

IT WAS a gloriously clear winter morning, the sky a brilliant blue with a bitter wind gusting off the Irish Sea. Susan Phoenix pulled her coat tightly around her as she trekked through the heather-clad Scottish hillside.

She was heading for the cairn built to commemorate the 25 security personnel and four pilots who died in the mysterious Mull of Kintyre helicopter crash in 1994. Among them was Susan's husband of 36 years, HUC police chief Ian Phoenix.

It was the first time she had visited this remote, peaceful, wildly beautiful spot but this was to be no ordinary visit. For Susan was adamant that this was the place she would "find" her husband once again.

"I know it sounds strange to people who may not have had strong spiritual experiences but what happened on that hillside can't simply be dismissed because not everyone can explain it. Belief is a great thing but it's not simply believing what you can see and what you can understand. This is far more powerful than that."

At Susan's side was a psychic healer called Joanne Maguire who had no knowledge of what had happened that terrible foggy morning 12 years ago.

"I suggested to Joanne that we sit roughly where I thought Ian's body

by **Melanie Whitehouse**

had been found," says Susan. "Immediately, I could feel the electrical shivers come from her arm to mine. I could actually 'see' energy bouncing around in front of us but nothing could have prepared me for what was to happen next."

Joanne turned to me and said in a soft voice, "Their souls left as a group - look". As she spoke I had a pure image of a body of spirits walking up the hill together as though they were floating upwards.

"Ian waited until the other ghosts had had their say before saying through Joanne, 'I feel real peace and contentment now'. Then a miraculous thing happened - I actually heard his voice myself."

"He asked me whether I was ready to join him. Through my shock I replied, 'No, there are things still to do...'. Just a few years before my answer might have been very different but he replied, 'Atlagirl - big stuff ahead - all your life-training is coming in now'."

"I experienced this wonderful glowing, prickly feeling all over. My

face felt as if it were being warmed by kisses, in spite of the freezing wind. It was all right, Ian was at peace at last and had told us so."

And Susan, too, was at peace. For this was the end of a long journey for her, through depression and illness caused by the pain of losing first Ian, then both her parents, all within six months.

It certainly seems extreme finding salvation through the appearance or otherwise of "spirits" but Susan isn't some sort of wacky New-Age devotee. Sensible, grounded and middle class, she's anxious about being seen as odd. "I'm worried about sounding like a happy-clappy," she confides.

Nevertheless, spiritual awareness is nothing new for her. As a child she had been able to see spirits, a gift that she neglected while she pursued a career as a psychologist and raised her family. "My whole psychic thing didn't come back until I needed it," she says.

"I'm not clairvoyant - but I am intuitive. I help people to get in touch with their inner wisdom."

"If you have a closed mind you won't learn anything but it's not my mission to convince anybody."

So how do those of us who would like to believe in angels but can't quite manage it go about it? "If you want to see an angel you must ask for a sign," says Susan, 57.

And if that sign can be explained by coincidence, what then? "You have to trust yourself."

'Ian told me he felt real peace and contentment'

The first thing that comes into your head is normally right. If it fits, it fits."

Like her relationship with Ian. They met while she was training to be a nurse, married a year later in 1968 and had two children, Nicola, now 37, and Niven, 33.

"Life was a journey from the beginning and meeting Ian at 19 wasn't part of my plan," she explains. "But if I hadn't lived the life I did with Ian I'd only be half the person I am now. He had a lot to teach me - and I had a lot to teach him."

WHEN he died - in circumstances that to this day have never been fully explained - Susan locked her grief away inside and continued as normal. "Nobody knew I was suffering because I just wanted to get on with coping and living a normal life," she says. "I thought I was conning the world."

"I remember standing in the kitchen with a friend a year after Ian's death and she said, 'You have to move forward to find another man'. To this day she doesn't know how close she came to being shoved in the dishwasher along with the dishes. Society can't dictate how long you take to get over something and I'd lost all my anchors at the same time - Ian, my mum and my dad, all within six months."

Hoping that a new scene would allow her to move on, Susan then moved to a little stone cottage in

I was a New-Age sceptic... but then I found my angel

When Susan Phoenix's army husband died in a mysterious helicopter crash, her life fell apart until she discovered a hidden psychic talent

the South of France a year after the crash, where she began the cathartic process of writing a best-selling book about her life with Ian.

Yet little seemed to help and by 1997 she was plunged into depression and seemed to be almost permanently ill. "I hadn't got a support group around me holding me up," she says. "I was getting fatter and fatter and telling myself I was fine but I wasn't. I

turned down anti-depressants because I was sure there was another way, and a few days later I found myself on the couch of an aromatherapist friend who introduced me to essential oils and healing therapies like reflexology."

"Another alternative therapist said I had what she called 'soul pain' and that to truly unblock 'negative' energies I ought to attend an angel workshop."

For many, it's not such a sur-



VOICE FROM BEYOND: Susan has found peace after the death of husband Ian, above, by 'contacting' his spirit at the site of the helicopter crash that killed him in 1994

quite bizarre seeing these sorts of greyish shadows standing together at the back of the room. I blinked and they were still there, with large, flatish shoulders and long flowing cloaks.

Diana looked up and said to the participants: "It's a massive golden presence all over and above you, reaching to the ceiling. And there's someone standing beside it."

It was Ian, saying he was still around, "I was dumbfounded but I knew instinctively it was him, that a

'The room was filled with strange shapes'

part of me had been restored. I know it's difficult to understand for many people but after all those years of unbearable loss, after the trauma of not knowing how and why he died, here was some sort of resolution.

"That's when I knew I had to get closer to him, to find him in Scotland. I guess that we found each other again, and that's when I knew I could move on."

● *Out Of The Shadows: A Journey Back From Grief*, by Susan Phoenix, is published by Hodder Mobyus, price £7.99. To order a copy, call The Express Bookshop on 0871 434 6091 with your credit/debit card details, or send a cheque payable to Express Newspapers to: The Express Bookshop, PO Box 206, Ralmouth, TR11 4WJ or order online at our website www.expressbookshop.com. Delivery to UK addresses is free.

prising leap of the imagination. Just last month a survey in Readers' Digest revealed that six out of 10 people believe in the possibility of psychic ability, while half say they have had a premonition or have dreamed of an event before it happened.

A quarter of the 1,005 adults quizzed knew a family member was ill or in trouble before being told, 43 per cent claimed they had tapped into other people's thoughts

or had their own read - and one in five said they had seen a ghost.

"I thought it would be a load of rubbish, all ladies with blue tints and nothing else to do," Susan recalls. "It was a last minute decision to go but it seemed like fate to me - there was a last-minute cancellation and immediately afterwards I phoned up."

And so she found herself in Exeter with "angel lady" Diana Cooper. "I walked in and I didn't like

the feel of the place," says Susan. "It was a bit New-Agey But then I realised the people were men and women from all walks of life and all ages.

"My only previous knowledge of angels was limited to Christmas cards and religious imagery, so I really didn't know what to expect."

But as she sat down in a circle on the first day, she suddenly felt comfortable. "It seemed strange when Diana told us about the

special energies that were now being sent to earth to help bring about world peace.

"She talked about things I'd never heard of and mentioned ascended masters. I have to admit it all sounded preposterous - I knew some people would have laughed out loud if I had told them about it.

"But then suddenly the room seemed to fill up behind Dana with strange, human-like shapes. It was