

WEEKEND LIFE

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Mystery midnight fire wipes out family of seven

• *How NNPC engineer, wife, three children, two others died in inferno*

■ Linus OOTA, Lafia ■

THE Umbuguala family in Eggon, Nasarawa Eggon Local Government Area of Nasarawa State is in distress over the sudden death of seven of their members in a mystery midnight fire. Among the deceased was the head of the family, Mr Sunday Joseph Umbuguala, a 40-year-old graduate of Mechanical Engineering from the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), who until his death was an employee of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) attached to the Kaduna Refinery.

Other casualties of the fire outbreak include Umbuguala's 38-year-old wife Emiria, their three children (Elmond 8, Eliana 5 and Elma 3) as well as two relations Justina and Patience. They were all burnt to ashes in the fire outbreak said to have occurred around 2 am on February 22, at a time there was no

electricity supply either from the public source, the generator or even power inverter.

Strangely too, the fire outbreak was said limited to the flat occupied by the Umbuguala family while other adjoining flats were not affected. Like everyone else in the neighbourhood, the entire family was apparently deeply asleep when the fire outbreak occurred and burnt them beyond recognition.

Sadly, the deceased engineer was said to be the only child of his parents as his

father died when he was only seven years old while his mother who could not do much to support him financially also died in 2010, leaving to struggle all alone to acquire university education.

The late Umbuguala was said to have met Emiria in the same Nasarawa Eggon where the two families lived close to each other. They started a relationship that lasted till May 10 when they decided to get married.

Emiria's elder sisters and their family members were still in pensive mood

when our correspondent visited the family house on Thursday. It took the reporter some time to get them to speak about the death of their loved ones.

An elder sister of the late Emiria, who identified herself simply as Mrs Abdullahi Mohammed, who spoke on behalf of other family members, sat dejected on a dining chair in the sitting room with tears rolling down her cheeks before she could utter a word. But after gaining some composure, she sat back, cleared her

•Deceased Umbuguala, wife and 3 kids

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Calamity hits family as mystery fire consumes seven members

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throat and narrated the misfortune that befell the family.

According to her, the entire family was living happily before the tragedy that struck on February 22. She recalled speaking with her deceased younger sister on the phone several times from morning till about 9pm on the fateful day.

Mrs Mohammed said: "I spoke with my younger sister on the phone at about 9pm and she told me that she was plaiting her daughter's hair as they were preparing to resume from the mid-term break.

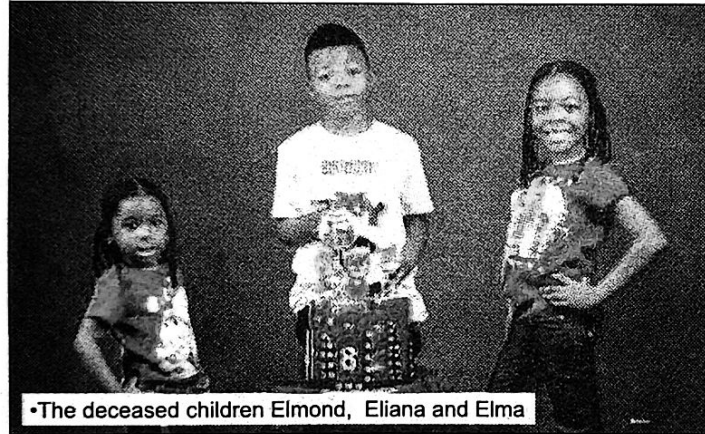
"I also spoke with the children and they were happy and lively, saying that they would be in school again after the mid-term break. I had no inkling that it was the last time I would hear their voice.

"They all went to bed with the hope of making it to school the next day. But at about 2am, fire broke out from the house, consuming the bedroom where the family members slept and the other bedroom where the two other relations were also sleeping.

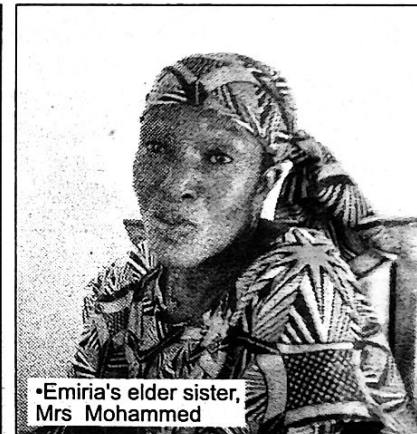
"What surprised us the most was that the fire did not affect the kitchen where there was cooking gas. It did not also touch the generator which was also not on. There was a small fish pond and poultry farm attached to the house and they were also not affected.

"So we are actually shocked about the source of the fire outbreak since there was no light for one to say that it could have come from a spark.

"That was how the entire family left this world. They were all young. They came to the world briefly and went back. It was such a sad



•The deceased children Elmond, Eliana and Elma



•Emiria's elder sister, Mrs Mohammed



•The late Emiria

incident."

She said her loss was compounded by the trauma of having to host her deceased younger sister, her husband, the three kids as well as the two other grown up girls who are also members of the family in dreams almost on a daily basis.

She said: "I keep seeing them in my dreams. The children keep talking to me on the phone in my dreams. The three kids just came into the world, saw the world briefly and went back.

"Sadly, death sneaked in in a cruel manner, killing not only her and her husband, but all their three kids and the other two grown up girls who were staying with them."

Mrs Mohammed however said the family had taken the incident in good faith and would not blame anybody for it because it was the will of God.

"It is God alone that can console us for we don't have much to do to console ourselves. I

will miss them so much. No one on earth can fill the space they have left in my life.

"My younger sister and her husband were easy going people, good and dutiful, always committed to achieving whatever they wanted to achieve and leaving no stone unturned," she lamented.

With this dirge amidst sobbing uncontrollably, Mrs Ibrahim Mohammed took her long silence and mourned her younger sister, husband and the three kids.

Our correspondent gathered that before her departure, the late Emiria had completed her master's degree programme and was waiting to defend her thesis.

The elder sister, who had earlier vowed not blame God for what happened, later made a U-turn, saying that it is not fair that God would allow such an amazing family to be burnt death in one fell swoop.

Hear her: "Allah is not fair to the entire family. Allah has inflicted a permanent wound in my entire life. There is absolutely no point taking my younger sister, her husband and their three kids away in their prime. What is their offence?

"Oh, my joy has been stolen. I'm only managing. My late sister had good plans for us but Allah suddenly took them away in an unexpected manner.

"We are badly touched about this whole loss. Their untimely exit from this sinful world has left us all distraught.

"God had given the late Umbuguala an amazing wife who was doing more than she should. We all looked forward to their future dreams.

"She had promised to make us proud but Allah denied her and us that opportunity. May their souls find peace."