

Cultists hack down varsity student, then set him ablaze

• My son must not die in vain, says father

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FOR the Uyo, Akwa Ibom State-based family of Chief Nse Abasi Akpaeno, it is an endless anguish as the heir apparent of the family, Edidiong Akpaeno, was murdered in cold blood by youths suspected to be daredevil cultists. The mindless youths snuffed life out of him and set his lifeless body ablaze.

It is not that Edidiong was a cultist, but the reason surrounding the murder of this promising young man, who was until his death, an undergraduate of Electrical Electronics Department in the University of Uyo, remains unfathomable.

The incident that took away his life began at about 7.30pm on August 19, 2007 when he took permission from his father, Nseabasi Akpaeno, to retrieve his phone, which he had lost two weeks before he met his untimely death.

Edidiong was said to have complained to his father about the sudden disappearance of his phone and when the news filtered in that one Imaobong, who is now at large, had found the phone, the father had no option than to grant him the permission to go and take delivery of his missing item.

The deceased, however, left with the family's domestic help, Joe, to No. 9, Udotong Street, off Nkemba, where they were supposed to meet Imaobong. Sadly, he never returned to his father alive.

When *Sunday Punch* visited the home of the deceased at No. 11 Iya Street, it was continuous wailing by sympathisers, who thronged the place to condole with the parents of Edidiong.

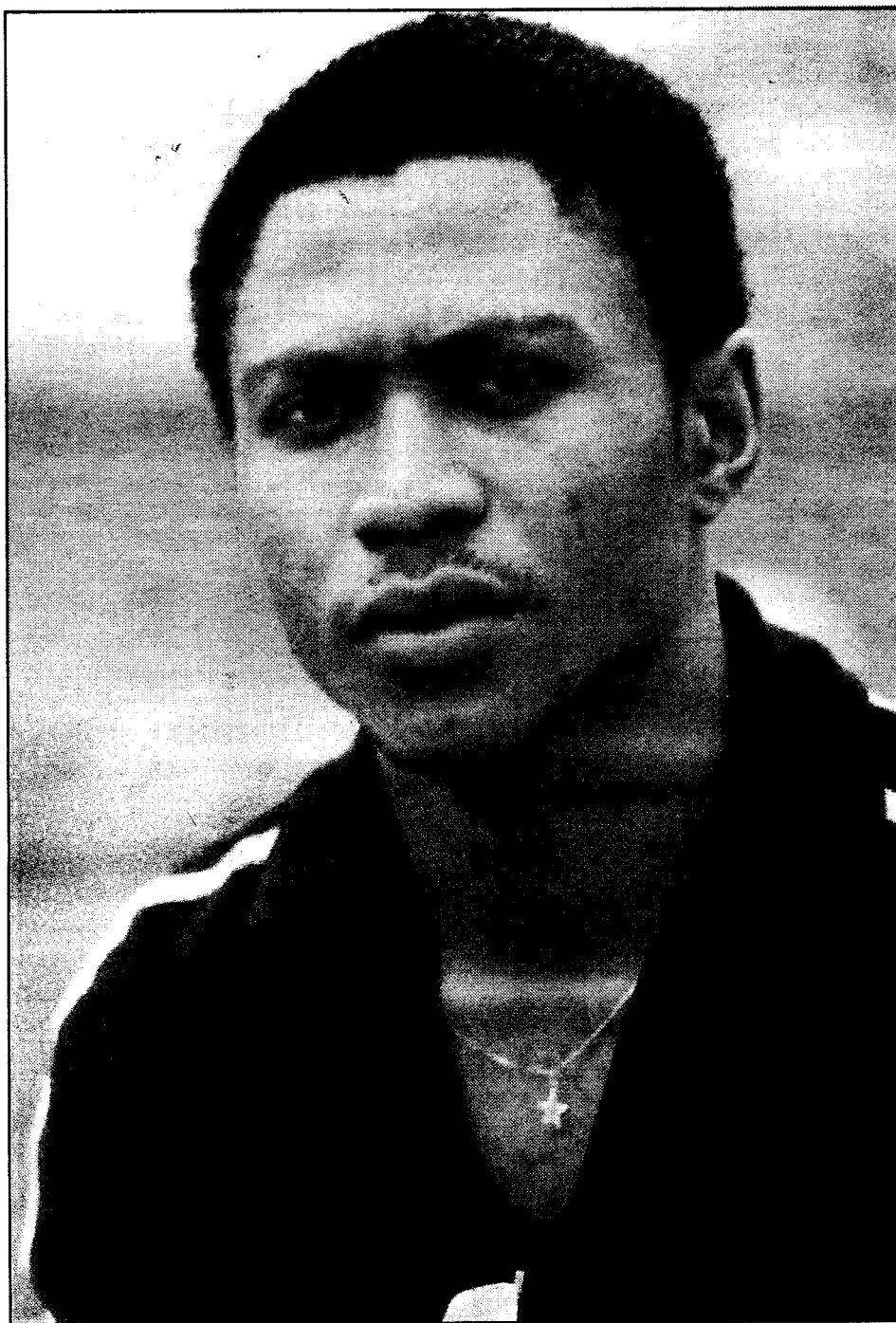
Narrating his horrible experience in the hands of those who killed his only son, Akpaeno said he actually permitted his son to go and retrieve his phone from one Imaobong, who was later identified as his girlfriend. That the Akpaeno could lose a promising young man in such a horrible manner was one thing the breadwinner of the family has not been able to grapple with. It remains mind boggling to every member of the Nse Abasi Akpaeno family.

"My son's death is something I cannot easily understand. He told me that he was only going to retrieve his phone at No. 9 Udotong Street, off Nkembe Lane and we have not seen him since then. Edidiong was my only son and the wicked people have succeeded in taking him away from me. My son is not a cult member.

"Everybody can testify to this fact within the neighbourhood or any other place you may want to make your investigation. He was an easy-going fellow," Akpaeno, who is a contractor, queried as he grimaced at the terrible loss of his only son.

"After being informed about my son's scuffle with some unknown youths, I quickly rushed to the point where the fight took place. On getting close to that place, I saw about four persons dragging the lifeless body of Edidiong along the side of the road. Amazed at what was happening, I accosted them and asked them where they were dragging him to, but one of them who was holding a keg, which I suspected contained fuel, warned me not to come closer.

"He actually threatened to set me ablaze if



• Edidiong

I tried to stop them from carrying out their action. I retreated and called the police, who came almost immediately. But before we could get to the scene, they had already set my son ablaze. Why must they take my son's life in such a cruel and gruesome manner?

Gaining composure, the deceased's father narrated how humble Edidiong had been all through his life. According to him, though his son was 25 years old, he had the mind of a mature man and very careful in all he did.

Sunday Punch gathered that the police had arrested the mother of Imaobong, the girl who called Edidiong to come for his lost mobile phone, while the man, who owns the building where the deceased was to retrieve his phone, is currently at large. A member of the gang, which clubbed Edidiong to death, is also currently in police net, while the two others have gone into hiding. The suspect in police custody was said to be wearing a bloodstained shirt before he was apprehended.

Identified as Emma Ekpote and John Tom Okon, the Police Command in Uyo vowed to do everything within its power to apprehend the duo and the father of Imaobong, who was said to have taken part in the killing of

Edidiong.

The Akwa Ibom State Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Gab Ngban, told *Sunday Punch* that investigation was in top gear. Ngban said since Imaobong's mother was cooling off in detention, the father of the girl would definitely present himself to the police.

Ngban explained that Edidiong's assailants killed and set him ablaze in order to create a picture of a lynched armed robber.

"From what we have discovered so far, the deceased is not an armed robber as the suspect tried to portray.

"It is just a case of murder and we will pursue it to its logical conclusion. I have, during one of my briefings with newsmen, warned members of the public to desist from lynching suspects. It is wrong to embrace jungle justice in a modern society like ours," Ngban noted.

The police spokesman, however, refused to make further comments on the matter, pointing out that doing otherwise would scuttle the investigation.

Corroborating what the father of the deceased told *Sunday Punch*, an occupant of No. 8, Iya Street, a building adjacent to that of Akpaeno's family, Chief Sunday Essien said Edidiong couldn't have belonged to a cult.

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• Akpaeno

Essien explained that the deceased was barely four months in school and never joined any cult group.

Essien said, "Apart from that, Edidiong was an easy going person. He is not known to be a troublesome person and was always busy with his studies, coupled with assisting his father in his contract work. He grew up in this neighbourhood and we all know him. If he was not busy, he was always within his father's house. Edidiong was a gentleman to the core. That is why we have remained dumbfounded by the news of his death in the hands of bad boys."

However, when *Sunday Punch* visited No. 9, Udotong, the landlord of the building, who is also Imaobong's father, was said to have fled the area in order to avoid being arrested by the police. The whole building was deserted as tenants, according to reliable sources, took to their heels since the murder of Edidiong.

As the police continue with their investigation, all the father of the deceased is seeking is justice. With two suspects in detention, it is hoped that it will not take much time before the others are arrested and brought to book.

In his last remark to *Sunday Punch*, Chief Akpaeno, who has only a daughter left as his child, said, "My son must not die in vain and I know the police will do a good job in bringing those who killed Edidiong to book."