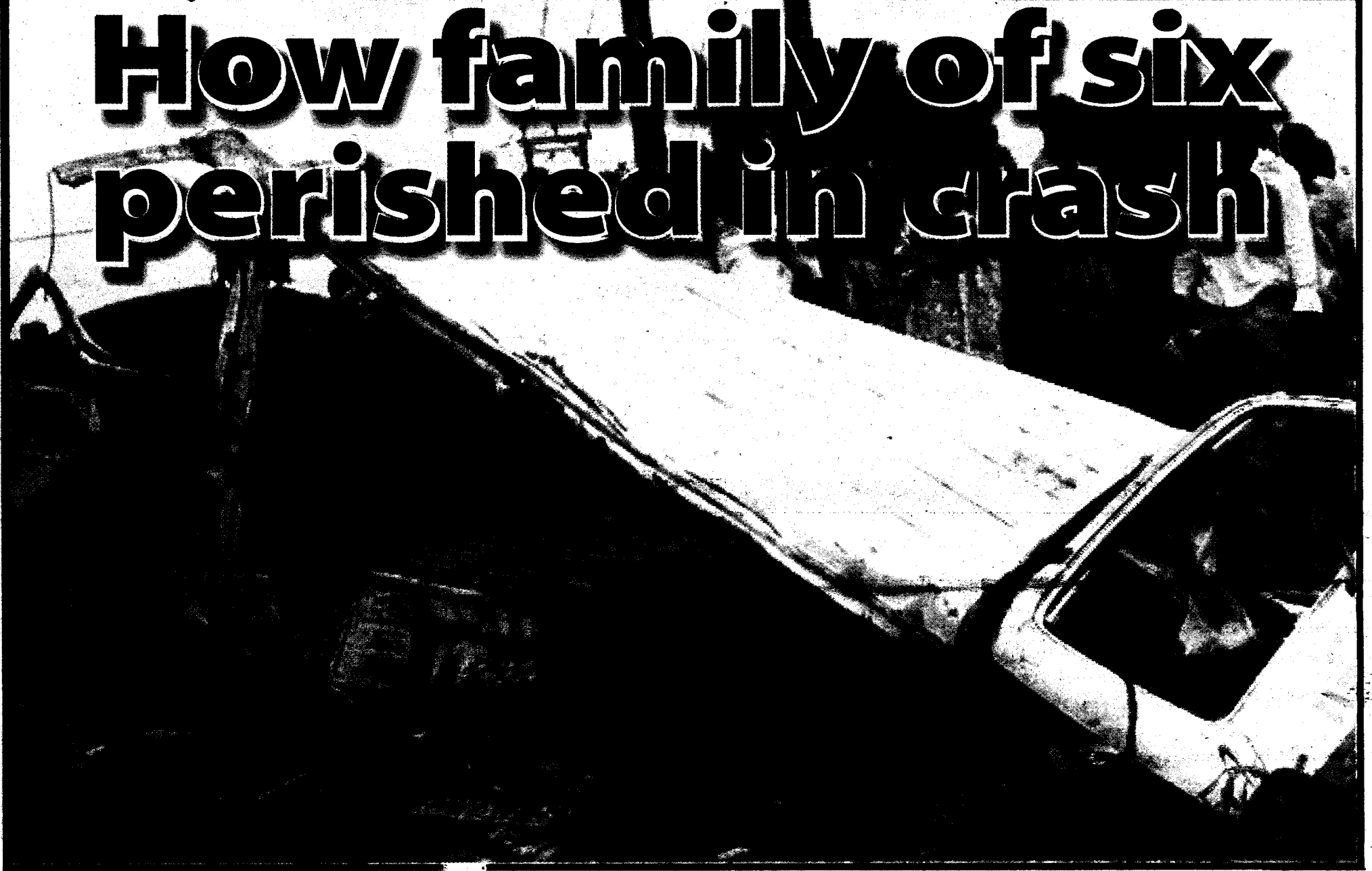


TRAGEDY

How family of six perished in crash



• ₦50 gift, cause of accident

FATE no doubt has a way of playing fast to alter man's goals in life. How it tends to smile to one, often times determines one's success or failure. It is the limit to man's inability to decipher what the next second or minute of time holds for him or her which brings man to the cross roads, depending, though, on how far he can apply his common knowledge at reading events. It is this puzzle that fate hangs on man to control events either for positive and negative end. This has dragged residents of Agbor to great bewilderment.

The agrarian community is yet to come to grips as to what befell the town last week. It was a gory tale of sorrow, pains, sadness and anguish as what ordinarily should have been a merry making of a marriage event which brought the people of the areas into grim picture. It was a really a tale of life and blood lost. Its occurrence and echo of the shock brought to questions the ugly concept of fate especially when life seems to offer its best to mankind and the society. Otherwise how does one explain it that when happiness has built itself in a man, but instead of ravishing it to the end, there is unsavoury contraction of the opposite?

The uncertain fate in the journey of life and living and the attendant questions are the odd mixture that have kept the eyes of members of the Kika family of Alisimie community in Agbor, Ika South Council area of Delta State shedding tears. Fate had on Saturday August 18 this year brought six members of the family to a sad end. The dead family members were part of the 21 team, men, women and children, from the family that went to Nsugbe town in Oyi local government area of Anambra state for the traditional marriage ceremony between their son Mr. Emmanuel Kika and Miss Uzoamaka Veronica Okeke from Nsugbe town

For members of the Kika family in Agbor and friends from the town, it is still shock and mystery how a strange fifty naira note consumed the lives of six of their own and left several others in pains shortly after a brief merry studded marriage ceremony at Nsugbe town in Anambra state. Our Correspondent **CAJETAN MMUTA** in Asaba captured details of the pathetic story in this report.

in Anambra state.

They were in the town across the River Niger to pay the bride price of Miss Amaka and had hoped on coming back from the town to continue with the feasting having added new person to their number. But little did they know that evil fate was lurked around in wait for them in Asaba on the busy Onitsha-Benin expressway. And so was the punctured juicy story for Mr. Emmanuel Kika that "He who findeth a wife findeth a good thing".

The marriage party from the groom's family were filled with joy on payment of the bride prize of ₦5,060 as there is no amount one pays to assume he has finished with marriage from a particular family as the journey is a continuum. Done with the festivities of dances, shared joy and hopes of better tomorrow having consolidated and started a journey with the relationship between both families by pouring

libations and offering prayers, the guests began the travel back to Agbor about 4.30pm. But on the approach to the S.I.O industries in the Asaba, the Delta state capital with big heart, the happiness was cut short as the people had a ghastly motor accident. The Toyota bus in which the 21 marriage team had traveled with registration number XA 254 CUE had a head on collision with another 18-seater bus belonging to Okeyson Transport with plate number XL 185 KSE on its way from Lagos to the commercial town of Onitsha. The loud bang from the collision, left six members of the Kika family dead with over 22 people from both buses severely injured.

Among those that met their sad end, were the new bride, Miss Amaka Okeke whose head was decapitated (cut off) from her body, Mrs. Martha Kika and mother to the groom (Emmanuel Kika), his elder brother Gabriel Kika, immediate younger sister and his aunt two others from the

family. Also lost in the carnage were the driver of the Onitsha bound bus and two others who gave up the ghost later at the Federal Medical Center, FMC, Asaba. It was no doubt a hectic moment for doctors and nurses at the FMC, Asaba where the health officials battled to save them from death.

According to investigations by our correspondent and heart breaking narrations by some of the accident victims of the ugly incident, including hordes of sympathizers, who thronged the scene of gory sight, a long trailer lorry was making a U-turn opposite the S.I.O company when the Onitsha bound 18-seater bus on top speed in order to avert running into the iron body vehicle, lost control. The driver of the bus instead veered off his lane and rammed into the up-coming bus heading to Agbor leaving both vehicles in carcass and flowing blood from the trapped victims. The situation left travelers on the dual carriage route to take alternative road in the city as the damage to the two vehicles and the wailing from trapped passengers could not allow for easy traffic flow.

It was no doubt a hard puzzle to the survivors, members of the public, including the most shocked groom, Mr. Emmanuel who by fate suddenly became a widower of an uncelebrated marriage, of how events suddenly turned against him. Reeling in "double pains" in his bed at the Amenity ward of the FMC Asaba, Mr. Emmanuel said he could not fathom the forces that orchestrated the ugly occurrence which cost him the life of his hearthrobe and that of members of his family.

The consternation knew no bound. People had expected strong believe that Kika may have been a running battle with his ex-lover, he may have promised to hook up

in marriage, but failed in his promise along the line.

But the jolted Romeo of two years courtship, with the deceased wife, while narrating his ordeal was quick to recall how an unnamed old woman who was among the guests at his in-laws house in Nsugbe wanted to give fifty naira (N50:00) note. He was quick to state that he had earlier been warned by close members of the host family not to accept any gift or money from anybody.

The warning truly manifested when he said that a woman during the marriage ceremony had wanted to offer him some money which he resisted receiving from her. As the wind of fate could still have it he disclosed that unknown to him and his now late mother as well as the marriage train, one of his younger brothers collected "mysterious money" from the strange woman. His late mother according to him had minutes before she finally breathed her last at the accident scene had inquired to know "who collected the fifty naira" raising suspicion among themselves in the ill-fated passenger bus when he was shocked to the marrow that his brother actually received the evil money. She had also in a trance "appeared" before another of his younger brothers who was not part of the marriage team.

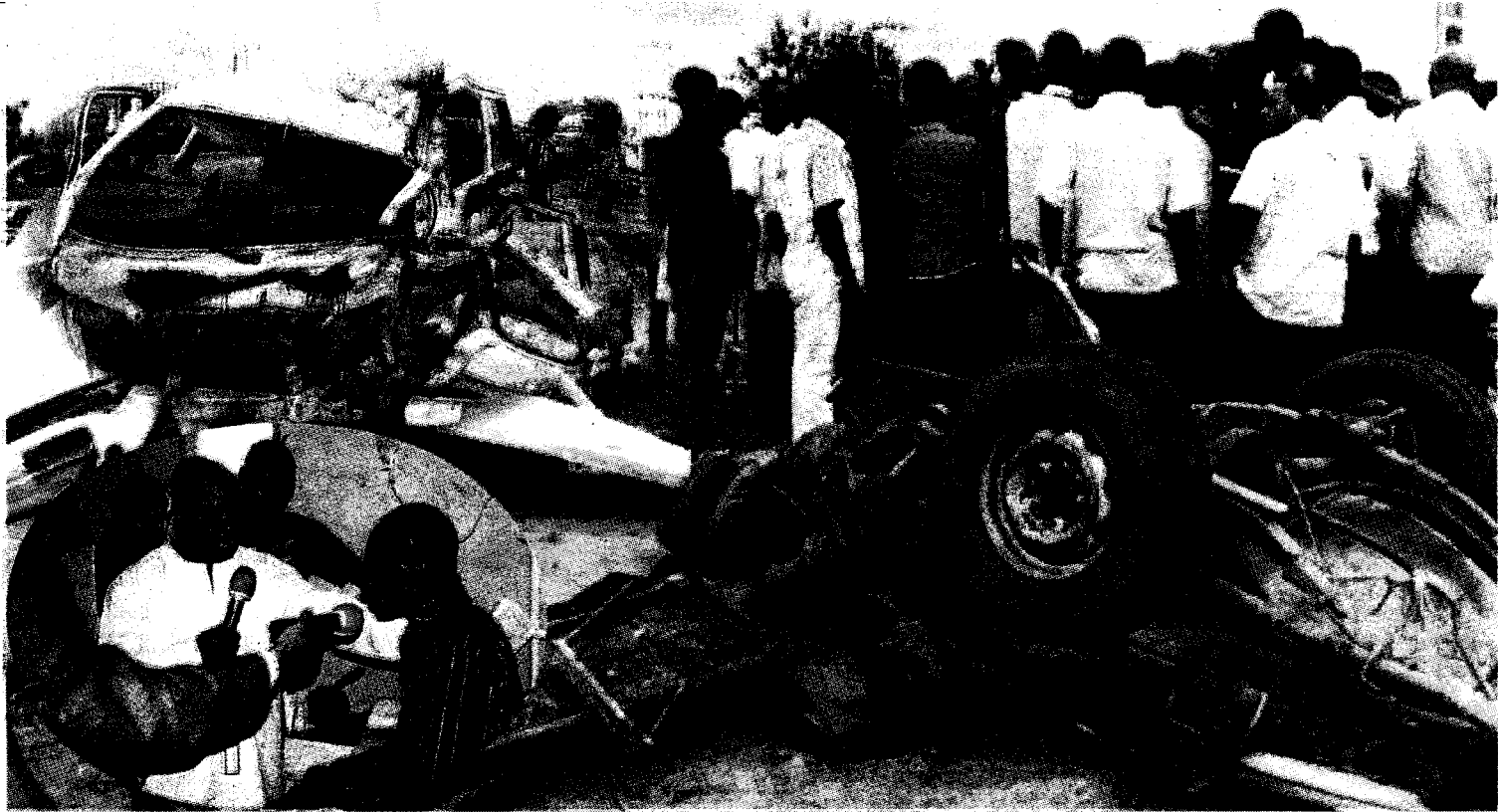
Whatever thing that happened should be from where (Nsugbe) went, because of the way a relation there...there was a woman that was trying to give me money, she was looking for the husband of the lady and I rejected the money. Those family we went for said I should not receive that money and I didn't receive that money. But in a strange twist of fate, he did not know that his younger brother later took delivery of the suspicious money.

"But unfortunately there was one of my brothers that received that money. Even when my mother was dying, she was asking who received fifty naira, who received fifty naira and even revealed to my younger brother at home. He (younger brother) said my mother just appeared before him because he was not around and said that somebody received fifty naira amongst us, that was why the thing (accident) happened", he said.

Speaking on his relationship with the late **hearthrob**, the bride, who sobbed said "I have known Amaka (bride) for two years before I decided to go into marriage with her. She worked as a sales representative in the complex where I work with Sunny Land Shopping Plaza, Lagos. He further hinted on his already concluded plans to, apart from the traditional aspect of the marriage, of embarking on the 'Igbakwo' rite with the late wife, which he said he has been slated for December" this year.

The 34 year old groom who is an Accountant with Sunny Land plaza, private surveying and estate developing company based in Lagos told our correspondent that he though had about seven year old relationship with another lady who he explained left on her volition without any sour note to the bond and equally exonerated the ex-lover of any mischief.

"I was in a love affair with a lady, Patience Osadome, who, I dated for seven years until she quitted the relationship on her own accord. And each time we met, we greet well. So, it was not as if I broke her heart or jilted her. She cannot be said to have constituted any threat to my marriage because I did not do her any bad even as he dismissed any form of opposition or threat to the wedding, because according to him "I decided not to make it open until I print out invitation by December".



Continuing Mr. Kika explained "My mother who died in the accident was well pleased with my wife. As a matter of fact, each time I send money from Lagos, where I work, to her, she feels uncomfortable, because, she was anxiously waiting for the day I will bring a woman to her for marriage as the only son. So, when I was preparing for the traditional wedding at Nsugbe, she was very happy and pleased to follow me there".

In total regret of the calamity that overwhelmed him, he added "As you can see, I sustained just little injuries in an accident that cut off the head of my wife. We sat together in the bus. Our driver was fully in control of the vehicle until when a similar bus from another lane of the dual-carriage, Benin- Onisha expressway headed for our own, through the divert opening created for possible turnings, collided with our own and before we know it, our vehicle started somersaulting. In the process, I lost my mum, my immediate sister, my house help, sister, my elder brother, Gabriel Kika and my aunty, in fact, six of my relations died on the spot, and about 10 of us are present between heaven and earth in the hospital here while others are in the mortuary".

Mrs. Bridget Williams, elder sister to Mr. Emmanuel Kika, also on hospital bed pointed out that she could only "notice that on their getting to Asaba a vehicle suddenly jumped from the other lane to our side and that is all I know before I know what was happening again I saw myself, people were dragging me out of the vehicle and I saw some people lying on the ground with blood who were put on one side. So they (sympathizers) have to carry me to the hospital".

On their mission to Nsugbe she said "we just went to pay the bride price for my younger brother, Emmanuel Kika. And my mother (Mrs. Martha Kika) died now, two of my junior ones died and the rest" While saying that she "put everything into God's hands" she disclosed that before they set out for the journey to the in-laws in the morning, she noticed some undisclosed strange "things but then I prayed

and we went... elm I don't know"

Another victim of the crash who was in the Lagos -Onitsha bound bus, Master Ossai Chima, a businessman, with severe head and body injuries said he was with a Christian prayer group in their own bus on their way to Abakiliki from for special prayer camping event with other chattered buses when the unexpected happened.

Master Ossai, an indigene of Enugu Ezike in Nssuka local government area in Enugu state said that he "cannot actually describe well what happened because by the time I was brought here, (FMC) I was unconscious" but recalled that when "we were coming from Lagos and we are here in Asaba, so the driver was on high speed and was like he wanted to overtake a trailer but the trailer did not want to give him chance and the driver entered the second lane. And as he entered the second lane, another motor surfaced and it's that one that surfaced that we jammed"

The wild news of the marriage calamity had in the night same day jolted the attention of the state governor, Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan prompting him Sunday morning to visit the FMC Asaba to console the survivors and equally sympathize with the bereaved families.

Uduaghan who was conducted round the accident wards by the Chief Medical director of the hospital, Dr. Leo Erhunwumnsee promised to foot the hospital bills of all survivors including the mortuary fees and burial of the dead victims of the ghastly motor accident. He reminded the victims of the essence of keeping hope alive as the death of their colleagues and relations was not the end of everything.

The governor blamed the fate of the victims "on human error" especially on the part of drivers who he said ply the dual carriage road with reckless abandon without recourse to necessary safety measures.

"What happened is unfortunate; it's obviously the fault of a driver who was not careful enough. For those of us who are not in this environment, we use to have several

accidents on that (Onitsha-Benin) road but since that road was dualized and made wider the number of accidents on that road have drastically reduced. From what we have heard now it was obviously the fault of a very, very careless driver and the problem of over speeding. We thank God not everybody died, though some died, we still have quite a lot that survived the accident and it's very touchy because a young couple that were just coming from a wedding ceremony and had that kind of accident and six people from one family including the bride it's very touchy and unfortunate"

While praying that God gives the bride the strength to bear the irreparable loss he said we (state government) are taking over the medical bills of all those who were injured in that unfortunate accident and it's also a lesson for all of us that we do not have control over our lives and over what happens"

Giving an account of experience of health workers at the FMC on the fateful day, the CMD, Dr. Erhunwumnsee said the hospital was challenged to contend with the beehive of accidents of about 22 persons at the same time, pointing out that despite shortcomings "we have to mobilize all our resources, all our doctors who were on duty from all the departments, the nurses so as to save as many lives as possible and of course we started all these without demanding for a kobo from any patient. We hope that with the promise Delta state government has made the hospital will be able to recoup whatever we have expended. Even before that promise was made we had taken a decision to continue with their treatment to ensure that life is saved before demanding for money" He stated that two of the patients were under initial treatment, some are to go special treatment particularly those with fractures and one, a little girl, for exploratory laboratory due to internal bleeding. Eight of the victims according to the hospital authority had been discharged but need still to go for further treatment. Life no doubt is war.