

The Russian Oligarch Who Gave It All Up To Live As A Modest Peasant

German Sterligov made his fortune at an early age. After the fall of communism in the USSR, when he was only 24 years old, Sterligov founded Russia's first commodities exchange. His business grew rapidly, and Sterligov became Russia's first legal millionaire since the 1917 Revolution. At one point, he had over 2,500 employees, offices in London and New York, and lavish homes around the world.



15 years later, Sterligov decided to give it all up. He took his pregnant wife and their four children out into the woods. They built a small log cabin with no electricity. Ten days after they moved in, his wife gave birth to their fifth child.

Now the Sterligovs live like ordinary peasants. They have very little money, but they are very happy.

"Not in a million years do I want to be a businessman with these silly, shiny badges of success - the luxury houses, swanky yachts, Bentleys and so on," Sterligov said. "I'm happy with my peace in the countryside, my family and my sheep." In their former life, Sterligov says that he and his family were like 'birds in a gilded cage'. "Being super-rich is a kind of slavery from which we're free, thankfully."

What happened to all of the money? That's complicated. Their trouble began, ironically, while Sterligov was succeeding at business. Because of the fact that Sterligov was wealthy, many people wanted him dead. He and his family lived in constant fear of being kidnapped or killed. They had to change their address 23 times to hide from would-be assassins.

Back in the mid-2000s, at the height of his success, Sterligov made a bold decision: he decided to run for president of Russia. His bold decision turned out to be a mistake. After a very expensive campaign, officials barred Sterligov from the election.

He built up huge debts during his fruitless campaign. To cover the debt, he had to sell his four-story mansion in Moscow's most exclusive neighborhood. And then he got an idea - what if he gave up everything he owned?

Sterligov sold his New York penthouse, his offices on Wall Street and in London, his retreat in Geneva, his castle in Burgundy, and his headquarters in Moscow.

That's right, he had his own castle!

Sterligov also gave away shares worth hundreds of millions of dollars. He asked his wife to trade her jewelry and designer clothes for the traditional long skirt and headscarf worn by Russian peasants. With almost no money, the couple and their four children retreated to the woods - they pitched a tent and camped in the middle of nowhere. With the little money they had left, the Sterligovs built a small log cabin.

The Sterligovs are doing well as peasant farmers.

"We have two modest houses now," he said. "This one is for the winter, where we have hens, geese, turkeys, several goats, two cows - not much, but enough to keep the family and our friends going. And we have another house 19 kilometers, 12 miles, away for the summer. It's closer to the pastures for the sheep."

The houses are large and comfortable. They feature a few modern conveniences like electricity, lavatories, and a washing machine. However, the Sterligovs don't own a TV or computer. Sterligov doesn't want his kids to use the 'brainwashing devices', he'd rather get them to read and discuss books.

Which life would you rather lead? The life of a rich businessman, or the life of a simple farmer?