How 13-yr-old schoolboy drowned in Abuja River

By Abubakar Yakubu, Abuja

When Rebecca Isaiah Jonah, a middle-aged wife, was leaving for work on Tuesday, March 5, 2025, she expected to return later in the evening to be welcomed by her adopted children, 13-year-old Todd Victory and his sister, Deborah.

The drowned student

But unknown to her, she would never see Todd alive again.

She narrated that when she returned to her home at Kubwa in Abuja that evening, she met Deborah crying at the frontage of their apartment and inquired about the problem.

Jonah said Deborah told her that Todd, a JSS 2 student of Government Junior Secondary School, Kubwa II, had not returned from school, and she sought to know whether he had gone out to read with his classmates.

She said when her daughter informed her that Todd never leaves the house, she then called a teacher in the school, who gave her the principal's phone number, which she called and was instructed to come to the school's premises that night.

The woman said that when she arrived at the school, the principal asked her whether her son had actually come to school that day. He also advised her to go to the police station to make a missing person's report while they carried out their own investigation the following morning.

She disclosed that at the police station, the police officer she met asked her to wait for 24 hours before officially reporting the case, adding that she was told to return the next day.

According to her, the following day, when she got to the police station, the investigation police officer assigned to her case took her statement and also collected her missing son's photograph.

She said that after getting assurances from the police that they would act, she went back to the school that morning to find out the outcome of their investigations.

"While approaching the school's gate with my husband, the principal called my phone, and when I answered, he urged me to come quickly to his office.

"As I got to his office, I noticed he was with some teachers. A female student who recognised me told me that she saw seven students, including my son, going to the river at Phase 4 Kubwa to swim.

"The girl said only four of the students returned to school to pick their bags," the mother lamented.

The grieving mother said after the student's narration, the principal then told her that the river had swallowed her son, and she passed out.

The mother said she was rushed to the hospital where she was placed on admission. She said when she recovered on Friday, she was told that her son's body was recovered from the river at Phase 4 in Kubwa and had been buried by the riverside on Thursday.

After the woman recovered, she took a complaint to the Human Rights Television and Radio programme called 'Brekete Family", where she alleged that her son was pushed into the river by his classmates.

She said from the picture they took of the child's remains, he looked like someone who was strangled and pushed into the river.

"His eyes were almost gauged out, his neck bent and reddish, while his tongue was out," she narrated.

The woman revealed that Todd and Deborah were orphans. In her words, she said both children were entrusted to her care by their parents when Todd was only one year and eight months, and

Deborah was three years old.

She said that as a young spinster, many men would not marry her due to the burden she was carrying, but she did not mind and was focused on taking good care of both children.

"I don't think my heart can take this," she bewailed. "After training my son until he reached 13 years old, some students pushed him into the river to die," she lamented during the programme.

The Principal of Government Junior Secondary School, Kubwa II in Abuja, Mr Akintola Jimi Olayinka, responded during the programme.

He said that when the boy's mother reported the incident on the night of March 5, the investigation began the following morning when it was ascertained that the student was marked present in the morning and afternoon.

He said the form mistress was then ordered to interact with the missing student's friends in the class. That, he said, was where it was discovered that they had gone to swim in a river after school hours, and the boy drowned.

The principal said he, along with some of the school staff members, went to the river on Wednesday, March 6, and learnt that there is a deep well in a section of the river that might have swallowed the student.

He said that when they got back to the school, they invited the parents of all the students who went with Todd to swim to appear in school the next morning.

"While we were briefing the parents of what had happened, a police officer appeared to take the affected students to the police station to write their statements, but I told the officer that I would need to obtain permission from my bosses before that could be allowed.

"A call was made to the Universal Basic Education Board, and a board member said since the parents of the students were with them in the school, we could allow them to go to the police station with their parents, which we did," the principal said.

He said information reached the school that the student's corpse was sighted at a river in Phase 4, Kubwa, on Thursday morning, and he mobilised some teachers and rushed down to the scene.

"The place was like a marketplace with a lot of people observing, and we saw the corpse face down in the river and began to negotiate with natives around to help bring it to the riverbank.

"Some divers were haggling for between N80,000 and N100,000 until one good Samaritan, without asking for money, dived into the river to pull out the corpse, which was buried by the riverside, according to the student's family wish," he said.

The principal disclosed further that the school was presently in mourning due to the student's death, and he advised parents to be close to their children and always monitor their activities after school hours at home.

Mrs Eno Okon, a housewife who lives in Nyanya, Abuja, agreed with the principal's advice to parents.

She said that a few years ago, when her daughter was attending a government secondary school at Nyanya, she noticed one day that she had not returned at the time she normally came.

"When the school closes at 2pm, she would stay for lesson and was expected to return by 4pm or, at worst, 4:15pm. But on that particular day, she came at 6pm, and I started to interrogate her," the woman said.

She said her daughter confessed to her that a female student in their class took about five of them to a mountain outside the school after closing hours, where they spent time chanting certain words.

"I immediately took my daughter to the school the next morning to report the incident, and the school authority called the girl's parent to report the incident, and she was removed from the school," she said.

Malik Osumah, a father, said when his son was attending a government school (name withheld) at Orozo several years ago, he was informed that senior students normally remove the junior ones from the hostels to make them do their domestic work in their homes outside the school premises.

"When the person watching over my son in his school told me this, I confronted the principal, who denied it until one day, when I was driving my son back to school after the holiday, he asked if I still wanted to see him alive, I should take him back home and change his school."

Osumah said he did as his son instructed and immediately changed the school.

The Divisional Police Officer of Kubwa Police Station, Chief Superintendent Paul Lazarus, who had earlier confirmed the incident of the drowned student to the press, was not on seat when our reporter called at the station.

A police officer at the station who declined to give his name said the case had been transferred to the FCT Police Command for diligent investigation.