

## FEATURE

# Family's only son electrocuted two days after dedicating his first child

Ayodele Ale

Tears flowed freely on May 5, 2010 as the body of Emeka Onuegbu was being lowered into the grave at Ngor Okpala Umubachi Eziana village in Imo State. While family members wailed uncontrollably, the young wife, Chidinma, who stood beside the grave with their baby, Chimerenu Eze Samuel, found it hard to believe that death had put an abrupt end to the marital union between her and Emeka.

"Everybody, including the aged mother, is in shock and it has been so difficult to console his wife. But I know that with time, they will learn to accept their fate. That explains why we had to bury his corpse quickly," Fidelis Ewereoke, the brother-in-law of the deceased told *Saturday Punch*.

Death had put a rude end to the joy the family had experienced since the arrival of their new baby. Ten days earlier, friends and well wishers had gathered at the Ogba branch of Salvation Army Ministries in Lagos, to join Emeka and his wife to dedicate Samuel, their first and only child. Choir members sang special numbers while congregation members danced happily to the altar to dedicate the new baby.

Thereafter, a big party was thrown at number 5, Oladiji Street, Ogba residence of the couple. "Till late in the night, people were eating, wining and dancing. The couple spent a lot of money to host their guests because the child is their first born," a neighbour said. It was gathered that but for tradition, the big bash that followed the arrival of the baby boy would have been held earlier. "Emeka told us that in their culture, they do not celebrate the christening of a baby until after three months," one of his friends said.

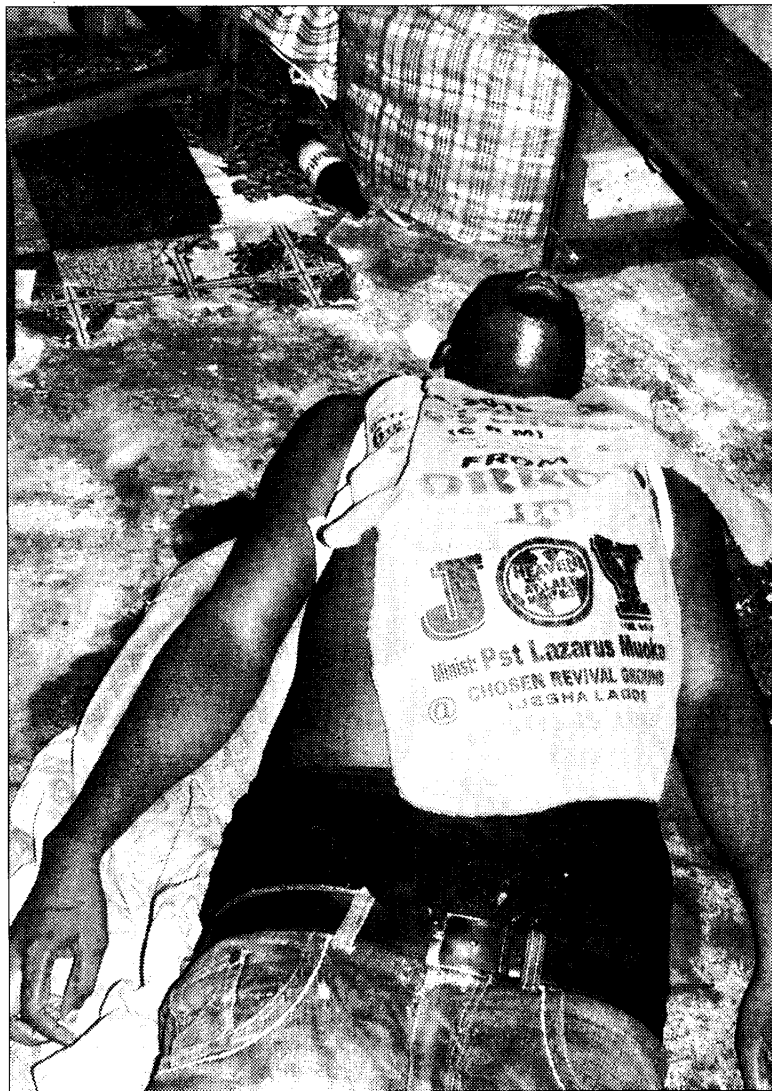
Two days after little Samuel was dedicated in the church, however, death struck. Emeka and his friend, Ifeanyi Mbonu, were having a chat in front of No 5, Shoneye Street, Ogba, Lagos when a high tension wire snapped from an electric pole and fell on them.

"There was no light on that day, and because of the heat, the two of them, like other people in the neighbourhood came out for fresh air. They were discussing beside the road and leaning against the fence when light was suddenly restored. A spark occurred and before anyone could realise what was going on, the cable landed on them," said Ifeanyi's friend, Magnus Asabiaka. Indeed, three of them were said to have stayed together at the spot before one of them left to pick something inside the house. The third person was yet to return when tragedy struck.

Fidelis recalled that the cable actually fell on Ifeanyi and threw him into the gutter. A move made by Emeka to grab Ifeanyi and pull him out of the gutter proved fatal as he too got electrocuted. Residents who felt that the lives of the two friends could still be saved were too afraid to come near them. Confusion thus ensued, with people running from pillar to post and wailing from a distance.

"We rushed to the office of Power Holding Company of Nigeria on Ajayi Road, Ogba to lodge a complaint about what had happened, and to implore them to switch off the light and come and help us," Magnus said. The PHCN workers on duty responded instantly, but by the time they arrived, there were traces of life left in Ifeanyi, while Emeka was gasping for breath in his last battle with death.

"When we rushed Emeka to TELAB Hospital, Ogba, the doctor was not around. Because of his pathetic



•Emeka's corpse

condition, we were advised to take him to the General Hospital, Ikeja. But before we could get to the hospital, he gave up the ghost. The doctors on duty only told us that he was dead," Magnus said.

The relations who believed that he could still be brought back to life went and put the publicity vest of their church on Emeka and embarked on fervent prayers. But when their efforts proved futile, they transferred his body and that of Ifeanyi to the mortuary.

Following the death of the duo, tempers rose and sympathisers in the neighbourhood, particularly youths, stormed the Oke-Ira branch of PHCN and gave the staff a hot chase.

The Public Affairs Officer of the company, Mr Christian Omoneh, said four of their staff were beaten by the angry mob. "Since then, we have not been able to open the office," he said.

"I had already gone to my house in Mowe, Ogun State before the incident occurred. I switched off my phone and no one could reach me until around 4.30 am the following day," Fidelis said.

Ifeanyi, in his forties, was said to be a bachelor at the time death struck. A decision was taken by the family members in Lagos to transfer his body to Oba, his hometown in Anambra State.

Magnus, who said that he lived in the same room with Ifeanyi for four years, said the bereaved family was thrown into mourning when the corpse got to Oba community. A decision was then taken that the body should be kept in the mortuary till May 13, 2010 when he would be buried.

"It was better to take the body home than to keep it in the mortuary in Lagos. The expenses would have been too much for us to bear," Magnus told *Saturday Punch* on Wednesday on his way to Oba for the burial of his friend.

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The sudden death by electrocution put an abrupt end to the dreams of the two young spare parts dealers in Lagos before their death. "Emeka was working with me before he set up his own spare parts business," Fidelis said, describing his brother-in-law as a hard-working young man.

Fidelis said his wife had decided to stay at home with their aged mother for some time before coming back to Lagos. "Their mother is still in a very bad mood and it will not be right to leave her alone for now," he said. Unfortunately, Emeka was said to be the only male child in the polygamous family of 19 children.

"The remaining 18 children are females.

He was the only son and the last born of the family. Before he got married, he underwent a lot of pressure from the family to get married. So, there was so much joy when he had a baby boy," one of his friends said, pleading anonymity.

Interestingly, the killer cable remained unattended to for a few days while the lot fell on residents to cordon off the place to prevent further mishap.

The spokesperson of the PHCN described the occurrence as an accident. "You know when we say that something is an accident, it means that it happened suddenly. It was unpredictable," he said. According to him, before the tragic occurrence, the electricity generation company was already carrying out its regular repair works in the area. "We were already at the junction of the street where the incident happened. It was really unfortunate and we sympathise with the relatives of the deceased.

He told *Saturday Punch* that investigation is on and that the company and other relevant bodies are looking into the matter. He however advised the people to be safety conscious, especially when it comes to electricity installations to prevent such accidents.