

# Though in prison for two years, I still want to end up a famous footballer — Freed 14-year-old who mistakenly pushed Osun landlord to death for fighting with dad over rent

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Like many of his peers, the ambition of then 12-year-old Joba (not full name), a resident of Ilesa, Osun State, was to become a famous footballer. He also worked hard towards achieving the dream.

The boy was being raised by his dad whose name was given only as Mr Adetoye. His father, a peasant farmer, was also said to be struggling with ill health. Joba, undeterred by his family's situation, was determined to use football to rescue his father from poverty. He trained hard and also concentrated on his studies as a Junior Secondary School 1 pupil of a public school in Ilesa.

But his dream got shattered sometime in early 2018, when his dad and his landlord disagreed over owed house rent. For two years, he was remanded and only regained freedom on July 2, 2020.

On the day the incident happened, Joba, *Saturday PUNCH* gathered, returned home after a football training session to see his dad held in the neck by the landlord over owed N9, 000 house rent.

He was said to have quickly rushed to the scene and pushed the landlord. In the process, the man was said to have lost balance and subsequently hit his head on a stone and immediately slipped into a coma.

For five days, our correspondent learnt that the landlord was in a coma and he later died, signalling the beginning of Joba's travails.

He was subsequently arrested alongside his father and arraigned in court for manslaughter, an offence having life imprisonment as penalty. He was, upon arraignment, remanded in the Juvenile Correctional Centre since he was a minor and couldn't be sent to prison. His dad was however freed by the court. For two years, Joba's freedom was curtailed.

In January this year, freedom came the way of Joba following a visit to the state's Juvenile Correctional Centre in Osogbo by a non-governmental organisation, The Helper of The Helpless Foundation.

The leader of the NGO, Funmilayo Olasehinde, after receiving briefing regarding Joba's case was said to have initiated move to ensure freedom for the teenager.

Explaining how Joba eventually regained freedom, Osun State Commissioner for Women and Children Affairs, Bukola Olaboopo, said her ministry facilitated the boy's release.

Olaboopo said, "Joba was about 12 years old in 2018, when the incident that brought him to the correctional centre happened in Ilesa. The father was owing house rent of about N9,000 and the matter degenerated into a fight between him and the landlord.

“Joba’s dad was being held in the neck by the landlord when the boy arrived at the scene and pushed the landlord to free his dad. The landlord reportedly fell and sustained injury on his head. For five days, he was in a coma and he later died. Joba alongside his dad were arrested and arraigned for manslaughter.

“His dad was later released but the boy was sent to the Correctional Centre. What we do basically in our ministry is not to interfere in court matters involving children. But we take care of those sent to the correctional centre and train them in vocations.

“In the case of Joba, when the NGO got in touch with the ministry, I immediately contacted the Ministry of Justice and the matter dragged on for about three months.

“At a point, I got fed up and didn’t know what to do again. I then went to the First Lady, Mrs Kafayat Oyetola and discussed the matter with her. She got interested and joined the struggle to free the boy. Her involvement assisted us a lot and I met officials of the Ministry of Justice. Paper work was completed and negotiations with the family of the deceased also took some time before we could come to agreement.

“The family of the deceased demanded N500, 000 to cover their cost of burial before they would discontinue the matter in court. I negotiated with them and we settled for N150, 000.

“I had to start asking people for money. Commissioner for Commerce (Dr. Bode Olanipekun) gave me N50, 000 when I informed him about the situation. I was able to raise the balance of N100, 000 and we gave the money to the family of the victim and they wrote the court to inform them of their decision to discontinue the matter.

“They swore to an affidavit that the defendant had been forgiven. We attached all these documents to our letter to the Ministry of Justice, yet the ministry was reluctant in acting on our request.

“This is because the case involving the boy attracts heavy punishment. If he had not been rescued, he would have spent his entire life in the centre. Intervention of the First Lady, Mrs Kafayat Oyetola, really assisted us.”

Asked what plans the state has for the boy, Olaboopo said the government was aware of the emotional trauma, including the needs of the young Joba, hence the decision to take up the challenge to further train him.

Olaboopo said “Joba was in JSS 1 when the incident happened. We don’t just abandon children in our care in the correctional centre. We give them vocational empowerment and educational support.

“In the course of our educational support for him, Joba went to take mock examination for Junior Secondary School 3 and he passed. Remember he had not even completed JSS1 when the incident happened. He was in second term JSS 1 at the time.

“While staying at the juvenile home, he was not going to school because the law does not permit that. We tutored him in- house. As we speak now, he has a state scholarship. As soon as schools resume, he will sit the JSS 3 examinations. He has been given admission to Unity School in Osogbo. We are going to pay close attention to him.

“His dad still lives in the vicinity where the incident happened. We don’t want the boy to be traumatised or stigmatised. We want him to bond with his dad for a while. Any moment from now, he will be taken to foster care. A NGO is interested in taking care of the boy. On our part, we will monitor his education and also the NGO that wants to take over his welfare.”

Speaking with our correspondent, Joba’s dad, Mr Adetoye, commended the Osun State government for taking good care of his son while in custody and pleaded for support of well-meaning Nigerians towards further training for him.

Adetoye said before he was eventually released, all efforts to free his son were abortive because of his inability to raise the amount demanded by the family of the landlord.

Asked for the changes observed in his son since he returned, Adetoye said, “He has changed. He listened to instructions and behaves well. He is cleverer too. He has grown so well. I really appreciate the Osun government giving the boy the best of training it officials gave the boy. I am a peasant farmer and also struggling with a health challenge. I need support from well-meaning Nigerians to support the government in giving the boy a sound training.”

In a brief chat with our correspondent, Joba said the biggest lesson he learnt at the centre was obedience to instructions.

During his stay at the centre, he said he attended coaching classes and expressed hope to further his education and continue with football.

He said, “I am a good footballer and I want to end up as a famous footballer in the world despite what I experienced. I have the skills. I want to combine football with my education.”