

panorama

My daughter preparing for master's in UK before train crash – Dad

Oreoluwa Aina, a National Youth Service Corps member, was one of those who died on Thursday when a Lagos State Government staff bus collided with a train in the PWD area of the state. In this interview with DAYO OYEWO, her father, Femi Aina, speaks on her daughter's plans after the service year

HOW did you receive the news of your daughter's death?

I was in Abuja watching the television around 9 am when I saw the incident. An hour after that, I got a call that my daughter was involved in it. That was when I knew what I saw on TV was actually happening to me. Then I immediately called my younger brother and sister in Lagos. I later received two more calls in another 10 minutes and by then, she was already in the ICU (intensive care unit). They were attending to her and at the same time calling me from there. I even heard some of the staff members praying for her. So, I rushed to the airport to get any available flight back to Lagos but when my plane was ready to take off by 4 pm, I was told that she had passed away.

When was the last time you communicated with her?

On Wednesday, my younger brother's wife celebrated her birthday. She recorded the birthday and sent it to us. We all laughed at the video and the following morning (Thursday) she sent a WhatsApp message to me saying, "Daddy how was your night? Hope you slept well," and I replied, "All is well" and there was no response after then. I even thought she did not respond because she ran out of data, not knowing that she was already involved in an accident.

Were you aware that she used to board the staff bus?

I know she boarded the staff bus, but not every day. If not for this cashless nonsense policy, she would not have followed that bus. But she did not have cash, so she had to follow the bus. She had just N200. They just kill people anyhow in this country.

What can you tell us about Oreoluwa?

Oreoluwa was very dear to me. She was a gift from God to me and that is what her name implies. She feared God and she was hard-working. I used to tell her that she took the job like she was already a staff member of the state government. She was a very nice girl with visions and ambitions. She was preparing to go to the United Kingdom for her Master's programme after her youth service ends in May, but unfortunately, all her plans had been dashed. She happened to be the first grandchild of my parents and she stayed with my mum here in Lagos because our dad passed away last year, so she had always been with her grandmother. She was dear to everyone around including church, school and at work. Her death is a great loss.

How old was she?

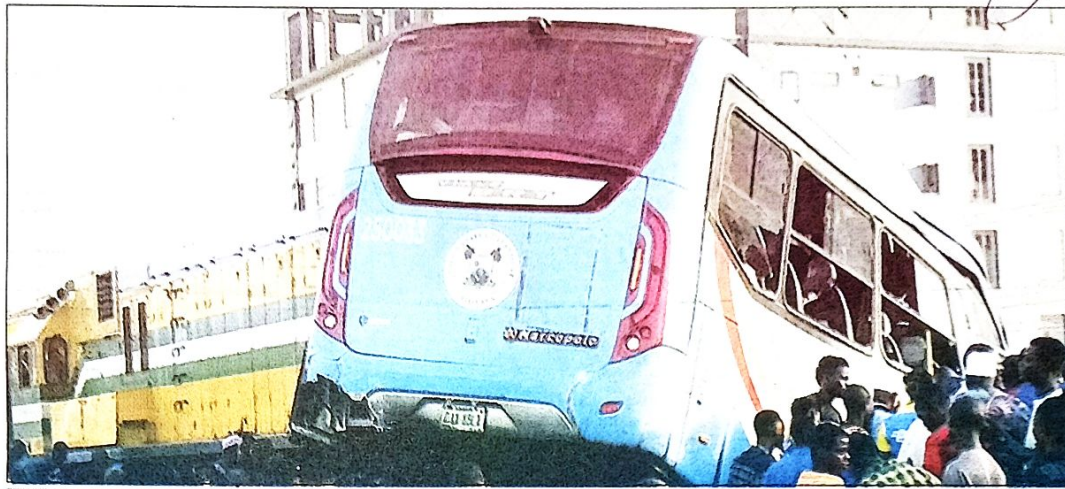
She was 28 years and was supposed to be 29 in October this year.

What about her mother?

She stays in Ogun state, but her family came for her burial. She is just trying to cope.

Were you checking to know her condition?

Yes, we have been talking, including her family. We are just trying to cope and calm



•Oreoluwa



•Aina

ourselves down to survive these few days and then we move ahead.

Can you tell us about her education?

She graduated from a primary school here in Egbe, then she proceeded to a secondary school also in this area before she went to study Pure and Applied Chemistry at Osun State University. Although, there were so many strikes while she was studying in school and I thought she would even give up on going back to school but she went through the storm. She did well and her report was always good. Even those she worked with in the ministry said the same about her and the church. She was chubby but very energetic. She was also industrious, she did so many things as a young lady and was very focused.

She must have gone through some difficulties at the university. Can you tell us more about this?

Yes. There was a time she had challenges with some of the courses she had to take over again. She was like, 'Dad, this cannot be my result,' but I encouraged her and she withstood the stress of going through the challenges. The course was for four years but she spent close to seven years in school before she finally graduated last year. That was why I said she went through hurdles.

For someone who had gone through such rough paths, how did she feel after she eventually graduated and thereafter mobilised for NYSC?

She was happy. When she eventually came out, I told her that she was already a success after going through all the stress. I did not

know that would be the end of it all. When she started serving with the state government, we discussed and planned how she was going to get a meritorious award after her service year. I told her to serve very well so that the state could give her an award. I was expecting the meritorious award but it was a death certificate that I got (breaks down in tears). I was just too eager for her to finish. She was my first daughter. Her death is painful because I have invested so much in her. This world is cruel. A girl that was full of life when she left home was now brought back dead.

Was she deployed directly to Lagos?

Yes, she was deployed directly to Lagos. I have a copy of her deployment letter. She did not redeploy from any state. And she was so happy that her prayers about the posting were answered.

How do you feel losing a child?

The feeling can't be described. Normally, when you hear the news that somebody is dead or people have an accident, there are personalities attached to those people. She is my daughter; I can show you some of her text messages on my phone. When I went through them again, I felt so bad. She called me names like, "O.G, Nigga, Daddy, how far?" We have tried, we have planned and just for her to finish and then, we go from there.

Did she share any of her aspirations with you?

Yes, many of them. She planned to travel to the UK for her Master's programme, and she was already into catering. She was part of a thrift society and they even called me from there yesterday to inform me about it.

She was saving money to start a mobile food business. Even though she had plans to study more, she was just trying to do things. She was also into music and she recorded in the studio. We are a member of The Apostolic Church and she was a staunch member. I learnt she was even the one that led the song last Sunday. She had so many plans and she was just about to fly. It was just this youth service which is mandatory that she wanted to complete and then fly.

What is your assessment of the response of the state government to the incident?

Sincerely, I was impressed. When I arrived in Lagos, I went straight to LASUTH and I saw how the victims were being attended to. I saw different injuries with different segments and how they were trying to help everybody. They tried their approach to that level of emergency. They were trying to salvage whatever they could.

What is your take on the driver?

I am not happy with the driver at all. The driver had caused a lot of damage. I learnt they want to do a mental test for him. Let the law just take its course. I can't say what is on my mind.

What do you expect the state government to do following this incident?

The governor was here yesterday and we spoke at length. The government needs to carry out a re-evaluation of our drivers, especially those who carry such a large number of people. A lot can be done to evaluate people so that we keep our lives in their hands. Possibly, the way they do for pilots, if we can value our lives like that, this thing could have been averted because my thinking is that the driver must have been doing something like that before now. This cannot be the first time. When they are doing roadworthiness, they should also do mental worthiness or whatever they can call it. We hear tankers falling on cars in this same Lagos, things that are not meant to happen normally. We can take them seriously as doctors who spend seven to ten years in school because they want to treat a human being. But we just give a driver a license to convey close to 95 people in a bus at a time and we don't know the health or the mental state of such a person. We take them as just drivers but our lives are in their hands. So, if there is anything the governor can do to evaluate them if possible – constantly.