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Famed Siberian Hermit Gets Billionaire's Help Ahead of Harsh Winter

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Agafya Lykova, 76, has lived alone in the remote Siberian taiga for most of her life. **Alexander Ryumin / TASS**

Russian aluminum tycoon Oleg Deripaska has dispatched essentials and an assistant to a famous Siberian hermit ahead of the harsh winter, the RBC news website reported Wednesday.

Agafya Lykova was born 76 years ago to a family of Old Believers, a traditionalist Orthodox Christian sect, fleeing Stalinist persecutions in the remote Siberian taiga. She has led a largely self-sufficient life away from civilization since the deaths of her family members, with regional officials and other well-wishers sending her occasional supplies — while reportedly keeping her away from news of the coronavirus pandemic to avoid upsetting her.

Deripaska, Russia's 41st-wealthiest businessman with a net worth of $2.3 billion, helped deliver household items including kitchenware and bedding sets to Lykova by helicopter, RBC cited an unnamed assistant of his as saying.

The outlet reported that Deripaska, 52, has long provided assistance to the Khakassia Nature Reserve near the Mongolian border, where Lykova lives.

According to the Siberian outlet Newslab.ru, Deripaska also helped send the son of Lykova's deceased friend and neighbor who followed in his father's footsteps in volunteering to help her.

Nikolai Sedov's father, Yerofei Sedov, was a member of the Soviet geological team that accidentally discovered the Lykov family in the late 1970s, turning it into a national phenomenon. He died in the taiga near Lykova's ramshackle hut in 2015 at age 77.

Russia's Old Believers split from the Orthodox Church in 1666 after protesting against reforms. Old Believer communities fled Tsarist and Soviet persecution deep into the Siberian taiga and elsewhere around the world, including North and South America, as well as Australia and New Zealand.

Many have begun to return to Russia in recent years under a new repatriation program that helps compatriots abroad relocate to territories in Russia's Far East.

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