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Susan Phoenix

By **Laurence White**

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The widow of one of the 25 senior Northern Ireland intelligence experts who died when their Chinook helicopter crashed on the Mull of Kintyre has said she would like someone to be made accountable for the crash and others which followed.

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Susan Phoenix, whose husband Ian died in the accident on the west coast of Scotland in June 1994, called for greater responsibility.

"I hate people who don't take responsibility. All those men and one woman gave their lives protecting others and working with the forces of law and order," she said.

Mr Phoenix, an RUC detective superintendent, was among the 25 intelligence officers killed in the crash. Four crew members also died.

Susan, a Doctor of Psychology, has updated the book she wrote along with journalist Jack Holland on her husband and the crash - Phoenix: Policing the Shadows.

In a new chapter she chronicles in forensic detail the battle to clear the names of the pilots who were initially held to be at fault for the accident and accuses the Ministry of Defence of withholding evidence to various inquiries, only releasing it - along with an apology - when a report clearing the pilots' reputation was about to be made public.

"It took 17 years to clear their names and all that time the families of those pilots suffered greatly at the slur on the names of their sons and husbands," she said.

"My son was a pilot in the RAF and his dad would have fought to clear his name. I got a bit of stick over defending the pilots but I felt it was a job that needed to be done.

"Ian was a real Irishman and had moral principles and used to say that everyone, no matter who, had rights and he would have fought for the rights of those pilots."

She added: "I would like someone to stand up and be counted for the crash and for others which happened subsequently."

Susan, her daughter Nicola and Susan's grandson Charlie (10) went back to the crash site last week on the 25th anniversary.

"We didn't attend any of the official ceremonies which were held as we wanted simply to pay our own private visit to the mountain and the cairn marking the site of the crash," she added.

"We met Ian's old sergeant from the RUC and his wife. They had brought along a lovely wreath with the RUC crest on it. It is nice that people should still remember those who died.

"I also saw a young man who had flown over with me a few days after the crash. He was the son of one of the other policemen on the helicopter and it was special to share some memories with him."

However, Susan had some criticism of the PSNI in recent times.

"Myself and another widow wrote to them asking for their support in the campaign to preserve all documents relating to the Chinook crash," she explained.

"The MoD is deciding which ones they feel are important and which ones could be deleted, but campaigners want all to be retained and kept somewhere where they could be easily accessed in future. We wrote our letter in January and have not had any reply. We thought that was very sad."

She recalled feeling bereft in the days, weeks and months after Ian's death and the situation was made even worse by the fact that her mother and father, who had been terminally ill, both died within three months of her husband.

"I remember the screaming, painful sadness that I felt and which I felt would never abate," she added.

"My soulmate was gone and my parents had also died. I wished I had gone too. People who know me today don't realise that I have been there. Now I feel gratitude for the life I have led and the serene peace I have thanks to friends and family. Ian was 51 when he died and a colleague once told me of what he had said at his 50th birthday - 'I have led a good life, have had a lot of excitement and a lot of love. If I died tomorrow I feel I have done as much as I can up until today'."

She added: "Those were dangerous times, an unreal life when you slept with a gun under the pillow and looked under your car for a bomb every time you went out.

"Living on that edge made us value everything and everyone more.

"We valued each other and our friends and those who attended Ian's funeral were of all religions and of none."

Susan left Ireland three years after Ian's death and lived for 22 years in France and Spain before returning to a home in Dorset.

Her experience led her into bereavement counselling and what she calls energy medicine.

She added: "I felt Ian's presence the night he died and know that it was real. I am currently writing a book - The Cosmic Condom - about protecting your own space and energy field, the science behind spirituality. Spirituality is not about religion, it is what goes on in your own soul.

"We all give out an energy field and when someone else enters it we can get a shiver up our backs. Those who are bereaved do not worry so much when they realise that their loved ones still exist in another dimension and trying to get in touch with them.

"If you can help them feel the energy around them they feel love and happiness.

"I am not opposing religion in any way. I use deep meditation which enables people to talk about life and death in a more constructive way."

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She continued: "My sister died with terrible regrets when she was 64. She was so full of fear it took her three weeks to let go. But she showed me these other dimensions. At one stage she saw 'a big light, a big angel' and the things she said you could not make up.

"There are scientific papers to back all this up and that is what I am writing about in my new book."

She admitted it is painful to look at Northern Ireland today, adding: "It hurts me; it has gone back 30 years.

"What is happening? How are people letting things slip? It seems to me that people did not address things head on and we have had denial and defensiveness instead of openness."

Now aged 70 she has remained single, explaining: "I have not found anyone that I would want to commit my life to. I am too independent and I don't need anyone to tell me how to lead my life.

"Life has never been boring apart from those first three or four suicidal years after Ian's death, but that would have been the coward's way out. Life is short and there is always plenty to do."

Susan's book is available to buy on Amazon via <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Phoenix-Policing-Shadows-Dr-Susan>

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