time. That night, however, Niven rang and mentioned that he had just bought a new car. I said: "It's blue." And Niven said: "How did you know?"



Chinook horror: 'I heard about the crash on the news on the radio. I can still remember the awful feeling'

Joanne also accompanied you the Chinook crash site on the Mull of Kintyre. From the account in your book that seemed to be a remarkable experience.

I felt I wanted to close the door before the 10-year anniversary of the crash by going there. Joanne said she'd like to come with me.

It was a freezing day with a clear blue sky and we could see across to Co Antrim.

I'd this map of the crash site and I'd always felt that I'd known where Ian's body had lain. I took Joanne to that spot and she sat down but almost immediately jumped up again. She said that he was telling her that wasn't where it was — which was nice because we knew we had a connection with him immediately.

But Joanne didn't just hear from Ian. She heard from other victims of the crash as well.

That's true but I don't want to report too much of that because these are other people's loved ones.

The reports I have included in the book are those that I have already passed on to those relatives.

For example, one man was saying: "Ask my wife did she ever see a mist in the house?" He'd been trying to let his wife know that he was with her for comfort and this was his chance to reinforce the message.

What did Ian say to you?

He said that he felt serene and at peace. He also asked if I was ready to come over and join him. Through my shock I replied that there were still things for me to do here. He said: "Atta girl — too right — big stuff ahead."

He also confirmed what you'd suspected were his last words.

That's right (laughing). Myself and the children had often speculated about they were. We thought they would either have been 'oh s***' or 'oh f***k.' As it turned out, they were the latter.

But you also saw something.

Yes, I saw what looked almost like a hologram. I could see all these bodies of men and one woman walking up out from where we were, as if they were rising in front of us.

They were telling Joanne that they all died at once and that they all went forward and that their spirits went up.

The circumstances of the crash remain surrounded in controversy. Did you get any confirmation as to what might have happened?

The Chinook was faulty — I've known that for some time.

And Joanne was shown this khaki coloured suitcase or box. One of the men on board kept pointing to it and telling Joanne it was faulty.

You moved to Spain two years ago and you've now met someone new. Tell us about him.

Well, we've only been together two or three months. But he is very together, very balanced. He also works with energy stores and bright lights. He's an Italian who grew up in Argentina and his first language is Spanish.

What are your children doing now?

Nicola and Niven are happy. They are both married and living in England and Niven has a son and a daughter.

Susan, there's no other way to put this — some people reading this interview will be convinced you're bonkers.

(Laughs). Oh I know. They'll be saying: "What's happened to Susan? She's cracked up."

But people always scoff at what they don't understand. There was a time they also scoffed at people who said the world was round.

Maybe some will think I'm a weirdo. I know that in the original draft of my book I'd put in a lot of self-deprecating things and my editor made me take them out. She said: "You don't need to be so defensive."

But I stand by everything I've written.

■ *Out of the Shadows* by Susan Phoenix (Hodder Mobius, £10.99)



Crash victim: Susan's late husband, Ian Phoenix