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I attended the University of Odense in 1993 as a biology student who wanted to educate himself as a professional environmental and animal welfare advocate. Problems occurred when I was told to harm and kill animals, for example, by inoculating them with toxic material. Most of the animal experiments in which we were to participate were not as horrifying as many exercises I have heard about. But still I will not accept any harming of animals in my education. This is a principle for me, and I think it is a healthy one!

The compulsory harmful animal experiments for the pre-graduate biology education at the University of Odense in 1993 included the vivisection of a common mussel; biochemical experiments with liver mitochondria and blood obtained from rats; physiological experiments with grasshopper flight muscles and the frog sciatic nerve; dissections of the earthworm, crab, starfish, grasshopper, cod, and hen; and a toxicology experiment with the inoculation of a living goldfish with radioactive material.

I gave in a conscientious objection to these experiments and suggested that I could do some alternative work instead. The head of the biology department rejected it. He made it very clear to me how little respect the institute offered people who were against animal experiments. And to no surprise for those people who know me, the result was a communication breakdown. Then I had no choice but to leave the University. With the help of a lawyer, I tried to make a legal case against the University for violating my human rights and freedom of conscience, but it was rejected first by the Danish legal authorities, and then by the European Commission of Human Rights in 1996.

Personally I did not ever expect to win the case, not because I did not think I was right, but because the law is not good enough and because of how the system works. The good thing was that because of all this, I was given the opportunity to make a lot of people aware of the problem through a great amount of media attention.

I have learned from all this that it is easy to waste a lot of time and money talking and writing to people who do not want to listen anyway. I have written hundreds of pages to no use—not many people from the establishment want to or dare to help a student if he/she confronts a university! A much more efficient way would be to write articles for student magazines, newspapers, etc. We must inform other conscientious objectors that support networks exist. If you give in a conscientious objection you are automatically under a lot of pressure, and in such situations it really helps to read about or talk to others sharing similar experiences.

We must think about our arguments against animal experiments and educate ourselves to do something about it. The universities will not prevent us from being educated. We are able to educate ourselves. They are not able to keep us in the dark! We should produce a lot of material about alternatives and humane life science approaches to make it clear to everybody that harmful animal experiments are by no means necessary.

The last thing I will mention is that it is always important for conscientious objectors to not forget family and good personal friends. These people can give you much support! It is important to stress that conscientious objection is not only about making enemies. You also have the possibility to make new friends in the animal welfare and animal rights movement. And to speak for myself, I have been very glad to meet all you EuroNICHE people (from all around the world), and to experience that we have so much in common.