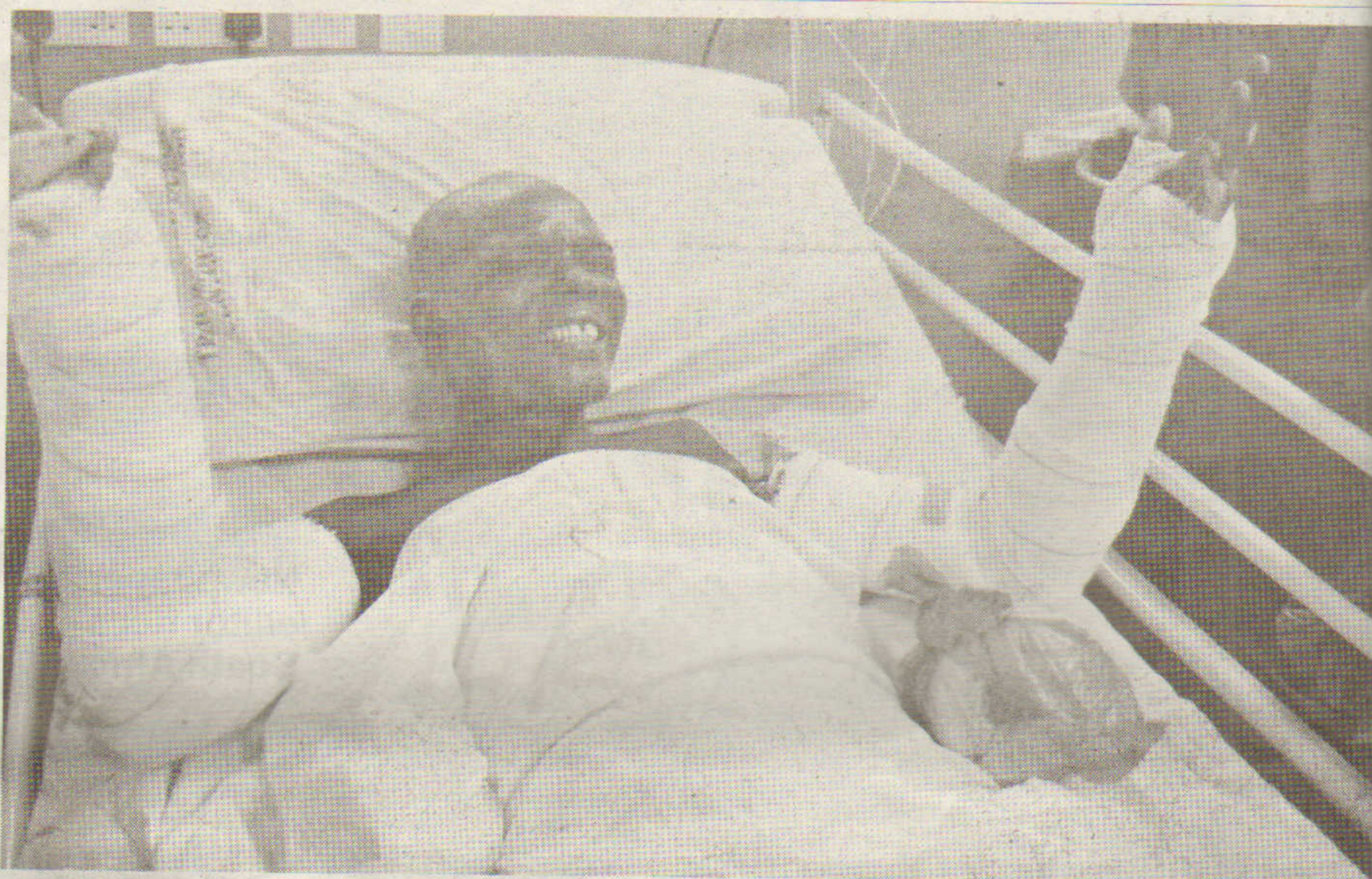


NEWS PLUS



Oviesu on hospital bed

This man spent Xmas, New Year Day in hospital

... But he says, 'I'm still grateful to God'

• Road crash survivor narrates how 23 co-passengers were roasted alive

BY TESSY IGOMU

Baba, oti mumi gba gbe, Ibanu-je igba kan. These were the tear-filled lyrics that rang through the hall of the Burns and Trauma Unit of the Gbagada General Hospital that Christmas morning. The song, which translates, *Father, you have made me to forget the pain of the past, no doubt was coming from one in the throes of pain.*

Out of curiosity, this reporter followed the direction of the voice and realised that the song was coming from a badly burnt male patient, draped all over with bandage and gauze. The only part of his body left uncovered was his chest and face.

This reporter was immediately drawn to this man, who though, in the hospital and in the midst of other burnt victims and in pains, chose to sit-up in his bed and dance.

On sighting the reporter, a huge, infectious smile spread across his face, even as he increased the tempo of the song, swaying to his own rhythm.

Meet Steven Oviesu, a worker at the Redemption Camp of the Redeemed Christian Church of God and a father of three. For this man, fate might have been cruel, but he is still grateful to God for sparing his life.

For Oviesu, an indigene of Ora in Edo State, the only thing that makes a difference in his life at the moment is God. His reason? "I saw death but God's mercy said no. God saved me from the claws of death."

He was a survivor in a tragic multiple

accident that claimed the lives of over 23 persons by Magboro, along the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. According to him, the accident, which nearly claimed his life, resulted into a huge fire that charred other occupants of the bus beyond recognition.

Despite facing a life-threatening event, he still found the courage and strength to see his ordeal as the will of God.

Steven's journey to the Burns and Trauma Ward of the Gbagada General Hospital started on Monday, November 18, 2013. It was a bad day for the man who said he left for work with a joyous spirit, unaware of the danger that lurked along the road which he traveled daily to earn a living.

According to reports, the accident was caused by obstructions on the expressway, particularly the indiscriminate parking of trailers by the roadside at Ibafo, Ogun State. The accident was said to have occurred when a tanker loaded with petrol lost control and rammed into trailers parked by the roadside. The impact ignited an inferno that engulfed other vehicles trapped in the gridlock.

Recalling the tragic happening of that day, Steven said he closed from work and boarded a bus that ran into a gridlock close to the Punch Place, along the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway.

He said while waiting in the gridlock, he heard a loud bang before everywhere became engulfed in smoke and excruciating heat. He said people struggled to get out of the bus, but to no avail.

"I was meditating when I heard screams and tried to know what was happening," Steven said of the last moments before he heard a loud bang. He said everything happened so fast that he did not have the time to think of possible means of escape.

This lucky survivor said he is yet to know what really happened but has been told that the accident was so fatal that people believed no one survived.

In a voice heavy with emotion and pain, he said, "Here I am today, to the glory of God. I am alive today because God said so. I am so fortunate as to be alive, despite all the burns I suffered."

Taking a deep breath to stabilize himself, Steven continued: "It was so fatal. All the people that we boarded the bus together all died in my presence. I saw them burn to death but God saved my life. Mercy said no. God on his throne said it was not time for me to die and rescued me from the claws of death."

Not spending Christmas and New Year Day in the comfy confines of his home, away from his loved ones, brought tears to his eyes. But to him, it was a divine arrangement he couldn't question.

"My stay in this place and at this time has given me a better insight into how great God is. People who are healthy should treasure it as the greatest gift of Christmas."

He, however, appealed to the authorities to ensure that trucks parked along the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway are evacuated and that the road is quickly repaired to forestall further loss of lives.