

# The Lifeline

## \*How female teacher allegedly flogged student to death in Anambra

From Magnus Eze, Enugu

**ANGER.** Confusion and blame game have trailed the death of Master Izuchukwu Onwualu, an 11-year-old Junior Secondary School (JSS) student of St. Valerian Secondary School, Akpaka GRA, Onitsha, Anambra State. He allegedly died after being flogged by a female basic science teacher in the school.

The incident on January 11 came on the heels of numerous cases of maltreatment and bullying of pupils and students, leading to death in parts of the country, including Lagos and Abuja, by their fellow students and teachers.

Izuchukwu, who hailed from Ogbolieke village, Onitsha, but lived with his parents at Akpaka Government Reserved Area of the commercial city, died with beautiful dreams of becoming a medical doctor.

Sources said Izu, as he was fondly called by his peers, was flogged by the basic science teacher in the school for failing to do his assignment but in the process of reasuring the cane, he allegedly hit his head against the wall. He later developed complicated health conditions the same evening. He was rushed to four different hospitals before he was pronounced dead in a private hospital in Onitsha around 4am the next day.

By Ngozi Nwoko

Izuchukwu was buried in the evening of the same Wednesday after a funeral mass presided over by some priests from St. Mary's Catholic Church, Inland Town, Onitsha. Tongues went wagging that the school wanted to cover up the case with the haste the young boy was buried, coupled with the sum of N200,000 that they reportedly gave to his parents.

When our reporter visited St. Valerian Secondary School last Friday, the school authorities said the education office of the Archdiocese of Onitsha would give an official position on the matter.

But the archdiocesan education secretary, Rev. Fr. Paschal Onwugbeni, said everyone was hurting over the unfortunate incident. He said they would only talk when hearts simmer down and investigations are to avoid misrepresentation of facts.

Discreet information gleaned from some of the students on the school premises revealed that the teacher actually beat the boy on the head with a cane and an empty water bottle when he refused to talk or cooperate while she probed him over his inability to write his assignment.

Some of Izuchukwu's classmates, who did not disclose their identities, said the boy was okay in school after the encounter with the teacher till their dismissal time but everyone was in shock



Funeral mass for Master Izuchukwu

when information filtered the next day that the boy was dead.

"We didn't know that there would be problem though the boy complained that he was having a headache after the beating," one of the classmates said.

There was a gloomy atmosphere at the business premises of the Onwualus within the Akpaka area where Daily Sun trailed them on

Saturday evening. Attempts by his parents, Dubem and Ogochukwu Onwualu, to pretend that all was well at their mini restaurant and provision store were not easy as people discussed the issue in hushed tones. Many of the callers at their shop were on condolence visits while customers who just heard about the incident there immediately

"Tragedy is like strong acid - it dissolves away all but the very gold of truth" **-D.H. Lawrence**

## flogged 11-year-old



Izuchukwu

tendered their commiseration.

The deceased's father said he took his son to the school on a motorcycle that fateful Tuesday morning, only to see him writhing in pain in the evening.

Dubem said he was in the market to get beverages for dinner when his wife called that his son was not feeling fine. On getting home, he met Izuchukwu writhing in pain: "My wife was pouring water on him and, at the same time, crying for help."

He tried to narrate what transpired to our reporter just as he did with other callers but tears rolled down his cheeks. The couple recounted efforts made to resuscitate the boy but he passed on, saying they have handed over



Students of St. Valerian School, Akpaka Onitsha

the matter to God and moved on with their lives. They also begged to be spared further media reportage of the incident.

However, Dubem confirmed that he was the one who actually decided to bury his son immediately after consulting with other family members. He also admitted receiving a condolence purse of N200,000 from the school authorities, led by the Parish Priest of St. Valerian Parish, Rev. Father Victor Ezeanya.

According to him, it was a norm for people to give some token when they go on condolence visits in Igboland. So, the money from the school was for that purpose. He said such

condolence token was called "ego akwa" in Igbo.

He said: "We have resigned to fate, as I don't want the matter to continue to linger. I was the one that called the parish priest of the school to come and offer last prayers so that I will bury him, as there was no need keeping his body in the mortuary. He was buried in our hometown in Onitsha."

"After burying my son, someone called me and was saying that they learnt that I collected N200,000 from the school to quickly bury my son. It is not true. How can I? The school representatives came with the envelope on the day of the burial and, after the ceremony, they presented an envelope to us. When I asked what it was, they said it was 'condolence money,' which is a norm in Igboland. I handed over the envelope to my wife and up until now, we have yet to even opened it."

"So, what is N200,000 that I will collect for the life of my son? I have four children in the

school and I know how much I pay. Although, for now, I have withdrawn my other children from the school. I don't want this matter to continue to linger anymore. I have resigned to fate. All these false information they are putting out there, I don't want it anymore. The money was not meant for me to hurriedly bury my son."

"I miss my son as he was a very helpful and likable fellow, but what can I do? I cannot bring him back."

Izuchukwu's mother, Ogochukwu, described him as a very loving, sociable and hardworking young boy and expressed anger that the school authorities did not deem it fit to close the school for at least one day in honour of her dead son.

She also said they were still waiting for further communication from the school authorities, since their visit on the day the boy was buried.

"We have handed over the whole thing to God. We can't fight; God knows what happened. My grievance is that the school has not come to us again after Izu's burial. I even feel the school can close for one day in honour of my late son who was their student and considering the circumstance of his death. But we have said it, we have left everything to God," she sobbed as she managed to serve a customer a malt drink.

A customer told us that Izuchukwu usually joined the mother in the shop and sometimes took charge of the place for her. He disclosed that the young boy even attended to him a day before the black Tuesday when he came and ate in their shop.

"That boy was good and obedient. I don't know why this kind of thing happened. I even played with him when he served me food on Monday," the customer said.

Daily Sun further gathered that police have waded into the matter by formally inviting both parties to the Central Police Station, Onitsha.



## Making Lagos tourism destination

plan, the strategies required to create an enabling environment to attract investments