

This man allegedly killed his friend in a scuffle for passengers

Stories: Sesan Olufowobi

While worshippers were returning home from church last Sunday, 33-year-old Salisu Omitunde was having a date with destiny.

Looking back on the whole scenario on Wednesday, this week, at the State Criminal Investigation Department, Panty, Yaba, Omitunde told *Saturday Punch* that he wished the hands of the clock would turn backwards, "then I will act differently and not find myself in this mess."

Omitunde, a tricycle operator in Lagos, became a guest of the police at SCID following what he described as a "slight" quarrel with his friend and fellow driver, but which led to the other man's death. But he said, "His death was not through me."

Omitunde and the late Sikiru were operators of the commercial tricycle popularly called *Keke NAPEP*. They ply Ikeja-Ogba route.

Their colleagues at the Ikeja terminal described them as bosom friends, whose quarrel on that fateful day was initially seen as a friendly scuffle. "We did not know they were serious. By the time we realised the severity of their quarrel, it was too late," one of them said.

Omitunde also confirmed his relationship with Sikiru, "Of course, he was a friend. I sometimes gave him my tricycle to drive. He was the only one I could give my tricycle like that. We didn't have any grudge against each other. We never quarrelled. It is still surprising to me what happened on that day."

Like all tragedise, the incident last Sunday started like a cruel joke. People at the garage told our correspondent that the quarrel was sparked off by an argument about who would take the turn to pick passengers first.

"I was supposed to 'load' before him, but he claimed that he would load before me. Before I realised what was happening, he had removed my key from the ignition in order to prevent me from loading before him. I demanded for the key and he refused," Omitunde recalled.

Whereas people thought that as friends, the duo would resolve their disagreement, Omitunde and Sikiru resorted to physical combat.

"They started fighting, and before we could separate them, Omitunde hit Sikiru with something and he fell down," said one of the people at the garage who refused to identify himself.

The police at Panty corroborated the man's claim. One of the officers said from police investigation so far, two of the witnesses interviewed said that Omitunde hit Sikiru with an iron rod. "But we have not done any autopsy to ascertain the true cause of the death," the officer stated.

Omitunde denied hitting Sikiru, saying, "He was my friend for God's sake. Why should I want to injure or kill him? What happened was that when he collected my key, he refused to hand it back, even after taking his turn to load. He wanted to go with my key, which is something I would not take, so I challenged him and in the process, a scuffle ensued. It was at this point that he fell and hit his head on the ground."

"When I realised that he might have sustained an injury, I quickly carried him to a nearby hospital from where he was referred to the General Hospital, Ikeja. In fact, I had to pay N5, 000 at that private hospital before he was attended to."

"At the General Hospital, he was declared dead and I just went to the Area F nearby to report the incident."

Saturday Punch gathered that the tussle over the turn to pick passengers has remained a major challenge at the garage.

A relative of the deceased, who declined to identify himself, was at SCID on Wednesday. He said the family was yet to meet to decide their course of action. "You know it is still fresh, but we are not going to take it lying low," he said.

Lagos State Police Command spokesman, Bode



•Omitunde

Ojajuni; said the suspect would remain with the police pending the outcome of its investigation, "then we will take him to the court."

And this man... •He sent his friend to an early grave after sharing a drink together

There is a lot to learn from the Holy books about the adverse effects of alcohol consumption. Proverbs chapter 20 verse 1, for instance, says, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

If Femi Korede had taken this to heart last week, perhaps he would have been wiser and stayed away from alcohol. And perhaps, too, he would have avoided the trouble he has got himself into.

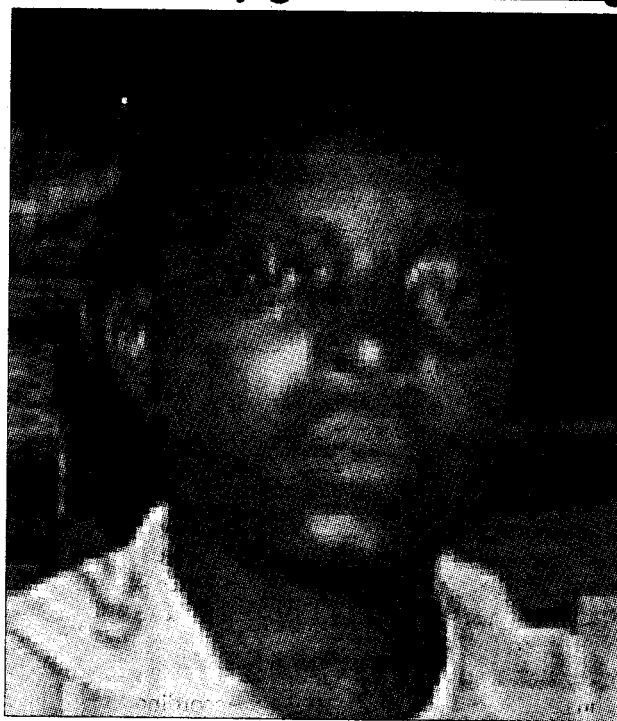
Last weekend, Korede had a large dose of strong drink and now he is telling the sad story of how he hacked his friend to death thereafter.

Korede is being held by the police for allegedly stabbing his friend, whose name was given as Segun, in the neck under the influence of alcohol. To the police, it was the wound Segun sustained due to the stabbing that led to his death few minutes after.

The duo of Korede and Segun were united by poverty. Both had migrated to Lagos State at different times to look for the proverbial greener pasture; and as both men struggled to survive and free themselves from the grip of poverty, they met and became bosom friends.

Korede is a driver, while the late Segun was a hustler who could do any job that would fetch him money.

In the evening, both of them would meet at the Osborne Estate area, where Korede lived in a shanty



•Korede

nearby. It would be a time to feel good and thank God for a day well spent. Hajia Restaurant was the place they went for relaxation everyday.

"We were good friends. Everyday like that we just go to 'Hajia' and have one or two bottles before retiring to our different houses," Korede told our correspondent.

Saturday was not different. But the unique thing was that Segun brought his girlfriend, who in turn came with two of her friends. The jolly party soon settled down to a night of fun.

"I think we drank three or four bottles of beer each - that is, Segun and I. Then Segun went and bought one big bottle of Chelsea, which the two of us shared," Korede recol-

lected.

As they were taking the alcohol, Segun excused himself to go to the toilet. "I had a bottle of beer in my hand when he was going. I don't know how it happened, but when he came back, the bottle was on his seat and instead of Segun to tell me to remove it or even remove it himself, he just flared up and started abusing me."

Korede also did not take the matter with levity, and before long the two bosom friends were poking fingers at each others' eyes.

The conflict allegedly went out of hand when Segun's girl took side with her man.

"She started abusing me and her two friends joined. I

couldn't take it and I gave the girls a piece of my mind, and even would have beaten them."

The situation soon degenerated into a physical squabble between Segun and Korede.

According to police investigation, Segun initially took a bottle and made to hit Korede with it. But Korede wrestled the bottle from him, gave him a punch to destabilise him, and the he broke the bottle on his head. As if that was not enough, he stabbed Segun on the neck with the broken bottle.

"It was a silly fight really. I guess it was all that drink, but Segun also compounded the situation. Immediately that bottle entered his neck, instead of going to get treated, he intensified the fight. We were pushed outside where some other boys joined him in fighting me," Korede said.

Before long, Segun fainted because he had lost a lot of blood. Although he was rushed to the Island General Hospital, he was confirmed dead by the doctors on duty.

"True to God I did all I could to save his life, but his friends would not allow me, they were fighting me, they even burnt my house. Oh! God, how I wish I did not go to Hajia that day," Korede said.

But Lagos State Police spokesman, Olubode Ojajuni, said the police would deal with Korede according to the law. "It does no matter whether he is sober, sorry or whatever; law is law."