

Double wahala:

FAMILY BATTLES FINANCIAL BURDEN AFTER LOSING SON TO THUNDERBOLT

Abiodun Nejo

The family of Femi Ilori in Aboluodi Compound, Emure Ekiti, Ekiti State, is in severe pains. Their anguish was caused by the death of their 14-year-old junior secondary school pupil. After the pupil's death, the family is also battling the demand for rituals and events occasioned by the manner of their son's rare demise.

The Iloris wailed desolately on Friday, August 30, 2019, when lightning struck dead their lovely son. That day, Femi and his friend, Deji Onija, were filled with joy over a snake killed by a neighbour in the compound when lightning struck them.

While Femi died on the way to the General Hospital, Deji was fortunate. But he spent the first seven days at a blacksmith's hut until the conclusion of the cleansing rituals handled by adherents of Sango, otherwise known as the god of thunder.

Sources who spoke with our correspondent in the community said Deji, who survived the thunder, confessed it was punishment for an act of stealing.

One of the residents said Deji confessed at the blacksmith hut that he took Femi to a hilltop where he (Deji) chased away a hen from its nest while Deji packed the hen's eggs.

The source, who described the development as mysterious, said those in the area usually went to the hill to defecate openly, adding that stories about stealing in the place were not new.

The deceased's father, Lawrence, a civil servant in his mid-40s, wept uncontrollably when our correspondent approached him.

He said, "That was what I saw of my son. My son died. He died. Femi died, I cannot see him again."

In vain, family members and sympathisers, who gathered at Ilori's compound to condole with the family, tried to make the bereaved father accept the reality that his son was gone and he should move on with life.

Ilori, who recalled the last moments of his late son, said, "The day this incident happened, when I woke up, I asked my child what we would eat that morning. He said we had soup and we prepared pounded yam and ate."

"In the evening, he asked me what we would eat. He said he would prefer yam. I gave him N500 to buy eggs. I went out to get fresh air. He prepared the food and ate. After eating, he packed the plates and I said he should lock the room windows."

"It was while he was locking the windows that he rushed to me that our neighbour, an Igbo man, killed a snake and that he wanted to have a look. I allowed him with the instruction that he should go to his mother from there. I went to the room to change my clothes."

Through the window, I saw the snake and the excitement that accompanied the night of the snake all over my son and his friend.

I had yet to put on my trousers when lightning struck. I was terrified by the development.

"Suddenly, the shouts of 'Femi, Femi, Femi' from that location rented the air. I had my pair of boxers on when I rushed to the place. When I got there, I carried Femi with the support of others. We put him on a motorbike and rushed him to the General Hospital. But he died before we got to the hospital."

Ilori's younger sister, Mrs Oluwatoyin Ayeni, who also spoke about the incident, said her attention was drawn to the area through a loud noise from the compound into the venue of a meeting she attended nearby.

Recalling the pain the family had gone through since the sad event, Oluwatoyin said, "We are not happy. We have lost a son and still spending. My thinking is that as things are, the town, through the palace and the local government, are supposed to have a role to play in alleviating the high spending associated with the incident."

Apart from the minor expenses, palm oil taken from sisters and other things for purification rituals, we have spent N126,000 after the boy's death. We don't know yet the cost of the ritual for the seventh day. We are already heavily indebted."

"We were at a meeting when the lightning struck. At about seven minutes after, amid the cries of several people, I could identify the voice of Femi's mother, shouting 'it was Femi o'. That was how we rushed out. By the time we saw her, she wore only a skirt."

"When we got there, they said Femi's father had taken the boy to the hospital. It was on our way to the hospital that I heard that the other affected boy survived and confessed to the blacksmith that they stole."

"Upon inquiry, they said they had taken the remains of Femi to the family house. My brother was inconsolable. He was at the verge of injuring himself over the calamity. It was

later that they brought the body of Femi to the blacksmith."

"Later, they said the body should be brought to where the incident happened. We came there, some traditionalists, who came, were later discovered to be novices as far as thunder matter was concerned. We had to begin a search for genuine Sango adherents. We got them in Ondo State."

"The body and the affected friend were at the spot until Deji's father protested

that his son could not continue to be alone with the body of Femi. He took his son to the blacksmith and we also took Femi's remains to the forge. We were at the forge with the dead boy till Saturday morning."

"I felt for the boy whose corpse had to go through all the stress in the sense that he was an easy-going child who was not covetous."

Had it been he was a glutton and an untrustworthy person, one would have thought or felt

otherwise.

"That Friday night, we went to the palace but the king was not around. The second day, we returned the corpse to the incident scene. The Sango adherents said we should call the monarch, who we were told, said it was already weekend. The adherents said we would need to pay N250,000. This is apart from numerous expenses for purification. We pleaded and they brought the charge down to N70,000. We made efforts for the corpse not to suffer unnecessarily."

"The Sango adherents said those who said the corpse would remain at the spot of the incident were only out to milk us. They said

it would be buried after necessary atonement. We begged them with N20,000 that we would balance them before they round off their rituals on the seventh day."

A close family member, Tosin Abe, who said he arrived Emure Ekiti on the day of the incident and received on arrival by Femi, described his death as devastating.

"He was obedient, gentle and easy-going. The testimony of everybody shows he was a well-trained boy that would be sorely missed," he added.

Abe, who said he had discussions with the late boy on the day of the incident, said nobody knew the boy had earlier accompanied his friend to the hill where they stole eggs laid by a hen.

Our correspondent gathered that Deji confessed at the forge that it was when he (Deji) went to the hill to defecate on Thursday that he saw the eggs.

He was said to have told Femi that he wanted to take the eggs but was scared by a crocodile.

It was further learnt that Deji confessed that he called Femi on Friday to accompany him to the hill where he (Deji) was to later chase the hen from its nest while Femi packed the eggs.

Sources in the town said Deji later cooked the eggs and gave Femi.

Saturday PUNCH gathered that Femi ate his egg immediately, but Deji had yet to eat his own before the thunderstorm struck at about 20 or 30 minutes after, hitting Deji and Femi, who clutched each other while watching the snake killed by a neighbour.

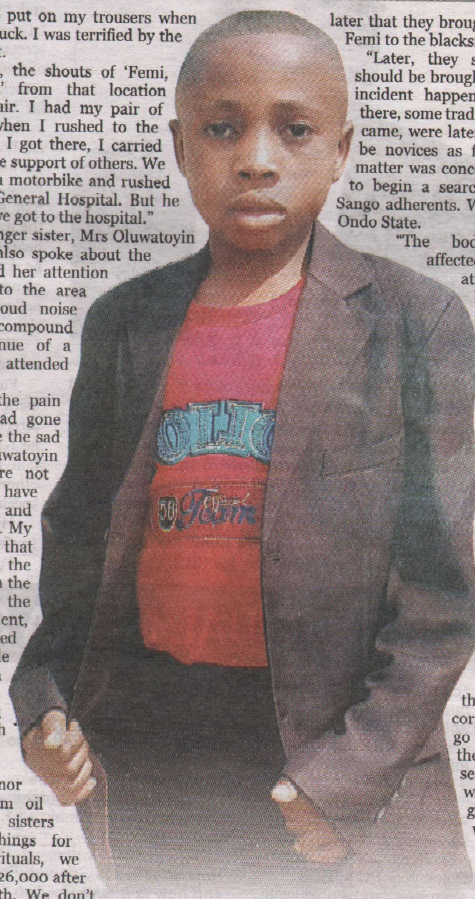
However, Deji's father, Mr Mekanjuola Onija, who alongside his wife, Aarinola was with Deji at the forge where he was observing the seven-day purification as instructed by the adherents of Sango, prevented his son from speaking with our correspondent.

Onija, who also declined comments, said, "The whole town including the palace is aware of the incident. If it is necessary for me or my son to speak with anybody on this matter, the order would come from the palace."

"I can only answer any questions on the order of the authorities of the town. The town's authorities are aware of the incident. If I have to say anything, it will be at their prompting. What happened had happened."

"It is Sango, the god of thunder that struck. Let the town intervene. It is only then my son can interact with anybody. I have been spending money since the incident occurred. I am a farmer and I never expected this. I have spent N80,000 since the incident happened. God should save us from sudden death."

Chiefs at the palace of the Elemure of Emure, Oba Emmanuel Adebayo, also, declined comments on the matter, saying "there has been a standing order right from time that no chief in this kingdom should speak with any journalist."



•Femi