

Stepping right

When Susan Phoenix lost her policeman husband Ian in the Mull of Kintyre helicopter crash 11 years ago, she didn't think she would ever feel excited about the future again. But now, after a long and painful journey back from grief, Susan is ready to look ahead and begin a new chapter with the launch of her second book.

JOANNE LOWRY
reports



MOVING ON: author Susan Phoenix

WHEN Susan Phoenix sat down to write her book more than two years ago, she never could have imagined how eerily relevant it would be in

today's climate. Inspiration to embark on the touching and deeply personal account of her journey *Out of the Shadows* came post-9/11 when Susan was touring the US and Canada giving talks on living with terrorism.

And now her book is hitting the shelves at a time when terrorism is once again dominating the headlines.

"Isn't that strange?" she says pensively, her thoughts momentarily drifting off. RUC Det Supt Ian Phoenix was one of 25 senior counter-terrorism officers who died when their Chinook helicopter crashed on the Mull of Kintyre on June 2, 1994. Four RAF men were also killed. Susan's life was irrevocably changed forever.

"The reason I wrote the book is because when I was giving talks after 9/11, people's questions were nothing to do with terrorism. They were all about 'how do you survive?'," said Susan.

"I wanted to get through the point that the soul continues. I think that's a very important message and that's what I think gives people the most hope, knowing that the end isn't the end of a person's spirit and energy.

"People want to know how to survive after the most traumatic things in their life and they want to know how to do it without drugs or drink.

"I never took a sleeping tablet or a tranquilliser and yet it's the first thing the doctor offers you. The important thing to know is that what you need is always within you."

It was a lesson that Susan would take some time to learn.

In the midst of her "world-stopping grief" she knew she had to leave Northern Ireland where the memories and surroundings only compounded her loss and it was then that Susan's

thoughts turned to writing about Ian, "her soul mate".

"Some people say I ran away from Northern Ireland but I had nothing to run away from. I saw it as moving on. I'd moved there with Ian and because of Ian, and when Ian wasn't there, there was no need to be there any more," explained Susan.

"That's why I took myself away from everything and everyone. I stayed in a hotel in the south-west of France and wrote an outline of the book [*Phoenix: Policing the Shadows*] so that I wasn't intimidated or influenced by anything and some of the stuff was emotional but then I suddenly realised what a long journey I'd been on and what a long way I'd come."

The bulk of her latest book was written in 2003/04 – a decade after Ian's death. It wasn't the first time Susan had sought solace in writing. *Phoenix: Policing The Shadows* was published in 1996 and chronicled Ian's contribution to fighting terrorism in Northern Ireland.

It went on to be a best-seller and now, nine years on, Susan is ready to step *Out of the Shadows* as her aptly-entitled new book hits the shelves.

"The last one was about policing the shadows and this one is about me moving out of the shadows so it tied in really well," said Susan.

"I feel excited about the future again and I never thought I'd feel that." Susan believes that rather than being afraid of change, you should embrace it. "We're never too old and it's never too late to change. If we're not changing and growing, we're just staying stuck," she said.

"It's wonderful to open your life and your heart to love people in general. I don't care what anyone says, the disasters in the world are there to teach us love – and it's a horrible way to learn it. But look at the outpouring of love that has been happening in recent years. The group consciousness is being

raised."

Speaking from her Spanish home, Susan said she hoped her new book could be enjoyed on different levels.

"I'm down here, meeting so many sad, lonely, wealthy people who have asked for my help, proving that money doesn't bring you happiness.

"I spoke to a young woman the other day about dreams and happiness and she burst into tears. When I asked what was wrong she said she just realised she'd never known happiness her whole life and I realised that in spite of all my grief and everything I'd been through, I'd known immense happiness and I'm so grateful for that.

"I want to be able to help other people find that happiness and that's what I hope the book will do, show people that what they need is inside. That's what's important. Other people are not responsible for your happiness and neither are they responsible for your unhappiness.

"One of the things I learned out of all my grief was how lucky I had been. My life was full of family love and I'd always been loved by my parents. I'd had a loving marriage, loving family and wonderful friends and it's the gratitude I reckon is important."

But while Susan hopes her book will reach out to those who have suffered loss or great tragedy, she is not naive enough to think it will be without its critics.

"Some people will say I just like to be in the limelight but I'm not going to be hurt by them," she said.

"When I wrote '*Phoenix*' I was accused of exploiting the way Ian died but I would have written that book no matter how he went and I know I would have written the second one because people were asking me for it and Ian's spirit came back to encourage me to write more."

She shows that it is possible to rise up from the ashes once more.

out of the shadows

Walking a spiritual path from loss to life

SANDRA CHAPMAN reviews
Out of the Shadows



TRAGEDY: the wreckage of the Chinook helicopter crash in which Susan's husband Ian was killed

LOTS of people believe in a spirit world, guardian angels and what can be loosely called the supernatural.

Being able to communicate with another dimension can be seen as a 'gift' and I think the most recent person I have met who has an astounding ability to communicate outside our world is Sharon Neill, of Newtownabbey who, despite being blind from birth has remarkable 'vision' and is able to travel around the country alone with the aid of 'voices' guiding her.

It's possible that everyone has the 'gift', but it remains undeveloped in most of us.

In Ireland people always believed that in death someone from your long departed family or someone who had been close came back to help you into the next world. Susan Phoenix in fact recounts this experience when her mother was dying.

She and her sister had been sitting by the bed when her mother looked up and spoke to Len, her husband who had died some months before.

Susan says she and her sister couldn't see their father but she was certain he had come back for her as he had never liked to travel without his wife by his side.

In this context it's important to keep an open mind about the spiritual experiences of Susan Phoenix whose new book *Out of the Shadows* makes such a riveting read.

Losing her policeman husband Ian in such a horrific way and finding out about it from the radio as she drove home from Belfast were, as Joanne Lowry says on these pages, something which 'changed her life forever'.

Susan writes about how, when Ian died her heart felt 'emotionally torn out and the physical pain in my chest, lasted for longer than I can remember'.

The autopsy had shown in fact that Ian's heart had been torn out in the impact and he had not burned as so many others had.

On reflection was this the first indication to her that there was not only a physical but spiritual connection to him in his death?

By 1997, three years after Ian died, Susan still hadn't got her life together and moved to France and she writes about the 'peculiar sense of coming home' when she moved into her new home. She was to discover later that

there may be 'past-life reasons for these inherent feelings'.

She was soon to find the healing powers of aromatherapy, reflexology and kinesiography. This led on to a Diana Cooper angel workshop in Exeter (Diana Cooper is well known in this field) and her realisation of synchronicity.

Susan writes that many of them on the course felt they had met before but didn't know where. It may sound far-fetched, she writes but that is the way it felt.

Diane talked to them about the special energies that were being sent to earth to help bring about world peace and mentioned Ascended Masters.

Susan: "I didn't know what they were, but as she spoke I could see a number of human-like shapes moving into the room behind her."

She thought she was cracking up but asked a clairvoyant from Southern Ireland who had been in the room if she had seen anything. Susan: "She was able to describe exactly what I had seen in detail."

The clairvoyant asked her if she would like a 'healing'. Susan felt she had nothing to lose. She says she now knows that a highly attuned healer or psychic person can sense the energy from several different dimensions. Scientists, in fact have started to identify such dimensions and call it String Theory.

Through this 'healing' session she learned about the 'aura' which surrounds us all, 'an invisible emanation produced by and surrounding a person or object; alleged to be discernible by individuals of supernatural sensibility'.

She writes: "I already knew about the energy fields that surround and inhabit living things. On that course I discovered we can indeed learn to see such energy fields; we do not have to be 'supernormal' beings but just need to relax and believe what we see."

Through that first session of 'healing' with the clairvoyant Susan believes she got the first message from her dead

husband. She writes: "My eyes flew open, I couldn't see anyone but I could definitely discern a change in the energy around us both. His message to me through her was that I didn't have to let him go so soon and that he was still there for me when I needed him."

Susan says she believes she had pushed his soul away too quickly after his death. She also believes the night after his death Ian returned to her. On that night she went to bed just to try to escape the pain; After much pacing about the room she lay on the bed and at 4am felt wonderfully happy and peaceful and

glowing from an unexplainable, all-pervading energy with a silly smile on her lips. In another room her daughter, she discovered, had had exactly the same experience at the same time.

The week in Exeter taught her a lot about herself and she met 'a few angels on the way'.

She learned to meditate for the first time taking the most 'amazing trips' each day as Diana guided her and the others through the exercises in ascension.

In one of the meditations they were 'encouraged to do some astral travel outside our bodies in order to go off and zap love at someone who needed it'.

This is remarkable stuff and she refers later to 'floating above my body' and then 'regrounding myself'. Her personal journey into things spiritual was to develop much further. She says she might easily have remained a needy, grieving person seeking love and comfort from anyone and anywhere if Diana Cooper had not shown her that we can seek personal support from an angelic presence all by ourselves. In fact Susan

has now met another man who she says makes her happy.

Her skills developed further but unlike the clairvoyants she worked through she still couldn't 'see' Ian around her but they communicated his messages to her, messages about matters between them that the clairvoyant could not have known about.

These are unexplainable things to most of us and some will criticise them as wishful thinking of a grieving widow. Criticism is easy; maybe we should all think more about that 'other realm' which possibly does guide and influence us on earth.

She saves the most remarkable part of her story to the last, when, finally, 10 years after the crash on the Mull of Kintyre Susan returns with her clairvoyant friend Joanne Maguire from west Belfast to sit in the spot where she believes Ian's body had been found. There she can actually see energy bouncing around in front of them.

Joanne, speaking words from another dimension, was able to tell her that those who died that day 'all walked up out of here together. Their souls left as a group'. One from the group said that 'passing over was much nicer than he imagined, a wonderful experience as he rose up'.

Then finally on the spot where he died Susan hears her husband's voice speaking to her..... she feels her face warmed as though by kisses on her cheek.....

It is an incredible story and Susan keeps the most remarkable bits until the end which are not recounted in this review but for the reader to find themselves.

A decade on Susan is finding love again. She says: "I met him just recently. He's Italian who had been living in the Argentine. I'm very happy now, just living for the moment. I know that Ian would want me to be happy and he also knows I have a lot of love to give and share with this world, so another love would be most welcome."

"My companion knows how to love and live as a whole person without jealousy. Her certainly understands about my last love."

We could all learn from her experiences.

Out of the Shadows, a Journey Back from Grief by Susan Phoenix, £10.99, published by Hodder Mobyus.

