

Misis luluai and the raskols

by Siren of Brixton

Subject statement

Subject: Kobe Amakidu, former Manager, Clinicare, Port Moresby.

Date: 11 May 2010

Interviewer: Rob Hastings

My name is Kobe Amakidu. I am twenty-four years old. I am — was -Volunteer Manager at Clinicare, an aid-funded NGO that provides health care. I loved that job.

I first met — do I call her Michelle or Sarah? OK. I first met Michelle Barstowe when she approached Clinicare about volunteering for us. She had a letter of recommendation from one of the charities that fund us. I now believe that letter was fake, but then I had no reason to doubt her.

She was like manna from heaven to us. We never have enough money to serve all the people that come to us for help, so every volunteer is a blessing. Here was a woman who wanted to help, who had her own money! She needed a computer: she bought a computer. And connections: we had been trying for months to get samples from one of the drug companies, and she got it in just a few days. And she would do anything. No job too big, or too small. And she was fearless. The women in the clinic called her misis luluai — it means white woman chief, it was a compliment.

She always wore crazy outfits. High heels and pantyhose. And tight, tight skirts. My wife never trusted her because of that. She said, 'only a woman who doesn't know hard work wears shoes like that.' It was very impractical. But my wife was wrong, she did know hard work.

Yes, you are right, my wife was right not to trust her. I am ashamed of that. I'm ashamed of my behaviour. I am ashamed I found her attractive. I was only married a year when we met! How

could I break my vows? I pray every day to understand, but I don't.

She had been working with us for just a month when our mobile clinics started having problems. We can't afford to run clinics everywhere they are needed, so we have a bus that go up into the Highlands each week. We started having problems with raskols holding up the bus and stealing the supplies.

It was Michelle's idea to go up there to negotiate with them. I should have known better but even then we all believed she could do anything. Me, Thomas Mokolo and Drayton Hamble went with her. They were very angry we had no supplies. And we were unarmed. They took us all hostage and marched us blindfolded through the rainforest to their camp. It was monsoon and we were drenched. They took her away, and left the three of us tied together. No shelter. No food. Just the three of us huddled together in the rain, thinking we were going to die.

Somehow she convinced them that if they let us go, we would bring them more things to sell on the black market, more drugs. No, she never explained how. She was very quiet on the way back to Moresby and when I took her home she begged me not to leave her alone. That is when I broke my vows.

She had an apartment in that complex on Ela Beach. Sunset Palms. It was very modern. She didn't have many personal things around. She said the container was held up in port: that happens all the time.

The next day she was back to normal, full of ideas. She said we should hire an armed guard for the bus. I said we should call the police but she was very against that idea. We argued about it, but in the end we needed to help those villagers, she had the money and she found some people. A big South African called Laurens was the leader, that's who I met. I think he had a couple of Aussies and an islander working for him.

The bus went up into the Highlands on the Wednesday. Michelle went with it; she felt obliged, she said. We got a message on the two-way to say they'd reached the village past where the raskols had been attacking. We celebrated in the clinic — one small victory!

Although really we were worried that the gang might have just moved camp.

The next morning was a total shock. The medical crew contacted us on the two-way: they had been attacked again the day before after all. The raskols only had machetes but the guard opened fire on them. The doctor tried to stop them, and tried to help the wounded, but they threatened him too. The men tied the crew up on the side of the road and took the bus. The crew were freed by a stranger the next day.

We never saw or heard from Michelle again. The crew on the bus said she was upset when the men started shooting but that she was the one who suggested tying them up so they could get away. The police investigated. I was not charged, but I lost my job anyway. The boss said I should have known better, but he met her too. He worked with her. He never said anything. The police told my wife that I was unfaithful and she threw me out of our home. It was a very bad time.

[subject shown a picture of Sarah Barry]

Yes, that is the woman I know as Michelle Barstowe. It doesn't do her justice though. She looks...pristine. She looks pristine so you expect her to be, but really all she does is make a mess of things.

[end tape]

