

The Agony of an Orphan

A seven-year-old boy survives a horrific fire incident that claimed his entire family, but needs help to fully recuperate

By YINKA OMAGE

His soulful eyes, deep wells of pain, stared wistfully from a vulnerable face still recovering from shock. Occasionally, those eyes would well up with tears, and attempts by his minder to wipe off the tears would meet with stiff resistance, even as his whimpering assumed a shriek at this 'audacity'.

For Kayode Adebayo, seven, a pupil of Upper Standard Group of Schools, Itoki, Ogun State, the whole world stood still and life lost all meaning on the night of Monday, May 21, 2007. That was the night he lost both parents and a younger brother to a nasty fire incident in the tiny room the family shared at 12, Onifade Street, Itoki, a sparsely populated area in Ogun State. In the grisly incident reminiscent of an Alfred Hitchcock horror flick, his parents, Peter Adebayo, 41, a carpenter, and Kikelomo, 37, a hairdresser, and his little brother, Femi, five, were all burnt to death. Kayode, the only survivor, had escaped not only with horrible physical scars but also psychological ones.

Kayode, who is now in the care of his maternal aunt, Dolapo Ogungbemi, an auxilliary nurse, recalled how his father had locked up the only window in their tiny room as he does every night and had laid out the chemicals later found to include solignum, sanding sealer, thinner and lacquer, which he employed in the

The Adebayos' one-room apartment after the fire disaster

preparation of the spraying gas that he used in polishing cabinets, on a table. Kayode, who always slept on a mat spread out on the floor near the bed, recollected that his brother, Femi, was fast asleep on the bed. His mother, he said, was sitting in a chair close to the bed. With the light from a lantern to guide him, Peter had filled up a small bottle with some thinner from a four-litre bucket. Suddenly, he said, the small bottle slipped from his father's hand and there was a huge explosion.

Ikhekua, a neighbour of the Adebayos who has a provisions shop just outside the building, recalled how, shortly after 8pm, that night, Kikelomo had purchased some items from her store and had gone back inside. Some minutes later, she said, she heard a blood-curdling scream and rushed out like other neighbours only to notice that smoke was issuing out from the Adebayos' room. "The smoke, acrylic and tear-inducing, was mixed with the anguished screams of the occupants of the room," she said. According to

Ikhekua, the victims were rescued and rushed to the hospital. Kikelomo was reportedly taken to Lantoro General Hospital, Abeokuta, where she died a few hours after. Kayode, who was at the intensive care unit of the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital, LASUTH, Ikeja, for almost two months, was recently discharged for lack of funds to continue vital treatments. Emotionally traumatised and financially incapacitated, the boy, according to his paternal uncle, Stephen Adebayo, a police corporal, has been abandoned by all the sympathisers that came to empathise with the family immediately after the incident:

At LASUTH, where Peter and his two boys were conveyed, Dupe Ogungbemi, younger sister of Kikelomo, relayed the tales of woe: "My brother-in-law was unrecognisable. He was completely burnt, from head to toe.

Kayode, with the death of his parents and sibling, faces a bleak future. His uncle, Stephen, who took brief care of him before he was sent to stay with his maternal aunt, Dupe, lamented recently that his meagre salary was hardly enough to take care of his own family:

Appealing to Nigerians for financial assistance to enable Kayode resume medical treatment from where he left off and also to continue his education, Stephen added that, except a miracle happens, Kayode would end up a destitute person. "Unless he gets financial help, he may find it difficult recuperating, not to talk of returning to school or living any meaningful life," he said.

Additional report by JIDE JEDEDE