

I still expect my husband to walk through the door – Wife of slain banker

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Late Mohammed Suleiman

By Grace Edema

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Mrs Talatu Suleiman, wife of a banker, Mohammed Suleiman, who was gruesomely murdered in a town near Katsina, shares with GRACE EDEMA the unanswered questions surrounding his death and the agony of watching her children struggle with the sudden void in their lives

What circumstance led to the death of your husband on August 4?

He left home at about 8:30 am for his office; it was a banking job. After that, he planned to head towards Zaria, Malumfashi, and then Gusau. That's the axis he normally covers.

I usually don't call him when he's on official trips, so I didn't speak with him. In fact, until his death, I never heard from him that day. I was waiting for him to arrive at his destination before calling, but instead, his colleagues came to the house at about 7 pm just after the Maghrib prayers, to notify me of his death.

What was his role at the bank?

He was a bank manager—I think he was the regional manager. He had just resumed at Union Bank—barely three weeks before he was killed. It was on a Monday, the start of his third week there. He was formerly with Sterling Bank, but when he got an appointment with Union Bank, he resumed.

After completing two weeks, the third week was when he was supposed to begin visiting the branches he covered. Sadly, that Monday, which marked his third week, was the day the incident happened.

What really happened?

I can only tell you what I was told by the driver and some Union Bank staff members. I was told they were ambushed by kidnappers on the 4th of August, and as a result, he lost his life. That Monday, I couldn't see him—not even his corpse.

It wasn't until Tuesday that his body was brought, and we buried him according to Islamic rites. I didn't even get to see the driver to know what really happened until Thursday, when they finally brought him.

So, I asked the driver to narrate what happened. He said they were ambushed, and both he and his boss (my husband) rushed out from the car. He himself ran into the bush, while his boss ran toward the nearby town. My husband reportedly hid near a Jumat mosque.

Later, the driver said he saw the shirt his boss wore on the ground. While he was holding the shirt, someone asked if he was the driver of the man who was shot, the one who owned the shirt. He said yes. Then he was told that the military had intervened and taken his boss to the hospital.

The driver went to the police station to find out where exactly they took him. They told him it was the hospital, but when he wanted to go there immediately, they warned him that it was unsafe to travel that route at night. They even offered him hotel accommodation till the following morning.

It was later that he got the news that his boss had died. That was what he narrated to me in the presence of others. As for me, I wasn't there. I cannot give a direct account of what happened. This is all I know.

Did anyone go to that Jumat mosque to confirm if there was truly a gunshot there, or if soldiers actually came?

I'm not saying the story isn't true, but I honestly don't know if it's my responsibility to investigate or that of Union Bank. Right now, I'm in mourning, and I cannot do anything. I believe it is either the authorities or Union Bank that should take it up.

What we gathered was that even bandits could attack people while townsfolk still went about their normal business.

When they hear gunshots, what they usually do is run and hide. That was what my husband's colleagues explained—that in that area, it happens like that. Whether it's true or not, only Allah knows. I don't mind if there was a proper investigation and the culprits were brought to justice, but even that won't bring my husband back.

Did you discover any wound on his body?

There was one gunshot wound on his stomach. But the driver claimed there were three—one on his hand, one on his stomach, and one on his lap. What I saw was just one on his stomach.

Still, I was able to bring him home, dress him, and pray for him before taking him to the cemetery.

In your own view, do you really think that was what happened to him?

Well, it's kind of suspicious because the story doesn't really add up. But the only thing I can do is leave everything to God because He knows all things.

I don't have anyone to explain the truth of what happened to me. It's only Allah and the driver who truly know. My husband cannot speak for himself anymore. So, all I can say is that everything is in Allah's hands—I've submitted it all to Him.

During the time he got this new job, did he ever talk about anyone being against him, attacking him, or any hostility at work?

No. I don't think so. Usually, when you resume at a bank, you spend the first few weeks just getting to know your staff members and settling into the work. He was just starting. So, I don't think there was anything like that.

Even if there was, maybe he didn't notice or suspect it yet. Besides, he would have told me—because he was my best friend. The only things he ever withheld from me were the ones he felt might hurt me. But even then, once he had managed the situation, he would tell me later.

How would you describe your husband?

Honestly, he was beyond description. There is no adjective strong enough to qualify him. If not perfect, he was close to it. He was someone I would marry over and over again. He was a very good man, a very good father—loved by everyone.

During the condolence visits, not a single person said anything bad about him. In fact, one of his secondary school classmates told me that anytime she met his wife, she always wanted to ask one question.

When she finally asked me, she said, “Did he ever get angry?” I told her, yes, he did—but it took a lot for him to get angry. Even when he did, it didn't last long. He was a very good man. Not perfect, but if I could place him on a scale of perfection, I would.

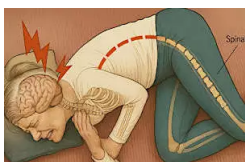
He always took care of his family to the best of his ability. He always wanted the best for us. Now he's gone. I still can't believe it. I keep thinking he will walk back through the door. It was so sudden. That morning, I even saw him off to the gate as he left, and that was the last time.

What about the police? Did you make any report?

The only report made was the area where it happened. In Kaduna, nobody has taken it up—nobody is doing anything. All we saw in the police report was ‘armed robbery/bandit attack.’ That was what was written in the local report from where the incident occurred.

But here in Kaduna State, nobody is saying anything, let alone doing anything about it.

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Was the incident still within Kaduna State or another state?

No, it was outside Kaduna. In fact, it was in Katsina. They said it happened between Malumfashi and Safana. At that point, he had already left the Malumfashi branch on his way to Gusau.

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Do you know if the killers took anything from his car?

For now, his luggage has not been brought to me. But I understand his phone was taken immediately. The driver said they ransacked the car and collected both their phones—my husband's and his.

When I spoke with the DPO, he told me all they had in their possession was the official car and my husband's suitcase, which contained his clothes, two pairs of shoes, a pair of Crocs, and two traditional caps. I know this because I was there when he packed them, and I saw him through the gate as he left. But his phone was not with the police.

What about his ATM card?

They said it's not with them either. The card itself is missing.

Did you try dialling his number?

I did. In fact, on the day they were about to break the news to me, I dialled his number—it wasn't going through. Even last night, around 2 am, I tried again because I couldn't sleep. It still wasn't reachable.

How many children do you have?

I have five children.

How old are the eldest and the youngest?

The eldest is 22, the youngest is 10.

How old was he?

He was 51 years old.

How old are you?

I'm 50 years old.

It was also gathered that he was planning to start an NGO for widows. Is that true?

Yes. In fact, there's already one for orphans that he and a few of his friends—about four or six of them—had started. They've sponsored about eight children so far. Some have already graduated, some are currently serving, and others are about to begin their service year.

But the one he personally helped was a girl in Kogi State whose father had a terrible accident with a trailer. The man died instantly—the trailer practically split him into two.

My husband had been paying her school fees, and she just graduated on August 2 from either Primary 6 or Nursery 3, but he planned to sponsor her to university until she graduates. He was even informed about her graduation the Saturday before his death.

What do you want the government and security agencies to do about your husband's death?

I don't even know how to put it, but they should know what they're supposed to do. The insecurity in our country is too much. Many people die in vain. I don't want my husband's own to be in vain, honestly.

Since I have left everything to Allah, they should please do something to prevent other families from going through what we went through. My husband died in pain, in agony. I saw it on his face when I was bathing him. I felt it. That's the most painful part—he couldn't even say anything to us.

Because his phone was always with him, I kept thinking—maybe if it hadn't been taken, we would have heard his last words. But he was gone, just like that.

This can happen to anybody. That's why I'm begging that something should be done to stop this. There's so much to say, but I don't even know where to start. What I know is this: the killings must stop.

Too many women are being left as widows. Too many children are left wandering the streets— orphaned—through no fault of theirs. The government can do something. I pray that Allah will help them to do it.

What about your kids? How are they coping?

If I say it's easy, honestly, I will be lying. Anytime they go into his room, they either stay there and cry quietly, wipe their tears before coming out, or they just come out in tears.

He was the kind of father who played with them, joked with them, and laughed with them. So, it's not going to be easy. In fact, the word 'easy' is an understatement.

Beyond our children, he was a father to many. Many kids depended on him; the ones whose school fees he was paying, and other dependents. They've been deprived. Their future has been cut short in ways only Allah knows.

Although I believe everything is in Allah's hands, this is not going to be easy for many people. If only those who did this knew him, they wouldn't have taken his life. Whatever the reason, whatever the motive, it wasn't worth it.

He was someone who never poked his nose into other people's affairs. Even if he found out something, he kept it to himself because it wasn't his business. That's the kind of man he was.

Did his organisation visit you?

Yes, they did. They tried their best, especially at the beginning. In fact, on the very first day, they came—they even brought the news themselves. They kept coming until about the seventh day, and for like 10 days in total, they checked in and called. So, I would say they tried their best.

Do you think your husband's murder was related to his new job?

Honestly, if I say I'm thinking of anything, I will be lying. Dwelling on it only hurts me more. I'm just praying for Allah to give me the strength to bear it and to look after my kids.

It's terrible. I've lost a husband, a friend, my best friend, a father, a brother... someone I've known for 27 years. In fact, 27 years is not a joke.