

I'm angry hoodlums killed my husband in Rivers police station attack – Widow of slain inspector

Mrs Joy Bassey, a 38-year-old seamstress, is the widow of Inspector Paulinus Bassey, one of three policemen killed by gunmen who attacked Elimbu Police Station in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State on May 7, 2021. In this interview with DENNIS NAKU, the widow says her husband's death has created a huge vacuum in their home

HOW did you hear about the death of your husband, Inspector Paulinus Bassey?

It happened on May 7, around 11pm. They put him in the mortuary the following day, May 8. But it was one of my daughters that they called to inform her of my husband's death. She called me around 2am to tell me. When I heard about it, I was so angry because my husband was a man that didn't want his children or me, his wife, to suffer. He took good care of his family. He never toyed with us. So, when I was informed of his death, I was very angry. I shouted and cried for a long time. I said the government should help to end the killing of policemen.

I had been hearing that policemen were being killed, but I thought it was a joke until it happened to my husband. It is a very bitter experience for mothers or wives or women or men that have families. Since then I have been putting my trust in God to help me. I am grateful that the Governor of Rivers State looked into our matter and assisted us. My plea is that he should continue to assist and try to stop these killings.

Were you told the circumstances in which your husband died?

One of the senior officers explained to me that they saw a Hilux van drive past the police station. My husband was suspicious of the movement of the vehicle, so he came out and used his own car to block the road that the Hilux van passed through. Shortly after, other cars started appearing. And seeing that the road was blocked, they (the attackers) and started shooting. But they didn't kill my husband with gunshot. They hacked him with axes. I have the photographs because I snapped the image of

how his head was hacked with an axe.

How did you feel when saw your husband's corpse in that state?

I felt very bad and pained. I felt the world had ended for me. I was not happy and I remain unhappy till now.

What kind of person was he?

He was a very courageous person. This thing that happened to him... I don't know. He did not toy with his work. But not many people knew he was a policeman. He wouldn't harass anyone and he was liked by many who were close to him. You would think he was a pastor. He had many friends because of the way he related with people, whether you are rich or poor, big or small.

On the day of the attack, did you have any premonition that something bad was going to happen?

No, there was nothing like that. We played in the house a lot. Even the day before that this thing happened, we slept late with our children because we were just playing. He was very good with the children and he always ate with them. Sometimes when I said to the children, 'Give your father some space to rest,' he would jokingly reply, 'Leave them; are they your children? See how my children are looking fine and beautiful.'

When did you get married to him?

We got married in 1996.

Was he already a policeman before you met him or he joined the police after your marriage?

He joined the police after our marriage. He joined the Police Force in 2003. We got married in 1996.

How many children do you have?

We have five children – three girls, two boys.

Where are your children?

Two of them have graduated. The third just got admission into the Rivers State University. The two others are in secondary school; one is in JSS1 while the other is in SS1.

How are your children taking their father's death?

They feel so bad. They are not happy because they are children that were very close to their father and they were always on his mind, they are not happy at all. But they are the ones consoling me. My last child is 11 years old now. All of them saw what happened; they even saw the picture of how the death happened and how he was wounded. They have seen the pictures. So, I am the one who is not feeling strong. They are strong and are consoling me, although they are not happy about what happened to their father.

What do you miss most about your husband?

I miss everything about him. I miss him so much because he was a man that didn't want his family to suffer. He pampered me. He couldn't bear seeing me angry over anything. He would put food in my mouth and pamper me, while begging me. I miss all these things. I feel so bad (that he was killed) and cry every day. I find myself calling his name every time.

What were your last moments together?

I am a seamstress and I go out early; sometimes when I get back I am tired and behave like a baby. So, he petted me. He promised me on Tuesday that on his return from work he was going to give me N10,000 to do something in my shop.

So, in the morning of the day this incident happened he woke me up around 5am and gave me N8,000 and

said, 'Madam, just manage this one; tomorrow when I come back, I will give you the remaining N2,000. I know you like money.'

But I always acted like a baby around him, so, I was playing with him that I would not collect the money unless it was complete.

But when I eventually collected the money, he was very happy. So, he immediately went to pick a bottle of wine, opened it and gave it to me. This was very early around

6am, because he knew I usually leave home early for work. As I collected the wine, he was just full of smiles.

He then called the children and was telling them jokingly: 'Look at your mother that said she would not collect money. Now, because I have given her drink (wine), she has collected the money.' That was how we all laughed before he left for work. That was how he played with us at home. He hardly got angry. Even when I offended him, he would still play with me.

Did he share any of his future plans with you?

He shared everything with me and his children. He was always talking about his children. He didn't want them to suffer or lack anything. We have a house in the village. So, he was planning to put the house in order and improve some things.

What about his parents?

His father died November last year. We buried him in March (2021). His mother is alive.

Has he been buried?

No. We plan the burial arrangements for June 11 and 12. The police asked that I write to request for his corpse. But I am travelling now (June 2) to discuss with the family if the burial will still be possible for June 11 and 12.

