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Stephen Flatow, father of terror victim and anti-terror advocate, speaks at RCC

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RAMAPO - Just after his 20-year-old daughter, Alisa, was killed in a terror attack in the Gaza Strip, Stephen Flatow had to weigh the decision of what to do about her organs.

"All these things went through our minds - religious issues, social issues. And you say, yes, it's the only thing you can do," Flatow said about his choice to donate her organs. "How could you not share Alisa with those people?"

Flatow, 60, an attorney living in West Orange, N.J., spoke yesterday before a contemporary Jewish issues class at Rockland Community College. He talked to the group about his daughter's 1995 death and his ensuing work promoting organ donation, especially in the Orthodox Jewish community.

Flatow, an Orthodox Jew who wore a small lapel of American and Israeli flags on his suit, said his daughter became closely attached to Israel early on in her life, first visiting the country when she was 11.

"When Alisa came back, she wasn't just a better Jew, she was a better person," he told the group.

During a leave of absence from her studies at Brandeis University, Alisa Flatow wanted to take a vacation with two friends to Gush Katif, a block of Jewish settlements in Gaza.

A Palestinian militant drove a van full of explosives into the bus she was riding and she died a day after the blast.

Stephen Flatow recalled hearing about the incident on the radio, thinking immediately that his daughter was involved.

He flew to Israel the next day and, after consulting with rabbis, decided to donate six of her organs. Three of the organs didn't take, but the three others - her heart, a lung, and a kidney - were successfully given to three Israeli Jews. Flatow said he was able to meet them in 1995.

In an effort to have more Orthodox Jews donate their organs, Flatow helped create the Halachic Organ Donor Society and continues to speak out about his cause to Jewish organizations.

Organ donation for Orthodox Jews is a somewhat thorny subject, as religious law talks about saving others' lives, but also warns against desecrating a dead person's body.

"Organ donation in the Orthodox community is not what it could be," he said. "There is still resistance in the community."

Flatow also found national attention soon after his daughter's murder, when he sued the government of Iran under a 1996 federal anti-terrorism act.

Flatow, who was awarded about \$250 million in the lawsuit, said he fought for years to receive that money, hoping that would in effect weaken Iran's ability to support terrorism in the process.

He said he received a portion of the money in 2001 from an account held by the U.S. government since 1979, and that he had since given away a portion of it to scholarships and to schools and charities in Israel.

Flatow recently became involved locally in what's called "terror-free" investing - a fairly new effort to divest from companies that do business either directly or indirectly with Iran.

"The idea is that it becomes a wedge," Flatow said. "They got to say to themselves, does it pay to deal with the Iranians?"

Top left: Josh Rothstein of Spring Valley, left, listens as Flatow talks to the class.

Left: Gerald From of Monsey listens during the class.
