



Paul Thesen, 48, died on Christmas Day after being one of the world's longest surviving heart transplant patients.

## Man dies under mysterious circumstances

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The family of a man who died under mysterious circumstances in Alexandria has rubbished racial allegations linked to the heart transplant done on their relative more than 30 years ago.

Bushman's River resident Paul Thesen, 48, was discovered slumped on the steering wheel of his vehicle on Christmas Day after police had received calls informing them about a vehicle that was swerving dangerously across the road.

Police spokesperson Captain Mali Govender said two reports were received by the SAPS on the morning of Wednesday 25 December, of a vehicle swerving from left to right between Kenton-on-Sea and Alexandria on the R72. "After a short while, Alexandria police who were on patrol found the vehicle which matched the description, a Nissan 4X4, parked on the main street opposite the Dutch Reformed Church," she said.

The driver was allegedly unconscious when the police arrived at his car. Govender said an ambulance was summoned to the scene and the victim was taken to a local hospital and later transferred to a Port Elizabeth hospital, where he was certified as being brain dead. He died shortly thereafter. The police have opened an inquest docket for investigation. Govender said a post-mortem had been done to establish the cause of death.

In a statement released by Thesen's sister Robin, she dismissed statements which she claimed were published in the media regarding race and apartheid issues. Robin was responding to media reports claiming that a man who was Thesen's friend and the executor of his estate, had reported that he had three hearts during his life time, one being his own and two from donors.

The first, according to the reports, was from a 13-year-old black boy, while the second came from a young white girl, three years later. The media reports also hinted that the transplant was significant to the apartheid government in deciding whether Thesen remained white after the transplant.

In response to these allegations Robin said, "The media articles mentioning (sic) apartheid and race issues are not true. They are unfounded, baseless and nothing more than mischievous lies and the figment of an overactive imagination, as this was purely for a humanitarian cause."

Thesen was one of the world's longest surviving heart transplant patients. Explaining her brother's condition, Robin said, "He developed a heart condition at a very young age and received his first heart transplant at the age of 14 on the 5th of January, 1980.

"It was the heart of an adult man. Unfortunately the transplant was not totally successful and he was given a second donor heart three years later, this time from a young girl who had been fatally injured in a car accident."

Some of Paul's achievements include skydiving and a brown belt in karate. He led hiking trails through Malawi and Botswana, competed in the Para-Olympics in Switzerland in the 1980s, and completed a very successful property development west of Knysna in the 90s.