

# Controversy trails mysterious death of two children under a pile of rugs in a shop



• The bodies of the kids

TUESDAY June 7, 2011 is a day Mr. Chizoba Theophilus Izundu and his wife will not forget in a hurry. Their joy of parenthood was cut short following the death of their two children, three-year-old Ogochukwu Izundu and two-year-old Chibundu.

Before her untimely death, Ogochukwu was a Nursery 1 pupil at Redeemed Nursery and Primary School, Uyo while Chibundu was yet to commence schooling.

The father of the two kids, 37-year-old Chizoba Theophilus Izundu and his wife, 29-year-old Njideke both hail from Aguluzigbo village in Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State. But they reside in Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital.

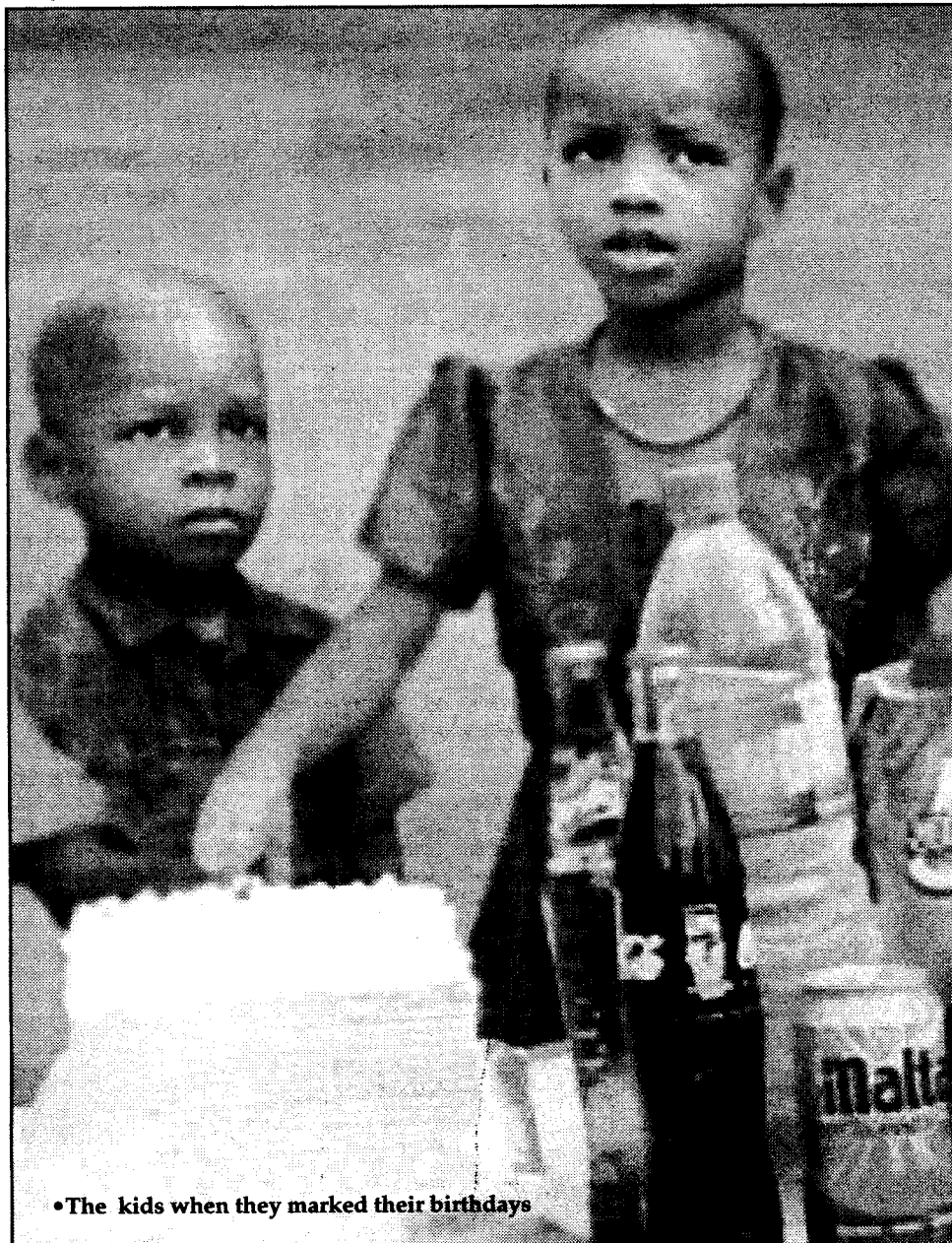
Izundu is a business man, dealing in electronics at No 11, Nepa Line, Uyo. His wife operates a small shop in front of his shop. A visit by *The Nation* correspondent to the one-room apartment of the couple in Uyo revealed how out of their meagre income from the proceeds of their electronics business, they still struggle to cater for the children, who until their untimely death, were full of life.

For the Izundus, May 22, 2011 would pass for the family's best days. It was the day Chibundu celebrated his birthday, which attracted a lot of well wishers. His parents must have quietly hoped that the child would one day procreate the way he was given birth to. But all the hope was cut short.

Narrating how the tragedy occurred on June 7, Njideke said: "At about 3 pm, my daughter, Ogochukwu, came back from school. I changed her uniform, trimmed her nails and attended to her along with my son, Chibundu. Our shop at Nepa Line is located between two traders who sell rug and paints. My two children started playing in front of the shop. Later, my husband came to tell me he was going to the market to buy some things because my mother-in-law wanted to travel back to the village the next day.

"It was not up to five minutes after my husband left that one of our neighbours who sells paints at No 13, Nepa Line came with one man to my shop. I do not know the man in person, but he wore a shirt that had the inscription 'Idems Ultimate' on it. So, I saw both of them standing in front of my shop. The neighbour said the man was his very good friend and that I should sell to him.

I asked the man what he wanted and he told me MP3. I removed the first one, but he said he didn't like it. I removed the second one and after testing it, he said it wasn't playing back. He then said I should remove the third one. After testing the third one, he



• The kids when they marked their birthdays

■ Kazeem IBRAHYM ■

started pricing below the cost price and I told him I could not sell below the cost price. He then asked me to bring the one that cost higher and I told him I would not bring any one again.

"I told him the last price was N4,000, but he was pricing it for N3,300. At that point, I

didn't feel like continuing. But my neighbour told me I should sell to him, saying they were friends. I told him his friend was not pricing well. The moment the man left and the neighbour entered his shop, I asked my sales girl (Itoro) to bring my children, because her father had bought beans cake for them and I wanted to feed the younger one. But my sales girl told me that he couldn't find them. I shouted their names, because shortly before

The big question I am asking is, since you didn't allow people to remove the rugs on the day of the incident, after opening the shop the next day, you went to the police to report that you found two bodies in your shop. How did the bodies get there?

that time, they were packing sand with toothpick cover. I asked my sales girl to check in the rug shop where one Samuel was the attendant, but she could not find them.

"I asked Samuel what happened to my children who were playing here just now. He told me they went towards the other compound. I ran to the other compound where they used to play with a little boy called Victor, but they were not there. I told myself that even if the children were flying, they shouldn't have reached the nearby Itiam Street. But I ran to the street to look for them to no avail. We later reported the case at the Area C Police Station."

She explained that when her husband returned, they both continued the search for the two children but all to no avail. Njideke said she turned to Samuel later and asked about the whereabouts of the man that bought rug while she was attending to our neighbour's friend who wanted to buy MP3. The mother of the deceased children further asked Samuel if the man went with her children, but he said the man left alone on a bike.

Her words: "I asked Samuel if he didn't put the rugs on top of the children, and he told me he was the one who arranged the rug and that nothing like that happened. When other neighbours came, they told him (Samuel) to let them rearrange the rugs, but Samuel said no. It was at that point that I asked him about Ndifreke (his colleague), and Samuel told me he went to the Plaza. I asked him to call Ndifreke in order to know if he went to the Plaza with my children, but Samuel said no, that Ndifreke was repairing his phone at the Plaza."

"That was how I started running around to look for my children. I became mad, running around to look for my children, only for me to return to the shop to find that Samuel and our neighbour had closed their shops before 5:30 pm. I was surprised be-



cause their normal closing time is 6 pm. We didn't see the children throughout the night. That night, I could not sleep.

"As early as 5 am, my husband left the house for the shop. At exactly 7:15 am, I came to the shop and I saw Ndifreke. I asked him where he was the previous day. He told me he went to fix his phone. I didn't ask him any question further. I told my husband that we should go back to Samuel, the rug seller's shop, because whatever happened to my children must have happened within his shop. I said at the time I started looking for my children, they could not have gone far."

According to Njideke, when she got to Samuel's shop, the shop was left open with no one inside. The distraught mother of two said: "I asked my brother to call Samuel to come and attend to a customer, but he didn't come out. He hid himself in the neighbour's shop. I shouted at him that he was here and I was looking for my children. I begged him to look for the phone number and the address of the man who bought rug from him the previous day. He said he



•The parents of the kids

didn't have the phone number of the man; that he was just a customer.

"We later went to the Area C Police Station. The policeman asked me if I suspected anyone and I told him I suspected Samuel

because he was in the shop throughout the time I was looking for my children and that the children didn't go beyond his shop. When we got to the shop to arrest Samuel, we didn't see anyone.

The next thing we saw was that Ndifreke, Samuel's colleague, was coming with Barracks Road policemen. Ndifreke entered the shop with two of the policemen and pointed to a particular location. The police called the IPO that I reported the case to. It was at that point I started shouting. They saw my dead children under the rug after removing about eight loads inside Samuel's shop."

Corroborating the wife's stance, Chizoba alleged that the duo of Samuel and Ndifreke went to the police

when they found that there was no way they could remove the bodies.

He said: "They are used to opening their shop around 9 am. Why did they come around 5 am to open the shop in order to remove the bodies of my two children? The big question I am asking is, since you didn't allow people to remove the rugs on the day of the incident, after opening the shop the next day, you went to the police to report that you found two bodies in your shop. How did the bodies get there? Was it the rug that tied the hands of my children with nylon? They tied my children's hands with nylon. Their heads were broken and the boy's face was wounded. This was how my children died and they took them to the mortuary. I have no problem with anybody."

The Izundus want justice to be done by bringing the killers of their children to book. They explained that so far, the police had shown cooperation in arresting those suspected to be be-

hind the dastardly act. But to the family, the work of the security agencies would be meaningless if the owner of the rug shop is not arrested.

When contacted, the Public Relations Officer of the Akwa Ibom State Police Command, Onyeka Orji, said the command had arrested suspects in connection with the case. Orji explained that the case had raised a lot of controversy and the command would do everything possible to get to the roots of the matter in order to bring anyone connected with the murder of the children to book.

The suspects could not be reached for comments, as the police said they were being shielded from exposure in order not to jeopardise their investigation.

"The suspects are at the state Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and we are still investigating. We don't want to jeopardise our investigation by telling you the number of suspects we have arrested," Orji said.

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