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## Controversy trails Valentine tragedy at Covenant University

By Chux Ohai

Published: Saturday, 28 Feb 2009

On Sunday, February 15, 2009, the day after Valentine's Day, the serene atmosphere of Covenant University, a private Christian university located in Canaanland, Ota, was shattered by the news of a fatal road accident involving a trailer-truck and an unidentified Mazda car.



Front view of the university chapel.  
Inset, The late Adedoyin Akinyemi

Three female students of the university were in the car when the accident occurred. The driver of the vehicle and one of the students, who was later identified as Adedoyin Akinyemi, a 200-level student of Estate Management, died instantly, while her other colleagues were said to have gone into coma for many days.

The tragic event had taken place at a time the air of Valentine's Day celebration was yet to clear. Love's flowery notes were still in the air and most people had not

finished relishing the warmth of the previous day's festivities.

What many find worrisome is the fact that the accident occurred along Idi-Iroko Expressway, just a few metres from the main entrance of the university campus. One eyewitness, a commercial motorcycle rider who plied his trade around the spot, told Saturday Punch that the car was parked by the side of the road and the occupants were probably busy chit-chatting inside, when the trailer-truck ran into it. "You should have seen how the trailer flattened the smaller vehicle. It was a terrible sight to behold. It is a miracle that two people survived the accident," he said.

But that was only one account of how the accident occurred. Another version, which the father of the deceased attributed to the police, held that the driver of the Mazda had lost control and rammed into the trailer-truck.

At the residence of the Akinyemis on 4, Omolade Oshinowo Street, Mafoluku, Lagos, our correspondent met late Adedoyin's parents, Mr. and Mrs. W.L Akinyemi, in deep mourning. Even at 7.30 pm penultimate Friday, sympathisers were still visiting to condole with the bereaved. But Mr. Akinyemi, a civil servant with the Lagos State Government, managed to speak with our correspondent.

Akinyemi disclosed that he was informed by the authorities of Covenant University that the accident in which his daughter died occurred at 2.00 pm. He said, "The school authority called me at about 6.45 pm to say that they wanted to see me on the campus. At the time, I was at Epe. When I asked why, they said that I just had to come. I tried to tell them that I was far away and it could be dangerous for me to set out at night. But they still did not tell me what happened and pleaded that I should come. I got home around 8.30 pm and informed my wife about the invitation from the university, regarding my daughter. She offered to accompany me to the campus. So did my eldest son. We thought that my daughter had erred in the school. We got there at exactly 9.20 pm and went to the office of the Students' Affairs Officer. We were told to wait because they were in a meeting. At about 10.30 pm, they invited us to the room where they were meeting to tell us that an accident had occurred outside the school and my daughter was involved and she did not survive it.

They told me that the victims of the accident were coming into the premises when a trailer hit their vehicle. The next day, we went to the mortuary to see my daughter's corpse and

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we started making arrangements for her burial”.

Saturday Punch gathered that it was not the first time that such an incident would occur outside the gates of the university.

Indeed, when our correspondent visited him in his office, the head of Corporate and Public Affairs Department of the university, Mr. Emman Kalu Igbani, confirmed that students of the university had been involved in accidents along the same expressway in the past. “In order to put a stop to this, the university made several efforts to construct a pedestrian bridge across the road. But the Federal Government would not allow it,” he said.

Igbani, who tried to avoid further discussion on the tragic event, said, “What I know is that some people were involved in an accident outside the university and one of them, who was a student of the university, died,” he said. Regarding the two survivors who were said to be in coma at the time of the visit, he went on: “It is not true that they were in coma. They were only injured, but have been responding well to treatment”.

Effort to get him to divulge more information on the subject met with a brick-wall. But Saturday Punch learnt from some of Adedoyin’s school mates that the three students involved in the accident had left the campus without obtaining a written permission from their supervisors, as required. According to the sources, it was against the rules not to obtain an exit card before leaving the campus. “When you ask for one, it is ninety-nine percent guaranteed that you will get it,” one of the students said.

Most of the students who spoke to our correspondent believed that the accident was the product of a misadventure. Adedoyin, they said, had left the campus to attend a Valentine’s Day party somewhere in Lagos.

Another source revealed that not all the students were positively disposed to the part of the rules that excluded Valentine’s Day parties and similar gigs from the list of extra-curricular activities prescribed by the university authority. Bored and a little impatient with the regimented life on campus, the source added, it was possible that any student would opt for some form of entertainment outside the campus.

But Akinyemi denied the story that his daughter had left the campus to attend a party on Valentine’s Day. “She didn’t go to a party. I know she didn’t because my cousin told me that she came to her for money because she lost the money I gave her a few days before the accident,” he said.

According to him, Adedoyin was last seen at home on Saturday, February 7, 2009. “That was when the university resumed for the semester. We gave her N40,000 for the semester’s feeding allowance. According to what we heard from her cousin, who she went to, the money, about N35,000, was stolen in the hostel the next morning. She was afraid to tell me and her mother about it, so she had to go to her cousin at the University of Lagos who in turn got in touch with my own cousin. She even went to my niece and that one got me the telephone number of my cousin who promised that he would pay the money into her account the following Monday. She actually got to UNILAG on Friday,” he said.







Funmi Elegbede, sister to the lady that Adedoyin went to visit at UNILAG on the eve of Valentine’s Day, confirmed that the deceased had stayed at her cousin’s place till the following Sunday. She said, “I called my sister on Saturday (February 14). I wanted her to do something for me and she said that she was with Adedoyin in the hostel and that she (Adedoyin) was supposed to go back to school because she had just finished making her hair. Her other mates were supposed to come and pick her. So she had to stay till Sunday. She called them on Sunday morning and they told her that they were going back to school. She went to meet them somewhere in Ikeja and they went back together.”

Obviously, late Adedoyin will be sorely missed by her family and friends. “She was brilliant, respectful, courteous, intelligent, loving and cheerful. If you saw her for the first time, you would think that she had known you for up to five years. She was everything to me,” her father said.

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