

Losing brother, mum in one day still a nightmare — Late corper's family

Godfrey George

Amourning haze has settled atop the roof of the Abukas in Ajaka town, Kogi State. Like smoke, it has left the family gasping for breath.

A quiet Monday night in May became one when the stars went dim on the small household, leaving them in sorrow and anguish.

That night, the Abukas lost their matriarch, Rachael, and 29-year-old brother, Christian, a corps member. The entire family is still in shock. Losing two people in one night, who left without a warning, was not what we planned for at all. They were not sick. Their lives were just cut short abruptly without warning," Friday, brother to the late Christian, said.

The late Christian, in February, was mobilised for the compulsory National Youth Service Corps after he completed his four-year degree in Library and Information Science at the Prince Abubakar Audu University (formerly Kogi State University), Anyigba, Kogi State.

After seeking admission for four years, it was a dream come true for Christian when he was admitted to study at KSU in 2019.

Although Library and Information Science was not his dream course, he made sure he came out with a good grade.

"My brother went through a lot to survive. We practically had to source for fees ourselves. He did everything he could to make sure he graduated with his mates.

"The last thing we expected was to be told to come to identify his corpse for burial while he was on the path of achieving his dreams. It is the saddest thing to ever happen to this family — watching a promising son go is very difficult," Friday added in a tone laden with sadness.

When, in February, KSU mobilised Christian to join the Batch A, Stream II Orientation Course, which was to commence on April 25, 2023, to May 16, Friday said it was a thing of joy for the family.

He recalled guiding his brother to choose four states on the NYSC registration portal, adding that he was the first person Christian called when he was posted to Bayelsa State.

Although he said the 29-year-old liked the state, he noted that Christian said he might consider redeploying to a state in the South-West.

He, nevertheless, did the compulsory three-week orientation course at the newly inaugurated Boro town, Kaiama Kolukuma, Kaiama LGA, Bayelsa State.

The day Christian left for Bayelsa, Friday said it rained and they both joked about it being God giving him permission to embark on the journey.

He then boarded a bus from the Kogi Central Park that morning and got to the camp almost nine hours later, exhausted from the long journey.

Friday said his brother, on the same day, expressed his desire to be moved to Kwara State to be close to his home for some personal reasons.

Luckily for him, his redeployment form was accepted by the officials and processed.

"He even called me that day to tell me his progress and we spoke about the weather and the people. He said he liked the place as it was not as bad as he thought but noted that it was a bit difficult getting to the new camp since it was a new one," Friday added.

On February 11, the Bayelsa State Government inaugurated a new camp for the NYSC in the state.

In his remarks during the inauguration, Governor Duoye Diri said the increase in the number of corps members posted to the state accelerated the government's plan to complete the construction of the camp for the comfort of Nigerian youths serving their fatherland.

He directed that two additional hostels be constructed at the camp to "provide friendly accommodation for successive batches of corps members that would be deployed in the state".

Deadly trip

Three days before the end of the orientation exercise, officials at the Bayelsa camp sent Christian a letter approving his redeployment to Kwara State.

Friday said the deceased called to inform him of the development.

On May 16, he set out on a bus from Bayelsa to Kwara for documentation.

There, he spent a few days settling issues around his place of primary assignment.

Christian a call but his line was not connecting despite several attempts. At this point, fear was already building up, Friday said.

He then decided to call another friend of Christian who was supposed to know his whereabouts.

It was that friend who confirmed the news that Christian was dead.

"I fell flat on the floor and wept. I just spoke to Christian a few hours ago. He couldn't have just died like that.

"I rushed to the social media pages where his pictures were posted and confirmed that he indeed had been involved in a fatal crash and died on the spot. I am not sure I was able to breathe for some seconds. I was in utter shock. Till now, I still cannot believe my own brother, Christian, is gone. He would have clocked 30 on November 26," Friday added as he sobbed.

Hypertensive mother dies

Christian's mother, a 55-year-old farmer was reportedly called by an unknown person who broke the sad news to her.

She slumped and was pronounced dead at the hospital later on.

"People are not just sensitive. I am sure no one from the family who knew that mama was hypertensive would tell her such news over the phone.

"The plan I had was to first inform other family members so we would look for a perfect way to inform mama and papa. The person just called and broke the news. Now, we had to bury two persons," Friday said.

Friday said Christian was buried a day after the incident, while their mother was buried on Thursday, June 1.

Family, friends mourn

Joseph, another brother to the deceased, took to Facebook to lament the tragedy.

He wrote, "It was a dark day in my family today. My younger brother, Christian Ughede Abuka, was involved in a fatal accident on his way from Kwara State for his NYSC documentation and he died. This resulted in his mother's death. Nothing to say but to thank God."

A close friend of the late Christian, Danjuma Abalaka, also took to Facebook to mourn his late friend.

"There is nothing beyond destiny, and that's why the only one thing in life which you could not win is death.

"Today, you are not here with us but we will always remember you as our classmate and a good friend. May your soul rest in peace, Christian Abuka," he wrote.

Saturday PUNCH gathered that the late Christian, while in secondary school, was the assistant head boy of Government Science Secondary School, Ajara, Kogi State.

The then-head boy, Sule Muhammed, described the deceased as a quiet and bright student.

Another former classmate, Blessing Iko-Ojo, who spoke to our correspondent, said, "He (Christian) used to be my classmate back then in secondary school and we were both born and brought up in the same place and after secondary school, we both parted for different higher institutions. He was a very nice guy."

Christian's younger sister, Faith Enyo-one, on her part, wrote on her Facebook wall, "Ah! Death why did you do this to me? Brother, why did you leave me alone at this critical moment? I can't believe you are gone. I love you, big brother."

"With tears in my eyes and my heart full of pain and sorrow, I say, 'Rest in peace!' I will forever miss you forever. Brother O!"

Another colleague, Pius Musa, who had congratulated Christian during his swearing in as a corps member, wrote, "Barely three weeks ago, I celebrated your achievement and we rejoiced. We had several calls and video engagements on how the camp was with its numerous activities. Then, you sought relocation of service from Yenogoa to Ilorin. After documentation, you set out to return and died in an accident."

"Hmmm... Christian! For 27 years of friendship, we shared a lot of understanding and mutual respect for each other. If I am not found in my family house, you would definitely know my whereabouts. You have stood for me in my absence many times. Death, why?"

"God! Is this not too heavy on your family and loved ones? Death, where is your victory? Goodnight, Christian and mum."

NYSC mum on compensation

When this reporter contacted the NYSC Director of Press and Public Relations, Mr Eddy Megwa, on Monday, he did not take his calls.

Text messages sent to his line were also not responded to.

Our correspondent called again multiple times on Wednesday to know if the NYSC had plans to compensate the family for the loss of the corps member, but he did not respond to his call or reply to the text messages sent to his line.



Yagba West LGA of Kogi State.

Christian was among the five casualties of the accident.

The state government, while confirming the incident in a statement by the Commissioner for Information and Communications, Kingsley Panwo, noted that it received the news of the death of five people after a vehicle plunged into a canal around Omi Dam on Friday, May 26.

Panwo noted that the government had since launched investigations into the circumstances leading to the 'unfortunate incident' and was 'willing and ready to cooperate with the Lower Niger River Basin Development Authority to improve the safety of people working around the canal and passengers travelling along the routes'.

An official in the state government's media team, who did not want to be named because he was not authorised to speak on the matter, said the bus had a brake failure.

"It was brake failure [that caused the accident]. Before the driver could manage it, the bus had plunged into the dam. Some people even died before the bus entered the dam. It was really a bad one," the source stated.

Bad news

Friday said he was shocked when he got a call that night from a friend, who saw the news on social media and called him.

At first, Friday said he didn't believe it. So, he told the friend to ignore the news as his brother was on a bus headed for Ajara town and he would get there by morning.

But, on second thought, Friday said he decided to give

• Late Christian and Mum

Friday

said

Christian

informed him of his every move.

The late corps member after concluding documentation and getting a PPA set out on a journey back to Kogi to see his family before resuming fully at his new place of work.

According to Friday, he was held back by "a lot of things" which made him finish late in Kwara before he boarded a night bus on May 26.

The bus moved around 7pm that day.

It was the last time they spoke, as Friday did not get to hear from Christian again.

The next thing Friday heard was that his brother was involved in a fatal motor accident that claimed five lives.

Saturday PUNCH gathered from sources close to the matter that an 18-seater bus in which the victim was travelling plunged into the Omi Dam canal, close to

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