

Teenage murderer confesses: 'I didn't mean to kill, I only threw a spanner at him'

A trifling disagreement has led a minor to allegedly commit murder, writes TUNDE BUSARI

THE entire residents of Magboro, a small community on the Lagos/Ibadan Expressway in Ogun State, have still not got over the incident in which a young boy, Sunday Ajibola, killed one Taju after a minor disagreement a couple of weeks ago. The incident, to say the least, shook the naturally serene community to the point of eclipsing other events.

Ajibola is just a 15-year-old, while Taju, until his death, was between 20 and 25 years. Many of the residents are still wondering how a boy of that age could have beaten a man that old to death.

"The boys of nowadays should not be underrated. They are such a daring generation that many of them don't care about the repercussions of their actions. Although I was not around when the incident occurred, the fact is that anything can happen with those boys," a commercial motorcycle operator, who would not disclose his identity, said.

But Ajibola, now cooling his heels in the cell at the State Criminal Investigation Department, Eleweeran, Abeokuta, told *SUNDAY PUNCH* that he could not have under any circumstance beaten Taju, whom he often referred to as "Brother Taju," let alone kill him. "He would beat me if I even attempted to fight with him for whatever reason. That was why I left him on that day to do whatever he liked," Ajibola said.

He, however, recounted what he did that eventually took Taju's life in such a dramatic manner. "I didn't mean to kill him. I only threw a spanner at him as he was running away after he beat me up for refusing to allow him to cheat me over a matter between me and another person," Ajibola explained.

Something one could not take away from this boy while the interview lasted was his knack for baring it all with equanimity. Perhaps realising the futility in telling lies, Ajibola was eloquent in his step-by-step explanation of the circumstances that led to the untimely death of Taju on that fateful day.

Ajibola, wearing a gloomy look, said he was a long time partner of the late Taju at construction sites, where they usually worked as casual labourers. He added that he had never engaged the deceased in any fight, though there was always a reason to engage him in one.

He said, "This incident is painful to me because in the past, Brother Taju always did what could force me to be annoyed with him, but I would just take it and let it go. He was in the habit of telling me that he was my senior, and that he was older than me anytime we wanted to share our money after a day's job, which we always did together.

"Whenever he said this, I would only murmur to let him know I was not happy; but it didn't go beyond that. I could not have fought him. And I realised that it didn't make sense for me to let him beat me after the work. So I always allowed him to get away with it."

This privilege, which the deceased seemed to have been freely enjoying, perhaps, was what he relied on to once again take on Ajibola when the latter was settling a score with a much younger boy, with whom he had worked at a site in the locality.

The boy, called Akeem, had protested against the share of the proceeds given to him by Ajibola after they completed their work for that day. Akeem believed his elderly partner had short-changed him. By his calculation, the money should have been shared equally. This, however, was not to be and he spoiled for a fight.

"We did not share the money equally with Akeem because we calculated it on the number of blocks each of us carried. The blocks we were asked to carry were 550. Liadi and I carried 450 and Akeem carried 100. So, we gave him N500 and took N1,200 each. Later, he went to report us to the person who gave me the job," Ajibola said.



Taju saw a spanner on the ground and hit me on the head with it. They then ran away. I also took the spanner and threw it at him. I didn't target his head. I just threw it. I didn't even know that it hit his head until he shouted

Akeem did not stop at that in his desperation to seek redress. He also went to his elder brother called Owolabi. Conscious of the confidence his brother had in him, Owolabi quickly followed Akeem to Ajibola, who explained the sharing formula to him (Owolabi). Having seen fair play in the arrangement, Owolabi only pleaded that N300 be added to the N500.

"But I told him (Owolabi) in the presence of Brother Tunde with whom he came to me that I had saved the money in my daily contribution with somebody in the community. But I promised that I would give him if I got another job the following day. He said he would come and collect it, and he left that day. Ajibola added, "God so good, I got a job. But after we

finished it, the person who gave us the job said he would pay us the next day. We agreed and left the place. Later that day, Brother Tunde just came to ask me for the N300 I promised to give Brother Owolabi. I told him that it was true. I told him that I had worked, but I was not paid.

"As I was telling him, Brother Taju, who accompanied him, just held me and said I was lying. I explained. Then one bricklayer asked him to leave me. After the man had left, they still came back to me. Brother Taju just slapped me. People came out and begged them to leave me."

The intervention of the people saved the situation as Tunde and Taju were prevailed upon to sheathe their swords. But this could only bring a temporary succour to Ajibola. As soon as the mediators dispersed, the duo once again returned more vociferously and promised not to leave him until he had coughed up the N300.

"I continued to tell them that I would pay the money. Suddenly, Brother Taju saw a spanner on the ground and hit me on the head with it," Ajibola said. "They then ran away. I also took the spanner and threw it at him. I didn't target his head. I just threw it. I didn't even know that it hit his head until he shouted, while Brother Tunde was holding him."

"They then took him to the chemist. They asked me to drop some money and I said I didn't have anything on me. I asked them to sell drug for me after making a promise that I would pay when I worked the next day. I then went home."

He returned home with no idea of what might be the end of his reaction to the provocation. But the following day, while he was hoping to get a job from which he would be able to settle his debt at the chemist, a team of policemen from the Ibafo Divisional Headquarters stormed the house.

When Ajibola got to the station, the news was broken to him. Taju had died. The boy broke down, weeping like a baby. "I never thought it could be this serious. I just threw the spanner. And it was Akeem, who came to me that I should help him to work with me whenever I got a job. I asked him about his school, he said they asked him to bring money," he said while recalling how he began a relationship with Akeem, who may be referred to as the remote cause of his ordeal.

The question raised by this incident is how a 15-year-old turned a veteran of menial job at construction sites. Ajibola said the untimely death of his father some years back dealt a big blow to his ambition of pursuing an academic career.

He dropped out of school at Primary Three when his petty trader mother, according to him, advised him to pick a new career in either trading or barbing. Ajibola chose the latter, being the most popular vocation among his contemporaries, especially those with a similar background in the community.

He then became an apprentice, with the hope of attaining independence after the approved three years. "When it was six months to my freedom, my master just said he had added another six months to my period. I told my mother. She did not like it and she took me away from the place."

"I went to another man. He said I should bring N3,000. My mother said she didn't have the money. That was why I decided to do menial jobs to raise the money. I am the last born of my parents. We are seven," Ajibola told our correspondent.

In his remarks, the Police Public Relations Officer, Ogun State Command, Femi Awoyale, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, said the rate of child abuse in the society was alarming. Awoyale argued that if the parents were up to their responsibilities to their children, they would have control over them.

He said, "But in a situation where a child is left to fend for himself, how can the parents effectively exercise control over such a child? Imagine a boy as young as this going to carry blocks and all sorts to take care of himself. It is bad. But there is no way we can take all he has said without investigating him further."

"We are going to investigate everything, including his age, to know the truth of his claim. His case deserves sympathy on its face value, but emotion may not help us to do a fair job. The CP (Commissioner of Police) is aware of the matter and he has directed that a comprehensive investigation be carried out."