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You are here: [Home](#) / [Feature](#) / [Super Saturday](#) / Days to my granddaughter's first birthday, she perished with her mother –Accident victim's father

## Days to my granddaughter's first birthday, she perished with her mother –Accident victim's father

JULY 6, 2013 BY ADEOLABALOGUN AND GBENRO ADEOYE 1 COMMENT



**Atiat Bamidele, who burnt to death along with her baby**

| credits: File

The atmosphere in the sparsely furnished living room of Mr. Olaniyi Obisanya at his Pipeline Road residence in Gbaga, Ogun State on Tuesday was indeed solemn.

Everyone tried to suppress their grief just to be able to console his wife at their home located along Sagamu Road in Ogijo.

Their daughter, Atiat Bamidele, perished along with her only child and about 12 others on Sunday on their way to an Islamic graduation ceremony (Wolimat) in Ibadan. Their granddaughter, Zainab, would have celebrated her first birthday today.

The travellers were on their way to the ceremony organised for the grandchildren of 62-year-

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### Columnists

#### **The man 'Fashola' by Fashola**

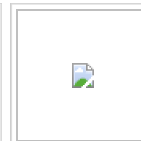
In the absence of the usual compliment of effusive media adverts, the special interview granted a select group of



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Oluwatoyin Badaru.

It was organised by her last child, Funke. The late Badaru, who was also known as Iya Ibeji, mother-in-law.

Last week, preparations were made for Zainab's first birthday but she and her mother had to paternal grandmother to Ibadan for the graduation ceremony.

Despite the fact that the new house was a bit far from the major village, sympathisers thronged twos and threes. When all the available seats were filled up, others sat on the tiled floor.

After the initial greetings, there was silence. Then nobody uttered a word until the arrival of another guest. The grief was too much for the bereaved mother, who just sat there staring at no one in particular.

The woman, who appeared to be in her late 40s, could not cry. Perhaps, the tears had dried up after much weeping. Her agony could only be expressed through heavy breathing in fits and starts, which elicited a 'sorry' chorus from sympathisers.

Nothing spreads as fast as bad news. *Saturday PUNCH* did not encounter much problem in getting directions to the residence of the bereaved family, which is about some three kilometres from Ogijo. After joining in the afternoon prayer at a mosque in Ogijo, the first person approached by our correspondent did not hesitate to describe the way to Obisanya's house.

Obisanya, who is popularly called Alakire in the community, was on hand to welcome sympathisers outside the house. He told *Saturday PUNCH* that as a Muslim, he would not question God for the death of his daughter, popularly called Dare, and her child.

Atiat was his second child.

He said he was not aware that Atiat and Zainab travelled until he got news that she was involved in an accident in Ibadan.

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"I had just finished observing the Suhr prayer when someone phoned me that my daughter was involved in an accident. The first thing that came to my mind was to call her husband on the phone at least to find out what happened because I didn't know that she travelled. I couldn't get through, then I tried my daughter's number but it was not going through.

"Later, I was informed that those involved in the accident had been taken to the University of Ibadan Teaching Hospital. I made to enter my car and head to Ibadan but people said it was not safe for me to drive in such a state. I parked the car and then got someone to take me in his vehicle to Ibadan.

"I phoned my wife who was at that time in Ibadan attending a wedding. She told me that she had been told about the crash and was on her way to UCH. All the while, my thought was that my daughter was probably injured and rushed to the hospital together with her baby.

"But when the twin brother of my son-in-law called as we were almost at Ibadan, the question I asked him was the state of my daughter and her child. But when he said that she was feared dead, I shouted and nearly jumped out of the vehicle in disbelief."

He said Atiat's siblings told him that she didn't want to travel with the contingent but that she feared that her mother-in-law would not take kindly to such an act.

"Her brother told me that she was complaining as he was seeing her off to the ill-fated bus that she was not ready to embark on the journey. She told him that she had to go just to please her mother-in-law.

"When I got to UCH, I saw her husband but from afar, I saw him walk away. I was going from ward to ward trying to see where my daughter was but I couldn't find her. I was confused because I didn't believe that she could be among the dead.

"At a point, I demanded to see her dead body but I was told that she and her child were burnt beyond recognition. I was informed that as a result of that, their carcasses were packed in a bag," he said.

At this point, the crowd that had formed round our correspondent and Obisanya burst into tears, wailing profusely. It was as if the news of the lady's death just broke.

"That was the most painful aspect for me as a father. Zainab, her daughter, was to mark her birthday this week. In fact, she had bought everything required for the ceremony, including the food and ingredients," he lamented.

Obisanya said that inasmuch as he accepted his fate as a Muslim, he expressed his reservation about the accident that claimed his daughter and granddaughter.

He said, "Kehinde, her husband, whom I saw in UCH did not appear as someone that travelled in the same bus as my daughter that got burnt. If he could not save my daughter who was his wife, why couldn't he save Zainab, his own daughter?

"In the same bus, not only Kehinde came out unscathed, about two of his siblings and their mother, who invited guests to Ibadan, also escaped. Apart from the family, all other people that accompanied them died."

A woman, who claimed to be a neighbour to the Obisanyas, told our correspondent that no cooking took place in the woman's house to suggest that they were going for a ceremony.

She said, "What kind of outing is that? I know of somebody who said she did not have transport fare for the journey but Iya Ibeji (Atiat's mother-in-law) offered to pay for her."

Another lady, who identified herself as Atiat's cousin, told our correspondent that the late housewife had an unpalatable ordeal in the hands of her mother-in-law when she was still courting her husband, Kehinde.

"Iya Ibeji would report Atiat to us that we should stop her from dating her son or else she would not like what she would do. When Atiat conceived Zainab, her mother-in-law said that would be the only thing his son's wife owed the family.

"Several times, she would say Atiat as a housewife didn't know how to cook soup or anything. My sister said she would not have volunteered to go with them if not for the fear of how her mother-in-law would react."

Obisanya told Saturday PUNCH on Tuesday that his son-in-law, whom he said he last saw at UCH, had neither contacted him nor come to see him.

"I have not heard anything from him but this morning, his father and some people came here to see me. The man told me that his wife did not inform him that she was taking people to Ibadan for any ceremony. I think you can connect what I said earlier that I had misgivings about the whole thing.

"Even though they were not living under the same roof, they lived in the same area. How come she organised

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such a large contingent for the trip and her husband was not aware of it? Well, I have taken what happened but when things happen like this, as human beings, we raise questions. But God knows everything," the distraught father said.

Obisanya stated even though he expressed his wish to see the remains of his daughter before burial, he was told that they had been buried in a mass grave in Sagamu.

"They came to me this morning that the remains of the accident victims would not be brought to Gbaga here for burial. They said they wanted my permission to allow them bury my daughter and her child along with others in a mass grave in Sagamu."

When our correspondent called the phone number of the late Atiat's husband, it indicated that it was switched off.

Mrs. Oluwakemi Adisa is one of the children of the late Badaru. The elderly woman was among those rushed to UCH alive. Therefore, Adisa had hoped her mother would gradually recuperate.

But her hopes were dashed on Tuesday when an official of the hospital called to inform her that they had lost her mother.

Adisa said, "I knew something was wrong when I was called to come and pick up my mother's jewellery that were recovered from her. It's painful that she had to go that way, but what can we do about it when God says it's time? I will really miss my mother."

At the hospital, Adisa hid the news about Badaru's death from her siblings, including Funke.

"I have to keep the information away from my siblings because they will be shaken; I'm the strongest out of all of us so I can still handle it better. The news can mess my siblings up that they won't know what they are doing again. Meanwhile, the family has spent about N80,000 already, but it couldn't save her," she said.

Efforts to speak to Funke were not successful as she repeatedly paced up and down the corridor leading to the hospital's Burns Unit.

"Please leave me alone," she said, as tears welled up her eyes. At this time, Funke had not been told that her mother had died.

At the Adeoyo Hospital, Ring Road, where some of the corpses were taken, an official of the morgue, who wanted anonymity, said the bodies were burnt beyond recognition.

Seated on a bench at a corner were two men. One of them was Mr. Agbaje, whose wife and child were in the bus. His daughter, Rukayat, died, but his wife survived.

Agbaje and his friend were at the morgue to claim Rukayat's body for Islamic burial rites.

He said, "What has been done has been done, there's nothing I can do about it. Will I kill myself or go and shoot God? She was a nurse and only followed the vehicle to get to her school in Ibadan. It was a terrible thing, but I thank God that both of them didn't die. What would I have done if I had lost the two of them?"

After a few more monosyllables about how his wife had to break a side window to secure her escape, Agbaje declined to give more comments, threatening to embarrass our correspondent if he asked further questions.

But back at UCH, an official told *Saturday PUNCH* that three victims of the accident were left as others had died or been discharged.

The source, however, said that all three were in critical condition at the hospital's Burns Unit.

"Fire is a powerful thing; it would have been better if it was just a fracture. This is because it takes a long time to fully recuperate after a fire incident. Frankly, all the victims left at the unit are in a critical condition but it doesn't mean that they won't survive it."

One of the victims said to still be in a critical condition is 23-year-old Mrs. Deola Sunday, whose mother, Iyabo, quietly prayed for her recovery outside the door of the unit.

Iyabo had already lost her 10-month old grandchild to the mishap, and couldn't bear losing her daughter too.

However, Iyabo was bothered that the hospital staff continually refused to allow relatives entry into the unit to see the victims. Iyabo said when she last saw Deola on Monday, she could neither talk nor open her eyes.

Iyabo said, "I've not been allowed to see her since yesterday, but then, she could not speak or say anything. She was just lying there. She could not open her eyes. I was asked to get her food which I gave to the nurses,

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maybe they have a way they will use to feed her. My grandchild was not even one yet; it is very painful that she won't get to celebrate one year."

Some of the people involved in the autocrash were related. Some others were friends who had joined the party for the journey.

Mr. Joseph Oke, whose wife, Gloria, also lay on the hospital bed, said he regretted allowing her to embark on the journey. Oke initially thought he had lost his wife when he arrived at the scene of the crash, as he saw the charred remains of some of the victims being brought out by officers of the Federal Road Safety Commission.

Oke said, "When she told me that she wanted to join her friend to the party from Ogijo, I should have said 'no'. If I had known, I wouldn't have agreed to let her go at all. When I heard about the accident and got there, I started crying and shouting. I only heard that there was an accident, but I couldn't believe what I saw there.

"When I saw all the burnt bodies, I started shouting my wife's name and crying because there was no way one could recognise any of them. This was because they were all burnt. I had lost all hope until they told me that some of them were rescued alive and taken to Adeoyo Hospital and UCH."

In spite of Gloria's condition, Oke said he still loves her would want her to recover quickly.

"At the hospital, I saw that her body was burnt – her hands and back. Only her tummy was saved. I still have hope that she will make it. I'm praying to God not to let anything happen to her."

In his wife's absence, Oke has been shuttling between his job and taking care of their four children, a task he described as 'not easy'.

"Our first child is 15 and the last child is four. I didn't expect anything like this to happen. In fact, I had to struggle to get the N20, 000 that I've spent so far. I'm very weak and I don't know what to do or where to get money to take care of her now."

At the scene of the mishap, *Saturday PUNCH* observed that the side door of the 14-seater bus was off its hinges, probably knocked down by the passengers as they escaped from the vehicle. A piece of burnt green Ankara fabric lay by the heap of gravel that was hit by the bus.

Initially, reports had suggested that the propeller of the bus pulled out in the motion and hit the fuel tank, thereby causing the fire.

However, Gloria's brother, Mr. Ikechukwu Jones, who said he was a mechanic, insisted that the propeller was intact. He however, noted that the bus' exhaust pipe was detached, saying that it could have led to the fire.

He said, "I noticed that the silencer was not intact but the propeller was intact. The silencer had probably dropped to the ground and the fire could have sparked from there while in motion. However, that alone would not have been enough to start a fire if there was no fuel leakage or gallon of fuel in the vehicle."

When *Saturday PUNCH* contacted the Assistant Corps Commander and Unit Commander, Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Oluyole Ibadan/Lagos Toll Gate, Mr. Adeoye Sanya, on the phone, he said it would be wrong to speculate on the cause of the mishap until the result of an internal investigation into the matter was concluded.

Sanya said, "We have carried out our investigation but I've not yet looked at the report. The investigation will let us know the remote and immediate causes of the mishap so we can avert it in future. It was a 14-seater bus and there were 24 persons on board, but we also have to understand that about six of the occupants were children – two of them less than a year old."

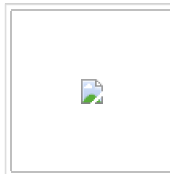
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