

## **Asja Sever, University of Delaware**

In May 2005 as a senior project, I volunteered at Animalearn for a month. Little did I know how big of an impact that experience was going to have on the rest of my life. Learning about animal testing and other forms of cruelty made me realize many things that were hypocritical in my own life, and in the lives of other vegetarians. I became more conscious of what I was buying, whether it was food, clothing, or even shampoo.

Oftentimes I was in the grocery store with some friends, and they were looking at different brands of shampoo or toothpaste. I quickly rattled off which brands tested on animals and which ones did not, which affected their purchase. I would think back to my days at Animalearn, sending letters to companies who tested on animals, with my co-intern Genai Odhner, and smile, knowing that *this* is where the difference is made—in the supermarket or in the restaurant.

After meals was usually when the vegetarian questions started. “That’s not healthy. People need meat” is the most common comment I received. “On the contrary,” I would say as I cleared my throat and prepared them for a fifteen-minute speech filled with perfectly prepared facts and arguments, something I picked up from volunteering at Animalearn. Knowing how to support the various counter-arguments people would use came in handy at times like those.

Now that I’m in college, I face the same situations all over again—new friends and new trips to the supermarket and dinner. I have chances to influence more and more people with whom I come into contact. Recently, I have attended the Students of Holistic Living Meeting and proposed an idea to the President. I suggested to her that we have a concert with local bands to draw awareness to the fact that the University of Delaware, which I attend, has animal tests and/or dissection somewhere in their programs. Although my major, international relations, does not pertain to biological science, and I would never need to dissect or test on animals, I feel it is inhumane and must be stopped. April, the Students of Holistic Living President, told me that this would be a good idea, and that we will concentrate more on it when the spring comes around.

Ever since Genai and I took a stand to eliminate dissection in our high school, I feel like I could do anything. What seemed like such a monumental task was all in our minds. I learned people are reluctant to change if the change is not initiated. By taking the first step, the wheels start turning.

Recently, I have also spoken to April about getting better vegan/vegetarian food in the dining halls and in the small university-operated ‘marts’ around campus. I walked into my local Rodney-Mart the other day and found microwavable organic vegetarian food! It amazed me what I did by just asking. April said it was a long process, which was initiated a few months ago, and that demands from the vegetarian residents in my building have helped quicken the pace of the developments.

All around, Animalearn has motivated me to be active for animals beyond my internship. I am much more aware of the things going on around me, and have certainly wanted to

show others the things I have learned. There are many more things I would like to do in college as well. Our Vegan Club here is not that well organized, and I would like to maybe get in touch with someone and help make it more active and bring those people together. Being vegetarian is an important part of my life, and I'm pretty sure if the right foods were made available to me, being vegan would be a choice for me. Also, I am involved in Amnesty International and Civil Liberties Union, which has exposed me to people with many of the same interests as I have, and helped me build a future network for when we do have a benefit concert in spring, hopefully!