

**BOOK** – City-born author tells her tale of spiritual discovery following the death of husband in crash

# The write of the Phoenix

Author Susan Phoenix, who grew up in Peterborough, has just published her second book, called *Out Of The Shadows*. Features writer **RACHEL WAREING** spoke to Susan about the book, which explains how she recovered from the loss of her husband through a journey of spiritual discovery.

**S**USAN Phoenix's life was shattered when her husband Ian was killed 12 years ago.

He was among 28 colleagues from the Royal Ulster Constabulary, military intelligence and MI5 who were killed instantly when the Chinook helicopter they were travelling in crashed over the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland.

After his death, Susan moved to France and threw herself into writing a controversial book about Ian's work as a high-ranking officer with the Royal Ulster Constabulary's specialist surveillance unit.

The book, *Policing The Shadows*, sold 100,000 copies and drew a lot of attention – not all of it good, as the authorities were not pleased she had lifted the lid on the secretive world of anti-terrorism.

Although she was busy with the book, and from the outside seemed to be moving forward with her life, inside the 57-year-old was in turmoil.

To add to her pain, both her mother and father passed away within a few months of Ian's tragic death and her son Niven was



**STEPPING OUT OF THE SHADOWS:** Susan Phoenix with her new book *Out Of The Shadows*, below, and the crash that claimed her husband Ian's life in the Mull of Kintyre, left.

Harry, and ate her first slice of pigeon pie at a cottage belonging to a member of his family.

In keeping with the theme of the book, she also remembers how she would see a little Victorian girl spirit, with piled-up hair and a large white pointed collar, sit on the end of her bed and look at her. She also remembers taking part in a ouija board while a sixth form pupil at Peterborough County Grammar School.

It was not until she reached her 50s, however, that she rediscovered her spiritual side.

While on a trip back to the UK from France, she was invited to attend a workshop on angels, being run by the author Diana Cooper.

At first she dismissed the invitation, but as

Although she was initially reluctant to write her story, fearing it would open old wounds, she said: "The book has been very well received so far, and people have told me it is hard to put down."

"I just hope it will help others to cope with grief."

□ *Out Of The Shadows*, ISBN 0-340-83556-7, costs £10.99 and is available from all good bookshops.

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father passed away within a few months of Ian's tragic death and her son Niven was involved in a serious road crash.

She describes that time as a "black hole" and said: "Writing the book was how I'd coped, but once the adrenalin of grief went, I was severely depressed."

Three years on from the crash, her grief was still raw, and was manifesting itself in physical ways – a chronic cough, a sore throat and a bad leg.

It was then she discovered complementary therapy. At first she was cynical. After all, she was a trained nurse and holder of a psychology PhD, who had done pioneering work in the field of deaf family d, amics and language development in Northern Ireland.

Yet, something inside her told her to find out more – and this is the subject of the book.

Written as an autobiography, it is really a book of two halves. The first half relates the events of her life which led up to her spiritual voyage, while the second details the slow, sure steps she took to recover from her all-consuming grief.

The first chapters contain several fascinating references to her childhood in Peterborough. She talks about the family's terraced home in Walpole Street (now demolished),

where she lived with her dad, Len Cheshire, a railwayman, her dress-maker mum and older sister Pauline.

She describes bicycle trips to pick bluebells and primroses from the woods around Helpston, and her friendship with Harry and Elsie Yates, the kindly couple who lived next door. She recalls how she would cycle miles across the Fens with

**HAPPY DAY:** Ian and Susan on their wedding day.



she was invited to attend a workshop on angels, being run by the author Diana Cooper. At first, she dismissed the invitation, but on her way back she spoke to her son-in-law, who persuaded her to go along. It was a move which was to transform her life.

She said: "I'd had experiences as a child which I couldn't explain, but I forgot about them later in life, until I attended this workshop."

Each day brought new revelations to her, and the book describes how her cynicism turned to enthusiasm as the course progressed.

On one occasion, a woman called Ann who was also taking part in the course asked if Susan would like a healing. It turned out that Ann was also a psychic, and during the healing she announced that a spirit was standing beside her who had a message for Susan.

Susan said: "She told me 'he says you didn't have to let him go so soon'. I knew at once it was Ian. It was true, I had tried to get on with my life very quickly after his death."

She explained how on the night after the crash, she sensed his presence at 3am in the morning. The next morning, her daughter told her she was woken at the same time and experienced a similar feeling. At the time, she had taken it as a sign that Ian was telling her to move on.

She said: "Ian was such a forward-thinking person and I knew he would want me to get on with things. When I got the message from Ann, it was a wonderful feeling to realise that he had not disappeared, and that he was there for me when I needed and that I could still talk to him when I was at my lowest ebb."

"Ann related everything Ian was telling her, and there were lots of things she couldn't possibly have known about, such as information about our children."

"The room also filled with the very strong smell of magnolia. I was puzzled until I realised the house I was about to buy in France had a large magnolia tree in the garden. He was telling me I should go ahead."

Susan, who now lives in Spain, now runs her own workshops showing people how to learn from their angel guides and read auras.

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