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'After shooting my 3-year-old daughter dead at checkpoint, policemen tortured, detained me'

By SESAN OLUFOWOBI

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Muritala Saliu is the father of Kausarat, a three-year-old girl that was shot in the head by the police at Alapere Division. He recounts the event that led to the killing of his daughter in this interview with SESAN OLUFOWOBI What were you doing at the spot where your daughter was killed?



Kausarat while alive (Inset: Father)



Deceased daughter on the back of police car (Inset: Father)

We were coming from a wolimat (an Islamic graduation) held at Elebinju, close to Ketu here in Lagos.

What time was that?

It was around 9.30 PM in the evening.

And you had to go there with your family?

I think you need to understand our relationship with the people whose child was having wolimat. You see, my wife grew up in the house. Her parent still lived in the house. The people and my wife had been friends since she was single. After our marriage, we still maintained the friendship. So when they are doing anything, we grace the occasion and vice versa.

So that day was not different?

Yes, we left that place after nine and we got to where the police were in front of Mr. Biggs.

Were you in a commercial vehicle?

No we were in my friend's, Toyin's, car; a Nissan Sunny. It was driven by another friend, Saheed. I sat behind the

driver, my wife sat in the middle carrying Kausarat and there was also another person beside her.

So what happened, did you quarrel with the police?

Not at all. When we got there we noticed the checkpoint. There was a commercial bus in front of us. The police stopped the bus and delayed it for about two minutes. We waited. After they told the bus to go, we also moved. They did not stop us, so we just proceeded.

Are you sure you were not stopped?

Yes, if they stopped us, we would have stopped. After all, we were not armed robbers and that area is not far from my wife's place.

So you moved on...

Yes. But we were just about 25 metres away from them when I heard a shot. Before I knew what was happening the shot pierced the windscreen of our car, bruised my hand and entered Kausarat in the head and came out on the other side.

How is that possible?

Kausarat was sleeping, so her mother put her on her shoulder and she was facing back. I put my hand around her mother and used it to balance Kausarat on the shoulder of her

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mother. So the bullet hit my hand before it entered Kausarat's head.

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What did you do?

I did not even know what was happening. I just felt pain in my hand. It was the shout of mogbe! mogbe! (I am done for) from Kausarat's mother that made me to realise what had happened. She started shouting Kausarat's name, but one look at her, I knew Kausarat would never wake up from her sleep. I took my child from her mother and moved towards the policemen.

By that time, our car had stopped. Immediately the policemen sighted me, they took to their heels. I ran after them. There were five of them, but I managed to catch one. I laid Kausarat on the road and held the policeman firmly by the belt. I told him that he and his colleagues had killed my daughter. I shouted for everybody to hear. I also took out my phone and started making calls.

To who?

My brothers, my friends. Everybody I could think of. I told them what happened and urged them to meet me there. By that time, I noticed that one of my friends in the car had picked up my baby and ran to the nearest chemist to get first aid. But I knew she was dead.

Did your people come?

They did not meet us at that Mr. Biggs. The policemen came back and started shooting into the air. Everybody ran away. But I refused to let the policeman go. The others threatened to shoot me if I didn't leave their colleague alone. I told them to go ahead. After all, they had already killed my daughter. They could also add me to their body count.

None of you relatives had arrived by then?

No. Most of them live here in Ikorodu.

So how did the police manage to get you away from that place.

They hijacked two Keke Marwa (tricycles) and pushed me and the policemen I was holding inside. They said we should go and settle it at the police station in Alapere. So I decided to follow them. My wife also joined us.

Did you see the DPO when you got there?

I didn't even know him until later. Immediately we got to the station, they dismissed the two Keke Marwa and threatened other people that followed us to stay away. They took my wife and me to the police station. And immediately we entered, one of them slapped me for holding on to the policeman earlier. I decided to make another phone call to my brother to tell him what was happening. I got another slap and the phone fell from my hand. One of them took it and before I realised what was happening, they had turned me to their punching bag. My wife wanted to save me, drawing the ire of other policemen there who gave her the beating of her life.

One of the policemen gave me a slide and I fell to the ground. My second phone came out of my pocket and they quickly took that one too and started marching me with their boots.

Later, they said I should go into the cell. I refused, reminding them that I did not commit any crime and that they were the ones that killed my daughter. Five of them wrestled me to the ground. Three of them took my legs, two grabbed my hands and they threw me into the cell. Before I could get up, they had closed the cell.

About an hour later, my hand that was pierced by bullet started throbbing. I shouted that they should take me to the hospital. Initially, nobody came. Later one man in mufti came and asked me why I was fighting the police. I told him it was not true and related what happened, including my daughter's death. He expressed shock, but went back to the job he was doing before coming back to me.

Where were your family all this while?

They later arrived at the police station. After my friends must have related what happened to them, my elder brother called our uncle who got in touch with the commissioner of police in Lagos, who in turn got in touch with the area commanders of Area F and H. That was when I was released from the cell.

So, what did they do?

I was taken to general hospital for treatment. They said that they would take my baby to the mortuary. I did not know that they abandoned her at the entrance of the mortuary. But they later took her into the mortuary the following day.

The area commanders asked me questions. Later, they said I should make a statement, which I did. They also brought the five policemen, including the one that shot my daughter. That one said that he heard shoot and he shot. Obviously, he was drunk.

What do you want now?

Want? I don't know. I just want to bury my daughter and forget about this incident. It is my destiny and I have taken it. I leave them to God. If I say they should kill them, will that bring my child back? If I say they should jail them, will they put them in my house? Let the relevant authorities do what the law says. I have accepted my fate.

What about the mother?

What about her? She is currently useless. She can not do anything. We are trying our best to take care of her. Kausarat would have been three years old yesterday. We had put everything together to mark her birthday.







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