

[HOME](#) [NEWS](#) [POLITICS](#) [BUSINESS](#) [COLUMNISTS](#) [SPORTS](#) [ENTERTAINMENT](#) [MAGAZINE](#)[EDUCATION](#) [ONLINE SPECIAL](#) [EDITORIAL](#) [FORUM](#)

# Intriguing story of three-year-old boy breastfed by a stranger for 14 months

March 28, 2020 in [City Beats](#), [Featured](#), [News Update](#), [Saturday Magazine](#)

0



Little Destiny Ataaku and the woman who breastfed him, Mrs Mercy

## **By Linus Oota, Lafia**

- ***Toddler rescued from womb after mother was shot dead by killer herdsmen***
- ***Foster grandmother, who picked up his deceased mum from refuse dump 29 years ago, laments •My life will never be the same again, says distraught dad***

Fate works in diverse ways. That much is true of three-year-old Mercy, who was born without his mother's knowledge and had to be breastfed by a strange woman. His father met the strange woman in the hospital where Caesarian operation was performed to bring him out of the womb of his mother, Celina, who was shot dead by killer herdsmen.

Celina's husband, 45-year-old James Ataaku, has been wearing sorrow like a garment since his 28-year-old wife was killed by rampaging herdsmen in March 2017 when their village, Tse bar, Keana Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, was invaded by the herdsmen, resulting in the killing of 15 persons.

The blood-thirsty herdsmen had also left in their trail burnt houses, destroyed farmlands and food barns, among other valuable items. The murder of Ataaku's wife was like a sword driven into his heart. The only son of his parents, he lost his mother four months before he got married to Celina in January 2012. His father also died five months after he got married.

Celina herself was an orphan adopted by Mr Ukpabi Gbakaan (now late) and his wife, Eunice, who had no child of their own since they got married about 40 years ago. Adopting Celina as a baby in 1991, they nurtured and trained her until she obtained a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business Administration from the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa, where she also met her husband before they got married.

The couple had lived in Lafia, the Nasarawa State capital, where they ran multiple businesses to keep life going. They were also involved in farming activities, engaging some youths and paying them in return, but their marriage lasted for five years without a child. Their joy, therefore, knew no bounds when Celina took in after five years of waiting for the fruits of the womb. Their joy was, however, cut short with the gruesome murder of Celina while she was heavily pregnant with her first baby on March 20, 2017.

On that fateful day, Ataaku had travelled from his base in Lafia to his village in Keana to pay some youths that were working on his farm and Celina, who was eight months pregnant, insisted on going with him. Unfortunately, the very night they landed in Keana, the village was invaded by killer herdsmen who shot sporadically and caused the villagers to run in different directions for safety. In the process, one of the bullets caught Celina on the head.



By the time the dust of the invasion settled and Ataaku returned to check on his pregnant wife, she met her in a pool of blood gasping for breath. With the help of other courageous villagers, he took Celina to Dalhatu Araf Specialist Hospital in Lafia, where the doctors, sensing that Celina could not survive the gunshot, decided to operate on her to save the baby in her womb. A successful operation was carried out and the baby was removed unhurt, while Celina died even before the

operation was completed.

With the death of Celina came Ataaku's burden of raising the baby. Luckily for him, his mother-in-law ran into a woman at the hospital who was delivered of a still born baby. They struck a deal with her and her husband to help Ataaku nurse Celina's baby with her breast milk since she had just been delivered of a baby and was lactating.

Thus, the nursing mother (Mercy) and the new born baby moved into Ataaku's house in Lafia under his supervision, while his mother-in-law also moved in to help look after the child, while the adopted mother breastfed him.

During this period, Celina's foster father died from the trauma of Celina's death at the age of 67. The development left Ataaku and his mother-in-law in despair that turned them into a picture of grief-weary people with souls in perpetual torment from a cocktail of painful feelings, sadness, helplessness, loneliness, abandonment and obsessive death wishes to escape the unbearable condition that life has foisted on them.

### **Tearful celebration**

When *The Nation* visited the family house of Ataaku in Lafia where the little boy, Destiny, was celebrating his third birthday as a motherless child, the occasion was more of a moment for sober

reflections. The large presence of friends and well-wishers could not stop the torrents of tears that rolled down his father's cheeks. The man in him vanished as he cried, holding his head with his hands.

Both Ataaku and his mother-in-law were in agony, sobbing over the loss of Celina at a tender age, with the former declaring that nothing in life could replace his wife.

Ataaku said: "I miss Celina so much. No one on earth can fill the space she has left in my life. Not even my son who she never had the opportunity of meeting.

"She was a prayer warrior. In so many ways, she was a blessing I cannot put to words. She was incredibly helpful, supportive and encouraging. She was lovely and very compassionate.

"She was kind, empathetic, loving, non-judgmental and nurturing. She sacrificed and devoted herself in a way that is almost unexplainable unless you come in contact with her.

"A few weeks before she was murdered, she told me of her intention to train her unborn child to become a medical doctor if God would allow her to be delivered of the baby successfully. She was already eight months pregnant. We had bought all that was expected of us in preparation for the coming of the new born baby. Little did I know that she was not going to make it.

"The grief and her loss in my life is so poignant that it stings. Even after three years, it is still penetrating so deeply into me. We had so many good plans for our future and on how to multiply and grow our business.

"She was my backbone. We had good plans for our future and that of our unborn children. I don't like the way her death came, because she had no opportunity to tell me goodbye, show affection and even make an effort to prolong her stay on earth.

"But I will tell her son stories about her; how great she was and how much she loved him."

He lamented that a void had been created in his life and could not be filled,

"My parents are not alive to see the punishment God has given me. My father-in-law also could not wait to see his grandson clock three years. What a wicked world!

"My wife's death ruined our business. But I will work hard to make sure my son becomes a medical doctor when he grows up, in order to fulfill his late mother's dream for him while he was in the womb.

“My wife once told me she would want her first child to become a medical doctor,” he added.

### **Grandmother laments**

“Who will help me take care of Destiny?” That was the cry from the bereaved 58-years-old mother-in-law, Mrs Eunice Gbakaan, as she bemoaned her fate in a chat with our correspondent.

“My son-in-law has exhausted his savings to save the life of this little boy. He has nothing again. His businesses have run down and he has nobody to assist him.

“My own husband has gone into the grave due to the trauma he suffered when his only adopted child was murdered by marauding herdsmen.

“Who will help take care of the boy and his education? I don’t have the strength again to struggle like when I was young. I got married to my late husband, who was a railway worker, and we stayed together for close to 40 years without a child.

“We decided to adopt a child because I advised him to take a second wife but he refused. We adopted Celina in Makurdi. Her mother dumped her in a refuse at the North Bank in Makurdi so that she could die.

“That was in 1990. We brought her to Lafia where I raised her myself with baby’s milk. My husband was then a railway worker, so we could afford to buy it.”

---

#### **Previous Post**

 **I tested negative for COVID-19 -- Garba Shehu**

#### **Next Post**

 **Ogun closes borders over COVID - 19**

---

### **Discussion about this post**