

I drank, passed out when my 11-year-old brother was electrocuted –Esther-Whyte, actress

Published [March 1, 2020](#)



Esther-Whyte, Godspower

On Friday, February 21, 2020, tragedy struck in Calabar when an electricity cable snapped and fell on a gate an 11-year-old boy, Godspower Bassey Isemin, was leaning on while washing clothes. He was electrocuted. His elder sister and actress, Esther-Whyte Bassey, tells ADA WODU about the pain of losing her brother

You lost your brother this week; he was electrocuted. How difficult has it been for the family since then?

The electrocution of my brother was caused by a facility of Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company. It happened while he was washing his clothes and leaning on a gate. It has been a really difficult and heartbreaking moment for me and my family, especially my mum who has not recovered from the trauma. Losing someone as dear as Godspower is a nightmare we are all begging to wake up from. It's really sad to wake up to the reality that someone as humble and God-fearing as my beloved brother is no more with us.

Godspower shouldn't have died, he never deserved it. Since his death, it has been a turning moment for my family and I just hope we, especially my mum, are able to move on soon.

How did you hear about it?

I received the sad news that fateful evening while I was at a restaurant on the (Lagos) Island where I stopped to have dinner. That evening, after placing my order, I got a call from Joy, my immediate younger sister, who informed me about the incident that led to Godspower's death, and that he, at that time was in a coma. She said he had been rushed to the hospital. Then few moments later, I got a text from my elder sister that Godspower was gone.

So, what was the first thing that came to your mind when you heard the bad news?

The first thing that came to my mind when I got the sad news that my beloved brother was no longer alive was that it was a lie. I pinched myself to know if all that was playing out was a dream. But no, it wasn't. And the moment I realised I wasn't waking up from what was to me a dream, I was immediately broken. I didn't know when I dropped down on my knees, and started crying and praying, asking God never to allow the lie to be true and to keep him alive for me. My heart bled; at the restaurant; I momentarily became disorganised and was almost making a spectacle of myself, if not for my friend who was there to calm me down and take me home.

How difficult has it been to for you to sleep at night?

Since the sad untimely death of Godspower, it has been very difficult for me to catch any sleep; even my mum could not sleep. I only realised how deep it was eating into me and breaking me down when I took to drinking as an escape from the reality. At a point in time, I was able to take a decision to be strong, but I found the day Godspower was being buried difficult. That day, I couldn't get a flight to Calabar (in Cross River State) to pay my last respects to him.

While calling home to keep tabs on his interment, I was at the same time drinking at Twin Towers on the Island, trying to console myself. I was all by myself that day because I left home so that I could be alone. Surprisingly, I realised I was on a stretcher and some management staff members of Twin Tower and Obaji Akpet, my publicist, were watching me. Obaji was standing there and yelling at me, worried that I wanted to kill myself. Only then did I realise I had actually passed out and been in coma for a period I could not remember. That day, Obaji and my friend

were awake all night as they tried to distract with their conversations; it was their way of trying to help me feel okay. And it helped. Since then, I have been trying to catch some sleep not induced by alcohol, but it's been like telling myself another lie.

You once said the last thing he told you was that he wanted you to be a star, what do you do?

I am an actor, presenter, and producer. As an actor, I dance as well. I produced my first film when I was 16. I started acting when I was 11 and since then, I have played several profound roles in notable films, including Biyi Bandele's 'Half of a Yellow Sun,' Frank Raja's 'In my country,' Shan George's 'One Good Man,' and many others. My acting career was one of the major reasons why I relocated from Calabar to Lagos to pursue it in earnest, with the hope that the industry would smile on me.

Will you try to be a star for him?

Being a star is part of the industry's maturation process because as a film practitioner, you will certainly be one if you keep your focus. Now, because of my beloved brother's death, I feel even more inclined to be a star, that is, more than ever because he always wanted me to be star. If that's one thing I have to do to make him proud of me until we meet to part no more, I will surely be that star for Godspower and for me.

What were his dreams and aspirations?

Like most children of his age, Godspower hadn't very clearly defined what he wanted to be yet. I can't really say that I knew about his dreams and aspirations but he was always tinkering around with electronics; and of course, at a sophomore studying science and technology, one can only see justification from there. My late brother was in love with sciences and was always trying to fix things at home. I remember teasing him once, when I asked him if he wanted to be a technician with the way he was going. That is also a vacuum Godspower left behind by his death. It's hard to believe that Godspower will be no more to tinker around with appliances at home and live his dreams of becoming a great engineer.

What kind of boy was he?

Godspower was God-fearing; he was always participating in church activities and these showed in his sense of humility and respectfulness at home. Despite his young age, my late brother was precise and brilliant. As a child, Godspower was never insulting and he loved me so dearly.

What kind of clothes was he washing by the gate when he was electrocuted? Were they his school uniforms?

Godspower was washing his school uniform and clothes for church at the time of his untimely death. He has since been buried according to Christian rites. He was buried the day after he died. He was too young to be kept for too long.

Is the family planning to sue the PHEDC for what happened to your brother?

I have been seeking advice from friends in the legal profession, because I believe Godspower wouldn't have died if the remote and immediate causes of his death did not happen. First, my late brother died of electrocution, which naturally should concern PHEDC. In 2017 alone, over 360 mortalities in Nigeria were reported to be from electrocution. And secondly, when Godspower was rushed to the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, he wasn't given immediate and adequate attention. I was told the doctors on duty could not even carry out a simple CPR on him.

Most Nigerian doctors these days seem to be used to seeing people die before them, and will need to be reminded that other people's lives matter too. And so, if I was going to contemplate any legal steps, it will not only be for my brother but also for several Nigerians who die yearly to electrocution and because of hospital negligence. These are things I used to hear about, but have now happened to us.

Have officials of the company and the state government visited the family over the tragedy?

None, except for a day when my publicist called me that PHEDC (officials) wanted to visit us, only to realise that they only wanted to assess the site of the incident and then, they hurriedly remarked that the electrocution wasn't caused by them. They came, but from all indications, PHEDC was more concerned about their facilities than the death that occurred. Based on the last conversation my publicist had with a senior official in PHEDC's safety department, it appeared she was more concerned about assessing their facilities to ensure they were in good condition than the electrocution of my beloved brother.

From government, no one has (visited us). It may seem to me like a joke that I come from a state that depends on scoring political points before they can associate themselves with someone's loss. I wish the current dispensation had blazed the trail, at least from recognising my little contribution to the state; the name I make or will make as film practitioner is always associated to where I come from; and naturally good leaders should know they owe me a duty as well for that burden. But incidentally, they don't, at least for now. But I got a condolence message from Joe Abang, a former Attorney General of the state, who has been an elderly friend and he did so in his private capacity. But I must be clear here, that I'm not using my brother's passing away to score any cheap points here, I'm only thinking of the ideal situation.

What did the PHEDC officials say when they came?

I've yet to get the full details of what the PHEDC team said during their visit to my home in Calabar because I wasn't there. But I kept tabs on the visit. What a journalist friend that was there said was that PHEDC said they had come to check if my brother's death was caused by their facility, and that they were now certain it was not their fault. That statement is still unsettling to me, but they still have the grace to formally call and make the same statement to me. And only then will they explain to Nigerians how my brother's electrocution was caused by miraculous electricity that had no link with them.

It's been days since that visit and the PHEDC senior safety official has yet to call back like she hurriedly did when she called to locate their facility that supposedly my brother's death might have spoilt. And now, I can understand why PHEDC rooted their call to us through the head of safety, and not the public relations department. It's still obvious until they prove me wrong that they were only concerned about their facility and business. That's how business is run in Nigeria; no one cares about whose life gets lost, all they care about is profit. This is sad.