

Phoenix rising

LOSING your husband after 28 years of marriage, both parents six months later and having your son in a serious car crash would push most people over the edge.

But for Susan Phoenix it was a different state of affairs. She swallowed her grief and threw herself into her work — ignoring her need to grieve for some three years.

Her husband Ian, an RUC inspector, was killed when a military helicopter crashed on the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland while carrying security forces personnel to a conference in Inverness.

That was in 1994 and after the initial shock, Susan threw herself into activities with her daughter Nicola and son Niven.

She also penned a controversial book about her late husband and his work with the RUC called Phoenix, Policing the Shadows, co-written with her friend, Jack Holland who sadly died last year.

The book was censored by the security forces in Northern Ireland and Susan was severely criticised by some of Ian's former colleagues.

The explosive story covered the undercover war against Northern Ireland's most deadly terrorists and Susan revealed in shocking detail how police operations were fought in an arena where terrorists made the rules and how the cease-fire negotiations were actually conducted.

It was also an intimate story about an Irishman and his English wife who went to Northern Ireland thinking she would be the wife of an ordinary hobby and instead found herself thrown into the world of top-secret subterfuge.

It details Susan and Ian's love affair and how family life sustained Ian during the mayhem of the Troubles. "It

started as his life story, then a real love story and it was a story about a man with a heart who did a difficult job," explains Susan.

"He was an Irish man in the RUC, he was an

Irish Protestant who wanted to see a united Northern Ireland and then talk about a united Ireland," she says.

But what Susan didn't do during this difficult time was stop and give herself time to grieve.

Eventually this came back to her in the form of a severe depression.

"I went down the tubes after the first book and working hard for three years but I was clinically depressed at the time and not admitting it.

"I just felt bereft and totally lost. I just kept going, it's what Ian would have expected me to do but I felt totally alone and the children were my biggest support but I didn't want to be a burden on them.

"I also knew that I had to be alone because all my friends, although they meant well, they want you to be alright so you perform to a certain extent," admits Susan.

"I cried solid for about two years and we did a lot of stuff that Ian and I had talked about doing with the kids as teenagers like sky diving and surfing. It was a lot of energetic stuff but I'd lost all my dreams when I couldn't share them with Ian — I lost all my purpose.

"When you couldn't ring my mum or dad when things were tough made things even harder. I'd lost half my memory because those three people share my background. You know when you become a couple, you always have your husband to remind you of things, check details as a reference.

"There were 1,500 people at Ian's funeral and although I recognised a lot of faces, I couldn't remember their names. Those are the things which strike you, because you become a couple, there's only half of my memory and half of me, so I had to rediscover me again," she reveals.

Susan is originally from Peterborough in England but lived for almost 30 years in Co Antrim with her husband and children.

A qualified nurse, she qualified as a psychologist in Northern Ireland and worked extensively with deaf people throughout the country.

She moved to France a few years after her husband's death but has since relocated to Spain.

Susan has now just finished her second book, Out of the Shadows,

which is described on the cover as a journey back from grief.

It covers her 10-year journey from overwhelming grief to a new life full of new hopes and dreams.

"It took me 18 months to write the book in Spain, I couldn't do it in France because life was too social, I had too many friends and I

was enjoying life too much so I had to move," explains Susan in Dublin's

Westbury Hotel to promote the book.

In Susan's second book, she tells how she made her journey back to recovery through healing and what she calls soul therapy.

"I was living in France and I'd be in the local village and suddenly I'd burst into tears so I came back to see my doctor in Ireland and he wanted me to take Prozac but I knew I didn't want to," she says.

After refusing medication for her depression she eventually found her way through alternative therapies and angel workshops.

"Modern society has convinced us that we need drugs and counsellors to fix us when what we need is to use that 95 percent of our consciousness that we've stopped using and we need to bring back the emotional side."

"Emotion has become a dirty word and we need to get back in contact with our emotions," she says.

"You have to feel the pain to know when you feel better, it's like when your body craves something in particular to eat, it needs a particular vitamin or something, it's the same with grief — I needed to cry and be alone with that

"I tried aromatherapy but it didn't work for me, then I went to an osteopath because my body was in pain but he recommended that I talk to his wife who's a kinesiologist.

"She gave me this lump of rose quartz and put it on my solar plexus and told me, 'you've got soul pain'. She said when people die, parts of your soul can go with them," says Susan.

The kinesiologist recommended that Susan go to an angel workshop held by Diana Cooper and finally, by default, Susan ended up going to a workshop in Exeter, England.

"I thought it sounded like a load of rubbish and couldn't imagine doing it but I went along because the right person said the right thing to me at the right time," explains Susan.

"I was sitting there and I saw these two figures behind Diana Cooper with flat shoulders and no facial features but I could see them in the shadows — that's when I thought that's it, I'm cracking up, I am falling apart.

"But at the break I asked another woman

what she'd seen and she described exactly what I saw.

"She was an Irish woman from Wexford and she offered to give me some healing and it was during this session that she began to tell me things only Ian and I knew."

"She told me 'I can feel this wonderful feeling of love and I'm overpowered by it.' It was Ian who came back to help me. It was here that I saw spiritual evidence and discovered all the positive energies that come from the angelic realm to help us.

"I now listen to my intuition, we have to be aware of the signs in our lives and to ask the angels to help and guide us," she adds.

Out of the Shadows by Susan Phoenix costs approx. €16. For more information log on to www.phoenixplanes.com

