

How Susan can help you to find your voice

Most of us take our voices for granted but, according to one woman, finding your true voice can change your life. Women's Editor **CHRISTEN PEARS** reports



Susan Lever: helping people gain the confidence to speak out

If you join one of Susan Lever's voice workshops, you'll probably find yourself standing in a circle making Tarzan sounds. It may look strange but it's one of the techniques she's used to help hundreds of people discover their natural voices.

"When you are a child, you don't have any worries about your voice," says Susan. "A two-year-old doesn't worry about who they're going to upset if they have a temper tantrum. But as you get older, you lose that spontaneity and become much more inhibited. What I do is teach people to rediscover that spontaneity and find their own voice and that has all sorts of benefits."

Susan, who has worked as a social worker and counsellor, discovered the power of the voice almost by accident. "I was someone who was really nervous about expressing myself and if I was in a group and was asked to say anything, even just my name, I would be shaking with fear."

All that changed just over ten years ago when she started taking singing lessons. "I had never thought of myself as a singer but one of my friends suggested I tried lessons. It was like a key had been turned for me and it released my creativity."

She began writing songs and in 1992 recorded a musical autobiography, *Beyond the Wall*.

The discovery of her own voice, which incidentally is deep and resonant, coincided with her growing interest in other cultures, particularly the teachings of North American Indians. She was fascinated by the way they used chants to free their voices and realised that other people could benefit in the same way she had.

Inspired by her own transformation, Susan trained with folk singer Frankie Armstrong and other experts to develop her own teaching techniques, which range from yawning and humming to chanting and making Tarzan sounds.

"It gets people out of their conscious minds and they just enjoy the sound. It helps them breathe better, which helps them calm down and de-stress. It can look a bit silly but it really helps people relax. Once they get into it, they really enjoy themselves."

She moved from her home in London to the North-East and began teaching full time.

She draws on a range of influences from the East, Africa and North America and the living room of her cottage in Pinchinthorpe, near Guisborough reflects her interest in these cultures. There's a smell of incense, an enormous oriental fan and an American Indian dream catcher on the wall.

"Singing is still an important part of some cultures but the tradition has been largely lost over here. Unless you

go to a football match or church, you're unlikely to sing in public. Many people believe they cannot sing or are inhibited about using their voices in public," she explains.

"But everyone's voice is unique and everyone can enjoy singing. A lot of people come along if they've got to do some public speaking and they're worried about it, but a lot just come because they want to reclaim their voices."

As well as helping overcome self-consciousness, singing also has healing properties and Susan describes her approach as 'holistic'.

"When you use your voice properly, it's like an internal massage," says Susan. "It's very hard, even impossible to stay depressed when you're singing. I suffered from severe depression as a teenager and I know what it's like to be very scared. I think my success is because of what I've been through."

Every organ, bone and tissue has its own healing frequency, says Susan, and disease can be described as part of a body vibrating out of tune. Sound healing restores the whole body to its natural resonance.

"There are all sorts of benefits. Some people say they sleep better, while others find it helps with muscle pains."

"Obviously, the more sessions you do, the more benefit you will feel, but

even after one session people say they feel a difference."

The classes attract people of all ages, from children to those in their eighties and as well as holding workshops and one-to-one sessions, Susan is also in demand in the workplace, helping employees with simple stress relief techniques. And for those who don't want to stand up in front of a group, there's an instructional tape they can try at home.

● Susan is holding a series of voice and sound healing workshops in the region. For more information visit the website at www.susanlever.co.uk or call **SUSAN LEVER** on (01287) 636350.

“It can look a bit silly but it really helps people relax. Once they get into it, they really enjoy themselves**”**