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Killed In His Prime...By Who?

When baby Bernard Ikenna was born on July 2, 1980, his parents were full of hopes that their son would one day become successful in life. But on Friday, September 15, their blazing hopes were dashed when an alleged gang of armed robbers raided their residence situated at No. 9, Bashorun Street, Off Akanni Street, Shomolu, Lagos and snuffed life out of him.

The Yaba College of Technology (Yabatech), Yaba, Lagos Ordinary National Diploma (OND) graduate of Industrial Maintenance Engineering was unlucky—he was shot in the head by the robbers and he died on the spot.

His offence? He was accused of raising an alarm when the robbers gained entry into their residence.

Before the bandits struck, the entire Bashorun Street and other adjoining streets were in total blackout.

But no sooner had Mrs. Cordelia Onuoha, mother of the deceased, mounted a seat at the frontage of their rented two-bedroom flat to enjoy the natural cool breeze than two armed men accosted and ordered her to lead them to their apartment.

Residents of the nine-flat apartment were used to frequent attacks of the underworld men, who usually operated without harming their victims. But when the woman attempted to rebuff the robbers, one of them gave her a dirty slap before marching her in.

Samuel Onuoha, head of the family, an indigene of Ihioma, Orlu Local Government area of Imo State, who was attracted by the commotion caused by the uninvited visitors, emerged from the living room to find out what was amiss.

"I was in the living room searching for an item when two

armed young men led my wife into the sitting room. One of them was dragging her to take them to where we kept our money. The moment they sighted me, their leader pulled out a pistol and pointed it at me, while the other one followed suit. As I attempted to plead with them to take it easy with my wife, one of them surged towards me and began raining slaps on me. Since we were helpless and there was nothing we could do again, I obliged and took them into the living room. When we got inside, they ordered us to lie down with our face to the ground. They threatened to scatter our heads with bullets if we didn't take them serious," revealed the provision trader.

He continued: "I begged them to handle us gently as we were ready to co-operate with them. But despite our pleas and entreaties,

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they started beating me so that I could show them where I kept my money. For over two weeks, I stayed at home resting based on doctor's advice after I underwent a surgery and the wound has not healed. I think (he turned round to show the wound in his back) you can see that the stitches are still fresh. To be sincere, I was not having anything on me when they called".

Bernard, a twin, who just completed his internship at John Holt Plc, Oregun, Ikeja, Lagos and was awaiting his appointment letter from either Guaranty Trust Bank Plc or Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) following his successful performance at both written and oral tests, was in the other living room with his younger brother. He was preparing to take his bath when he was suddenly attracted by his father's cry of anguish. With a towel tied round his waist, he made to enquire what the problem was. The deceased, it was learnt, prevailed on the robbers to handle his father with ease. The poor father was asked to surrender all the money he had in his possession but he told them he had none.

Unconvinced that he had no money to offer them, he said one of the robbers went to the sitting room to pick a candle he had kept on the table, which he intended to use to read the Holy Bible before going to bed. The robbers, he said, searched everywhere but couldn't find anything.

Sensing danger, Bernard sneaked out of the apartment and attempted to hide in one of the other eight flats within the building. But that turned to be the costly mistake that cost him his life.

According to his father, "My son was allowed to return to his room and they were busy searching the

room for money, but they did not find anything. I didn't know my son had run out of the flat until I heard a gunshot. Although I did not know my son was the one shot by the robbers until they left. I thought it was when the robbers heard a gunshot that they left my flat and went away. They did not take away any of my belongings.

"I was told that when Bernard ran out of our flat, he decided to hide at the next flat, which I later gathered that the robbers had earlier raided. It was after they were through with the inhabitants of the flat that they came to our flat. The attack was not the first time, because we are used to them in this building. But on each operation, they had not killed anybody. They usually came in and we always co-operated with them. After each successful operation, they always disappeared through the large canal bordering us here (pointing at the direction).

"When Bernard wanted to escape through the gate, after he was denied entry into any of the other eight flats within the building, he ran into one of the robbers, who was mounting guard at the entry point. If he were aware that another member of the gang was at the gate, he would not have made such a silly action.

"The robber accused him of being the person that shouted *Ole* (thief) and he asked him to kneel down. He shot him in his forehead, which pierced through before it finally hit the heavy iron gate at the entrance of the house. He died immediately on the spot", explained Bernard's father.

Onuoha accused the police of inefficiency in the area. According to him, Bashorun Street and its environs were porous. He

noted that residents go to bed early in fear, not knowing whose house the robbers would visit. He hinted that the police even exhibited their incompetence when they arrived shortly after the robbers had left. Both officers from Alade and Pedro Police Divisions were trading blames on whose jurisdiction the affected area falls. But the intervention of the pastor of the bereaved family's church, the Ogudu Area 'H' Police Commander, Mr. Zaccheus Olusa, Assistant Commissioner of Police, was contacted and he quickly drafted a team of policemen to the area.

The police team removed the corpse and deposited it at Military Hospital, Yaba, Lagos for *postmortem* examination.

However, Lagos State Police Command spokesman, Olubode Ojajuni, gave an entirely different account of the story. He told pressmen in his office that the deceased was killed by a rival cult group, adding that when the unidentified gunmen entered House No. 9, Bashorun Street, Shomolu, they held one Oluhan Samuel and his family hostage. "But the hoodlums shot and killed his son, Bernard Ikenna, 26 years old, and escaped without removing anything in what look like a cult revenge," Ojajuni said.

In response, Onuoha refuted the police report, saying his son was no longer a student as was wrongly painted.

He accused the police of concocting lies in connection with his son's death rather than accepting responsibility for their inefficiency.

He called on the police to release the corpse of his son for interment since it was clear that he was killed by robbers, adding that there was no need for autopsy.