

Family takes solace in knowing that slain missionary was able to help restore someone's sight

BY SHAUN SMILLIE

Even his own murder couldn't stop Lyle Stephen from giving. Hours after Stephen was gunned down on his way to hand out food parcels at a children's hospice last Thursday, he "gave" his corneas, when doctors harvested them to be used for transplants.

This week, Stephen's family gathered at his sister's house in North Riding to remember their "angel on Earth" - a man who always gave, even though he often had little himself.

They also hope his murder will not go unnoticed. "This can't just be another murder case. We want to make sure that it doesn't happen to anyone else," said Stephen's sister Lauren.

Stephen was shot in the head in the picturesque Valley of a Thousand Hills in KwaZulu Natal where he and a friend, Justin Roberts, were helping out with missionary work.

Last Thursday afternoon they were on their way to deliver food parcels to the IKhayalobomi hospice for children, situated in the Kwanyisa Valley, when they got lost.

According to police reports, they were approached by four men who opened fire through the driver's side window of the car. Stephen was shot in the arm and head.

The men then pulled him out of the car and drove off.

As Roberts cradled Stephen in his arms, the men apparently drove back past them twice.

Stephen died hours later in hospital.

Police later found the car abandoned 6km from where Stephen was shot.

The only things missing were the food parcels.

Stephen (28) had returned to South Africa from the UK on a quest to help the poor. He arrived at Johannesburg International Airport on November 25 with R35 000 in his pocket, from which



IN MOURNING: The late Lyle Stephen's sister, Leeanda Vollmer, is still in search of answers to the brutal killing of her brother. **PICTURE: NEO NTSOMA**

he had allocated R22 000 to be given to the poor.

His plan was to make his way to Lesotho, where he wanted to help start up a community arts centre.

"Lyle had been in the UK since 2003. He was there to make money so he could come back and help people," said his sister Lucasta.

But before reaching Lesotho, Stephen's plan was to hike along

the KwaZulu Natal south coast through to the Transkei region then back again.

It was during this journey that Stephen and Roberts made the tragic detour to the Valley of a Thousand Hills.

In the few days since Stephen's death, his family has been amazed at the response from people, some of whom Stephen had met only briefly.

"So many people have been affected by his death, people from around the world. He seemed to have had an impact wherever he went," said Lauren.

In the Drakensberg, some of Stephen's friends plan to build a memorial to him.

Apparently, according to his family, a tribal chief whom Stephen met in the Transkei even gave him land, on which Stephen had planned to build a rehabilitation centre.

"He did a lot of work in the Magaliesberg. He grew a vegetable garden which he used to feed underprivileged families," said another of Stephen's sisters, Leeanda Vollmer.

A favourite story that the family tells is how Stephen once gave his Volkswagen away.

"What is ironic is that the probably would have defended the people who killed him. He would have blamed their actions on their upbringing," said Vollmer.

Stephen's family have planned a memorial service for him, which was to be held today.

In their time of grief, the Stephen family have taken solace in his last gift.

"There is someone out there who last week couldn't see, now they can see, thanks to Lyle," said Lauren.

"And he had such blue eyes ..."

The final gift from an 'angel on Earth'



MISSED: Lyle died while delivering food parcels.

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ON VIEW: SUNDAY 19TH FEBRUARY 2006 FROM 9:00AM ON WARDS