

# My captors shot two children dead for walking slowly– 26-year-old undergraduate

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| By Ayoola Olasupo

*A final year student at the School of Health, Makarfi, Zaria, Baraka Abdulkarim, speaks with AYOOLA OLASUPO about her abduction and how she survived horrifying conditions in captivity*

*Which school do you attend?*

I'm a 400-level student at the School of Health, Makarfi, in Zaria.

*How old are you, and which state are you from?*

✓.

I'm 26 years old now. I'm from Oyo State. My dad is from Ogbomoso, but my mum is from Oyo Town. I can say I'm from Ogbomoso Ayilara, but we stay in Oke-Elerin, and we always go home.

*Could you describe the events leading to your abduction?*

I was coming back from school in Zaria and heading to Funtua, which is in Katsina State. When I got to the park, no taxi was available. So, I decided to take a car along the road. Another woman, who had six children, also joined me. When we got to a village called Maraba Maska, the driver stopped, claiming the fuel had finished and that he would call another car for us to board. We had to enter the new car.

***When did this happen?***

It happened on December 1, 2024.

***How many passengers were in the new car?***

There were four of them; three passengers and the driver. None of them were female, and they were all Fulani. The seats inside the car were insufficient, and it was already 6pm. So, the woman and I entered while the children sat on our laps. Another man also joined us. When we reached Funtua Junction, where I was supposed to alight, I informed the driver, but he ignored me.

He drove past the junction, and we started shouting. That was when the passengers who had pretended to be fellow travellers brought out their guns. We didn't even know they had guns, as they had concealed them. The car continued moving until we reached a point where there were soldiers.

***How did you feel when you realised you had been kidnapped?***

Before they brought out their guns, the man sitting beside me asked me to shift a bit. After I did, they then revealed their guns. I was scared, and the woman, the children, and I started shouting. They didn't seem bothered by our cries, saying that even if the soldiers saw us, they wouldn't do anything and nobody would come to our aid. The strange part was seeing an airplane flying over the forest every morning, and the kidnappers would mockingly say that it wouldn't help us.

***Did the soldiers notice what was happening?***

We were shouting, but the soldiers didn't notice anything. They didn't realise what was going on until we passed them. Then the kidnappers ordered us to get out of the car, and we complied. I saw the Fulani men holding AK-47 rifles.

***How did you know it was an AK-47?***

I can recognise some guns when I see them. I've seen them in foreign action movies. They asked us to leave, and we began trekking into the forest. We walked from that night until around 5am the next morning. When we reached their destination, they instructed us to enter a thatched hut in the middle of the forest. On the way, they killed two of the woman's children.

***Why did they kill the two children?***

They said the children weren't moving fast enough. So, they shot and killed them before we reached the hut. They also shot a fat woman in the leg because she couldn't walk quickly. They wanted to abandon her, but one of them insisted they shouldn't. It seemed they didn't tolerate slow movement in the forest. After trekking for more than an hour, we heard gunshots from soldiers. The kidnappers told us the soldiers would not leave their positions and would only shoot into the air.

***What happened when you entered the thatched hut?***

They tied our hands and legs with big chains and padlocked them. This was done to all of us, even the children. They chained one hand and one leg together and padlocked it. I couldn't sleep until daybreak because the chains caused severe pain, and I developed scars. We thought we would be given food and water in the morning, but none came until the night.

They sarcastically asked if we wanted tea. A man who had been kidnapped with us said yes, unaware that their "tea" meant a severe beating. They beat him mercilessly. The kidnappers didn't stay in the same hut as us. They had another hut where they lived with their young wives, who were between 12 and 14 years old. The leader of the kidnappers looked about 20 years old. They were all young.

*Were you later given any food?*

They gave us the shaft left after grinding and sieving maize. They also asked us to cut small roots, place money on them, and burn them with a lighter to make a fire.

*Do you mean they were burning money?*

Yes, they placed bundles of N1,000 notes and honey on the roots before lighting them. I'm unsure if the notes were real. They used this fire to prepare the maize chaff, which they gave us once a day. They rationed water too, giving us a Fanta bottle's quantity to share among three people.

*How many of you were kidnapped from the bus?*

We were 10 in total; six children and four adults. Inside the hut, we urinated, and defecated on our bodies. We couldn't bathe as we were chained. I even started and finished my menstruation in captivity.

*Were the kidnappers aware that you were menstruating?*

Yes, they were. Once I started menstruating, they stopped coming to our hut. The other woman said menstrual blood could neutralise their charms. I was supposed to menstruate for three days, but it lasted 10 days due to anxiety.

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*How were you cleaning yourself during that period?*

I couldn't. My hands and legs were tied, so the blood dried on my body along with the urine and faeces. There was no way to clean up.

*How long did you stay in the kidnappers' den?*

I was there for 13 days

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#### *Can you recall the location where you were held?*

No, but they often went to a nearby village called Na-Kutsa to buy items and charge their phones. They would ask me to transfer music and videos to their memory cards because they didn't know how to do it themselves.

#### *When did they contact your family for ransom?*

After four days, they asked if I knew my mum's number. I gave them my maternal uncle's number instead, as my mum was in the hospital awaiting surgery. They took me to a spot with network service, and I called my uncle. He confirmed the situation after speaking with the kidnappers.

#### *How much did they demand?*

Initially, they demanded N20m. My uncle said there was no way we could raise that amount. They reduced it to N3m, two motorcycles, two smartphones with three cameras, and N50,000 worth of Airtel recharge cards.

#### *Did your uncle take the ransom to the kidnappers?*

He didn't take the money to them by himself. He sent one of his guys. You can't believe that the guy who went with the ransom is still with them. They didn't release him after giving them the money, saying we would have to pay another ransom to set him free. We are running helter-skelter now to raise the money.

They asked me if I knew the guy and I said no. The way those people collect the ransom is that when anybody takes the money to them, they will ask the person to put the money on the floor and cross over it three times. After that, they asked the person to pack the sand under his feet and pour it on the money. After that, the kidnappers would touch the money. So, they told me that the ransom had been paid and that it was already 9pm, saying they would release me if I wanted to go that night or stay with them till daybreak.

I said they should release me now but they were saying that if they released me that night, I might fall into the hands of another set of kidnappers. But I insisted that they should release me that night. So, they took me on their bike and passed through the forest without the lights on. We fell off the bike three times. There is a spot on my leg where I got hurt by the bike's silencer.

When we got to the end of the thick bush, they released me at that spot around 10pm. I was not wearing shoes but they showed me the way and told me to go straight. That was how I started running until I got to a point far from where I was left. I saw a house there and I entered. I saw a man with his children reciting the Quran. As I entered the place, I fell and started crying. Then the man said he knew what had happened and that I should not say anything.

#### *Did the man help you?*

I used the man's phone to call my mum and I told her that I had been released. So, the man told her about my location and she pleaded with him to take me to my uncle's place in Yankara very close to that place. When we got to my uncle's place, they took me to the hospital immediately to

carry out a general check-up.

There is a card they always give at the hospital that if they write bandit on top of it, any medicine or tests to be given and carried out will be free. They did the tests for me but the problem is that whenever I scratch my body, rashes will come out. Recently, something came out of my eye. So, I had to go to the hospital. My eye surgery is in a few days now.

### ***How was the moment like for you in the kidnappers' den?***

I was asking myself if I would ever see my mum again. A lot of things were coming to my mind at that moment. I thought that if my mum cooked tuwo for us at home, I might decide not to eat it, but I was in captivity eating the chaff from maize with soup or anything. My dad is late and my other sister is going for eye surgery.

I did not even know if my mum wouldn't develop hypertension because she only gave birth to the two of us. I was kidnapped and my sister was in an operation room for her eye surgery and we are not even sure if she's going to see again with the eye.

### ***How are you coping with the trauma?***

I haven't slept properly since. I attend therapy every three days and keep praying for strength. I'm thankful to God for my life, my family's support, and the opportunity to seek my mum's forgiveness.

### ***How is your mum feeling now?***

Thank God, she's getting better now since I came back a few days ago.

### ***Have you gone for therapy to deal with your trauma?***

Yes. There is one I'm attending every three days because even now, I've not been able to sleep for three hours. When I sleep at home, I'll wake up around 2am or 3am. So, I'll be praying because I won't be able to sleep again. I have to continue to thank God because it is only Him who can do this for someone.

Right now, I've started imagining some things in my head. I used to remember the experience every time. There was a day I was talking to my mum and she told me they gave N50,000 to the alfas at the mosque in Funtua to pray for me. On the day they started the prayer, the kidnappers came to wake me up and said they saw all the prayers my people were doing at home.

### ***What are you thankful to God for?***

The first one is that I thank God that I have a supportive family because my dad's family contributed a lot. Secondly, I've wronged my mum a lot to the extent that I don't know that she's someone that I should not even hurt or did anything that would make her unhappy.

So, when I was there, I regretted everything I had done, all the bad things I had done to her. I thought that if I could see her now, I would look for her forgiveness and make her happy. My colleagues in school also contributed a lot.

