

interview

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I will never watch video of how train crushed my wife – Late NTA accountant's husband

I will never watch video of how train crushed my wife -- Late NTA accountant's husband Alhaji Fatai Suleiman is the husband of Selimota Suleiman, the Principal Accountant of the Nigerian Television Authority, Channel Five, Abuja, who was crushed by a train while attempting to cross the railway last Thursday in the Kubwa area of Abuja. The bereaved husband speaks to LILIAN UKAGWU about the tragic incident

What is your name and how are you related to the victim of last week's train accident in Abuja, Selimota Suleiman?

My name is Alhaji Suleiman Fatai. I am the husband of the late Selimota Suleiman. I work with the National Assembly.

Who broke the news of the tragic incident to you?

It was my friend's wife that broke the news to me. On that fateful morning, her son washed the car and made everything available. I was lying down on the coach in the living room while she prepared for work. When she got ready to go to the office, I looked at her and I called her Mrs Suleiman. As I didn't intend going to my office that day, I told her, "Please bring something from your office when returning." She looked at me and laughed and she left. Before she left, she reminded me that I had said I was going to pick up something from a friend. Thirty minutes after she left, I went to my friend's house, not too far from my house, not knowing that something terrible had happened to me.

While in my friend's house, his wife ran into the house and said something happened along the rail and I told my friend that my wife had just left for the office. She demanded to know the exact time, then I told her it was about 30 minutes earlier. At that point, I asked myself, "Could it be her?" Then I asked my friend to call her number because I left my telephone at home. He dialed the number and it was ringing but nobody picked it. So, we rushed out, a car was approaching us from the other street, we hopped into the car. When we got there, a man on top of an okada (commercial motorcycle) started shouting, "Alhaji, it was your wife," while other persons said, "It wasn't your wife." They know her car, so they said it wasn't her car. Then a friend held me as we tried to approach the track. The train was still there, the car was still under the train. The police surrounded the place, they didn't allow anybody to get there. I was shaking, somebody came and picked me with his car and took me back home.

I picked my telephone and called my friend, Nuhu, who was there and asked him to investigate to know if it was my wife's car or not. He demanded to know the plate number of my wife's car. By that time I was already confused. Then my wife's brother called

from home and said someone called with my wife's number and said my wife had sustained an injury. That was how I got to know. Before I even knew what was happening, people had filled my house. My wife was hale and hearty; she was full of life, (she had) very pretty smiles.

Did you take any immediate action then?

It was a rude shock, I was almost going down, I was about fainting before one man held me and put me into the car. I wasn't in control of myself anymore. But in spite of that, I was still not sure it was my wife (that was involved in the accident). I couldn't believe it until it was confirmed.

Some reports said her car got stuck on the railway, some said the car broke down there. What exactly were you told by the eyewitness?

I didn't ask any questions from the eyewitnesses apart from what I have been reading in the news. I didn't see any eyewitness. What I know and I can tell you is that the car was in a good condition; the car was as good as new. It is a Toyota Camry 2010 brand new car, no repairs had been done on it. However, people are saying it is the magnetic effect from the train. You know I was not there, so I wouldn't know.

Have you visited the accident scene thereafter?

I didn't visit the scene of the accident; they didn't allow me to go close. I was just looking at the train from afar before they held me, probably they already knew (it was my wife), so, they didn't want me to get close. As of then, I still had the belief that it couldn't have been my car.

Someone who said she was an eyewitness posted on the social media that policemen allegedly beat up and used pepper spray on sympathisers who wanted to rescue Selimota. Did anyone tell you about that?

I heard about that but I don't know how true it was. Rescue in what sense? Was it when the train was coming? I heard that somebody somewhere was making a video of the incident, which I refused



to watch till today and I will never watch it. According to those that watched the video, they said my wife was trying to open the

car door to come out. The video wouldn't have been more than one or two minutes long. I wonder why such a person was doing that (making video) instead of helping a fellow human being; I thought that person would have probably assisted instead of making a video. But I believe it is the work of God. After the calamity occurred, that was when people were struggling to get to the scene. I heard policemen were there, shooting tear gas or whatever they did, because they didn't want people to get close. Maybe the woman could have still been rescued then, I wouldn't know. The police refused to let people get close. I'm sure that even as the husband, if I had tried to get close, I would have been tear-gassed too, because they wouldn't know I am her husband.

Was she taken to the hospital after being brought out of the car?

No, she wasn't taken to the hospital. By the time she was brought out of the car, she had given up (the ghost) completely.

Has she been buried?

Yes, she has been buried; she was buried the same day in accordance with Islamic rites.

What kind of a person was Selimota?

She was my wife, a loving and caring mother, a friend. She was everything to me, a problem solver, I shared my entire life with her. When they say someone is a mother, she was a very caring one.

Let me tell you one thing that will give you an idea of the type of person she was. The incident happened on Thursday, which was three days to my birthday. My birthday was Saturday, December 17. She had ordered a cake to do a surprise birthday for

me. It is only a loving wife that will do that. I had told her I wanted to see what she would give me as my birthday gift and she just smiled; it was after her death that the children told me about the surprise birthday cake.

On my birthday, the baker brought the cake to the house; maybe she not was no aware of the tragic incident, as my wife had already paid in full. I didn't see it (the cake), my people asked the baker to take the cake away and do whatever she wished to do with the cake or to give it to the needy or whoever.

How many children do you have together?

We have three children, a girl and two boys.

Is the estate in which you live close to the railway?

Yes, my house is very close to the railway.

Is it true that residents had been clamouring that government should build an overhead bridge across the railway?

Yes, I personally wrote two letters to the Ministry of Transportation as the Secretary of the community's association and I can bring the copies to you, if you want. The letters were received and stamped, but till today nothing has been done.

Was that the first time the community would experience such a fatal train accident?

It wasn't the first time. We had had about two incidents like that, but my wife's case was different because she was in the car. The incidents that happened before involved passers-by and we could hardly identify them after the train mutilated them. In such instances, the Nigerian Railway Corporation would just come and pack the mutilated body. We have had about two or three incidents like that and nobody was able to recognise any of the victims.