

# My husband received death threats, says Agbroko's widow

The hope of the Agbroko family of celebrating Christmas was dashed when their bread-winner, Chairman, Editorial Board, *THISDAY* Newspapers, Mr. GODWIN AGBROKO, was killed by yet unknown gunmen in Lagos on Friday. JANICE OJEME spoke with the widow Rachael and children of the journalist.

**"M**UM, you promised not to cry again," said her second daughter, Ruonah, as Mrs. Agbroko dabbed the tears on her swollen eyes with her handkerchief. "Yes, I promised. I will not cry again," she replied in a shaky voice.

If the tears of a loved one could raise the dead, apparently, tears from the love of his life, Rachael, would have brought Goddy back to life.

The late Agbroko and his wife Rachael tied the nuptial knot in 1979 with an oath to love and cherish each other, "till death do us part."

Now, 27 years after, death has indeed created a spasm between them. On the night of Friday, December 22, 2006, unknown gunmen killed him on his way home from work.

When *The Nation* called at the Agbrokos' at Ire-Akari Estate, Isolo, on the outskirts of Lagos, where people have been paying their condolences, his widow came out from her bedroom to meet sympathizers.

Visibly worn-out from crying, she sat down on the floor, unable to say much to anybody. She merely raised her face and greeted everyone. The sorrowful mood did not give room for conversation. Everyone sat down quietly and left, after registering their condolences.

Quite often, she dabbed the tears on her eyes. The tears kept flowing as she struggled to fight them back.

Amidst the tense atmosphere, Mrs Agbroko gave in to this reporter's prompting to talk about her late husband.

"He has been a loving husband and father. We used to play music and dance together, he is full of humour. He is a father, very understanding. He does not like oppression and he stands for the truth," she said.

Her mood lightened up as she spoke. "He died for the truth, so I thank God. I have the conviction that his soul is resting with the Lord and that gives me joy."

Recalling her last moment with him, she noted that last Friday morning, the family was very happy and chatted with one another.

In the bid to take her away from the children, he asked her if she left any money on their bed. When she answered in the negative, he bade her to come and see. She followed him into their bedroom and saw some money on the bed.

After another round of questioning as to how the money got onto the bed, playfully, he told her that it was for Christmas shopping.

Later, she left for the market to return in the evening. The day that started with great promises ended in great sorrow as the widow recalled. "I stayed very long in the market so I did not have the time to call him during the day."

"That night, I called him several times but his phone rang on and on, unpicked. I prayed and went back to bed. Later the children were crying and I came out to hear the news."

Mrs. Agbroko who met her late husband when he was a teacher at her hometown, Eku, near Sapele in Delta State, said they got married in 1979. The union is blessed with two girls, Tega and Ruonah, and three boys, Tobor, Runor and Oshehor. The first four have finished their university education; the last, Oshehor, is at the University of Lagos.

More on her late husband's legacies, she said: "If I wanted to do any humanitarian work, he always paid for it. He liked to help people and I encouraged him, because he laid his treasures in heaven."

"I believe God has used him to sanitise this nation to a level. I knew it. If you brought a story and money, he would throw it away because he stood for the truth and would never pervert it for money or anything. He would have made millions if he wanted, but he didn't. He would never follow any child anywhere to go and lobby for admission. You must make your papers."

Mrs. Agbroko affirmed however, that her late husband had been receiving threat calls. "I knew so. I always prayed over it. They trailed him and killed him. It has always been like that. You know because of what he writes."

On the response of the police, she said: "They have taken the car from Mushin where he was shot to Panti for their investigation. It is not the police. It is from those that have the power." The tears came dripping again as her daughter reminded her of her promise not to cry anymore.

Observing that her mother had bared her mind to this reporter, her second daughter, Ruonah looked impressed as she expressed her surprise. "You must really have a good head you know. Do you know my mother has never opened up to anybody? She has not been talking. See the way she just warmed up to you."

Ruonah confirmed her mother's words, about threat calls "He used to tell us, but not mum. He would come home on certain days and say, 'they were calling the office today'."



•The late Agbroko



•Mrs Agbroko (left) and her sister, Mrs Felicia Onosurnue...on Wednesday

He was a fearless man. In 2003 when he wanted to start his column, we were looking for a name for it. My father said: "My whole life is all about this nation. That was how the column was named *This Nation*."

According to Ruonah, some were warning him to stop writing, and others were trying to lobby him. He has also been receiving invitations from the State Security Service (SSS).

"He had opportunities to leave this country, but he wouldn't. He lived and died for this nation. He used to tell my mother: 'Writing is my first wife; you are my second wife.' I remember when he was jailed by the Abacha government because of his writing. Whenever we (children) did things he didn't like, he used to tell us; 'Do you think I will be here forever? If I died today, is this what you people will be doing? It is not as if one would not die. My father used to say

it. It's just that, it happened too soon. He is just 53."

Ruonah virtually poured out her agitation: "That was a cowardly thing to do. Just drive behind somebody and shoot him in the neck. Only cowards act like that. They did not take his handset worth N130,000 nor the money with him."

"The only difference between him and others is that some people sat at beer parlours and aired their opinions, but he had the opportunity to say his own on the pages of newspapers."

"This nation is dead. When you cannot solve crimes. Look at Dele Giwa, Bola Ige. It will take a lot to resurrect it. If I am looking at the antecedents of the police in cases like this, that means there is no hope of my father's assassins being brought to book. But as my father used to say, one day, the change will come. Maybe with him this nation will change."

Thoughts about her father still made her smile. "He was

'Ruonah confirmed her mother's words, about threat calls. He used to tell us, but not mum. He would come home on certain days and say, 'they were calling the office today.' He was a fearless man. In 2003 when he wanted to start his column, we were looking for a name for it. My father said: 'My whole life is all about this nation. That was how the column was named *This Nation*.'

a very emotional person. He cannot be in the house and you would not know. He had a great sense of humour. He was a good dresser too."

She recalled that a day before her father's death, he had bought her skirt suits for the office as she had just started working. "They fit perfectly."

Ruonah's twin brother, Runor said: "We shared jokes that morning before he left for the office. My younger brother was disturbing him for Christmas money. We were all very happy. There was no sign of any threat."

On how the family got the news of his death, he said: "Around 1a.m., we received a phone call from his office that he was in hospital, that we should expect the worst. I called back the number. People sounded hysterical. Around three, we called back with mum who begged them to tell us the truth so they told us that he was shot."