

'I've realised I do have something to contribute to other people's lives'

A surprising connection has given former Bond Girl Fiona Fullerton a big confidence boost

'As friendships go, mine and Alex's is pretty unusual. It began when I was 19 and received a beautifully written fan letter. It was witty, clever and philosophical and led to a correspondence that grew over the following 12 years. I was a successful actress and he was a suspected KGB spy who had been jailed in the UK for a crime he has always been adamant he didn't commit – but we found a deep connection.

In 2003, after 22 years, he was let out of prison, but by then we'd lost contact. But in 2011, going through some old boxes at home, I found the letters. I cried when I read them – they are extraordinary. With the help of a newspaper, I found him. When we met again he put his hand out to shake mine, but I threw my arms around him. We've become so close again; he's like a brother to me. He's moved to a little town near where we live and I see him all the time.

Our relationship has been a major turning point for me. I feel one of my main purposes in life is to make sure he is looked after and help him have a better quality of life. He took me to a prison he served in, Grendon in Buckinghamshire, a therapeutic community that helps people towards rehabilitation. I now go there as often as I can and raise awareness – places like Grendon need funding.

One reason I gave up acting was that I felt underestimated as a person. I moved into the property business and I'm involved with ratedpeople.com, a trade recommendation website. Looking back at the journey I've been on since I was 19 has made me realise I can contribute. By becoming a prison visitor and enhancing other people's lives, I feel I'm giving something back. It's made a big difference to my confidence and my sense of self-worth. I feel more sure of myself than I have for many years.'

PHOTOGRAPH: MARK HARRISON. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: SOPHIE EVERETT AT GINGER SNAP. ALL CLOTHING: FIONA'S OWN



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