

FATAL AMBUSH

34-year-old lawyer shot dead at eatery, few weeks to his wedding and journey to the UK

Ayodele Ale

His is the story of a young, brilliant lawyer, whose life ambition was cut short on the brink of breakthrough.

After enduring the rigours of the academic environment in Nigeria to qualify as a lawyer, 34-year-old Ifeanyi Samuel Obi sought to expand the frontiers of his achievement by travelling to Britain to further his studies, and possibly practise his profession.

He had already obtained a visa to the United Kingdom and scheduled his wedding for the first week of December, shortly before he would have made his journey to the UK. But a few weeks to what would have been a double achievement Ifeanyi was shot dead in controversial circumstances.

It was the lifeless body of the 34-year-old lawyer that was brought to his father's compound in Ichi, Ekwusigo Local Government Area, Anambra State on October 19, 2007.

His friends and colleagues at the Ofianyi Chambers, Shippers Council Plaza in Apapa, Lagos were yet to recover from the shock of Ifeanyi's death when *Saturday Punch* visited on Tuesday. "We were so close and we all feel very bad about it. It is really unfortunate," lamented Glory David, one of Ifeanyi's former colleagues.

The grief was even more palpable in his Ichi family home. Ifeanyi's father, Sir Zeph Obi, who spoke on the telephone on Monday, said he was determined to get to the roots of his son's untimely death. "They were two boys - Ifeanyi and his younger brother - but I am now left with the younger brother only. The death of my son cannot go like that," he said.

Ifeanyi met his fate on September 16 when some gunmen invaded Kinstine-Jo, an eatery located in Calacutta area of Apapa, Lagos, where he had gone in company with a friend and two girls. He was said to have remained indoor at his Apapa residence all day until his friend came and invited him out.

Ifeanyi's younger brother, Arinze, said, "He was indoor. My sister said he told her that he did not feel like going out; and that if he would go out at all, it would be to have a hair cut."

But then, Ifeanyi dropped his initial resolve when his friend, identified as Onyebuchi, who was said to hail from Ifeanyi's village, came in with two girls around 7pm and invited Ifeanyi out to the eatery.

Arinze said his sister told family members that Ifeanyi initially insisted that he would not go out, the lawyer eventually caved in to pressure from his visiting friend. He picked his car key and the four of them headed to the eatery.

The four were said to be sipping their drinks at the eatery when some gunmen struck and held all the people there hostage. "They first shot at the counter," Okafor Chukwumenje, the manager of the Apapa branch of Kingstine-Jo said.

Confusion then ensued as everyone began to rush upstairs in a bid to escape from the invaders. According to Chukwumerije, immediately he noticed one of the bandits holding a gun, he rushed out of the compound.

He said, "I was standing at the entrance when they arrived. Immediately I saw one of them holding a gun, I ran and took an *okada* (motorcycle) to Area B police headquarters. I told the policemen I met at the station that armed robbers had invaded our place,



but they said they had a patrol team around the place."

Before Chukwumerije returned to the eatery, Ifeanyi had been shot at the back of his head, while the gunmen escaped after robbing the customers of their valuables, especially handsets. Chukwumerije said Ifeanyi was the only customer shot by the bandits.

He explained, "As I was returning to the eatery, I saw four of my workers carrying the young man. He was the only one that was shot. Others who sustained injuries did so as they were trying to escape to the manager's office, which was upstairs."

According to him, the young lawyer was first taken to a nearby clinic, which declined to treat Ifeanyi because the operators insisted on getting a police report before attending to him. By the time he was rushed to the General Hospital, Apapa, it was too late as he gave up the ghost moments after. Ifeanyi's body was thereafter deposited in the hospital's mortuary.

But Ifeanyi's father believes his son's death was contrived; as he wondered why, after the death of his son, his friend, Onyebuchi, who came to invite him out, vanished into thin air with the two girls.

Arinze recalled that Onyebuchi's whereabouts remained unknown for five days after the incident.

Onyebuchi was eventually arrested, and he has since remained in police custody.

Ifeanyi's father says Onyebuchi has explanations to offer law enforcement agents on the death of his son. He queried, "Why was it that Ifeanyi was the only person killed? Why did he (Onyebuchi) switch off his phone for many days before he was arrested by the police? I want the police to investigate what happened to my son. The way the thing happened, I do not believe that it was robbery. I believe it was planned."

Efforts to get Onyebuchi to speak about the incident failed as the Divisional Crime Officer at the Area B police headquarters, who identified himself simply as Mr Ralph, said he was new in the division. "I was only transferred here two weeks ago," he said.

The Divisional Police Officer, Mr Mohammed Ali, told *Saturday Punch* that he could not confirm whether Ifeanyi's killing was a case of armed robbery or assassination. "All I can say is that there was a shooting at Kingstine-jo," he said.

He said the case had been transferred to the State Criminal Investigation Department, Pantli, and that only the spokesman of the Lagos State Police Command, Mr Bode Ojajumi, could speak on it. When he was contacted, the PPRO said he was not aware of the incident.