

2012 Lush Public Awareness Prize Winner: Decipher Films, Canada

1. Could you describe who you are and what you do?

My name is Karol Orzechowski, and I am a filmmaker and photographer, based just outside Toronto, Canada. My film production company, Decipher Films, is dedicated to making films on a wide range of topics, which are the combined result of both artistry and activism. Much of my work focuses specifically on issues around animal rights.

2. Why were you nominated for the Prize?

I was nominated for the Prize for my film *Maximum Tolerated Dose*, which is a documentary that explores the issue of animal experimentation through the first-hand accounts of humans and the profiles of animals, who have been involved in animal testing. Beginning in 2010, I interviewed former researchers, scientists and laboratory workers

about their direct experiences and ethical struggles, and I also profiled animal subjects which had been rescued from laboratories, to tell their individual stories. Throughout production, I also engaged in investigative work relating to various aspects of animal experimentation. The result was a feature-length documentary, which was played at film festivals worldwide, has toured on three continents, and is now being released as a DVD.

3. Why did you win the Prize?

I believe that I won the Prize because *Maximum Tolerated Dose* looks at the issue of animal experimentation in a novel way: through the first-hand experiences of those who have walked the thin ethical line of vivisection, and have decided to abandon the practice. The film's focus on direct experience and a discussion of the trauma that animal experimentation can cause, both to humans and non-humans, had



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not previously been explored. I believe that the Lush Prize committee saw the value in the film as both an educational tool — through the stories presented, we learn about the global scope of the animal experimentation industries — and also as a tool to open up a conversation among experimenters themselves, about what is ethically justifiable.

4. What difference has winning the Prize made to your contribution to the goal of *Replacement*?

Maximum Tolerated Dose as a film is not focused on scientific outcomes, and my background isn't scientific; rather, I am a storyteller, and the film is focused on telling individual stories as faithfully and powerfully as possible. Some amazing work is being done in the field of the Three Rs (*Reduction, Refinement and Replacement*), but I believe that my film exists in a different space, as something contributing to a cultural change in how we think about animal experimentation, rather than a procedural shift in scientific research.

5. Could you outline how your work overlaps with current government ethical policy?

It certainly depends on which government you are talking about, though many Western countries enact roughly similar ethical policies. I feel that, here in Canada, as in the USA and much of Europe, there is virtually no meaningful pro-

tection given to laboratory animals. I am concerned, in fact, that their existence as laboratory animals actually precludes them from being protected at all by our already-weak animal welfare and cruelty laws.

Being a documentary advocacy piece that is focused on storytelling, my film does directly overlap with government policy. That being said, however, I have already received some anecdotal stories of the film being supplied to, and viewed by, US government officials, as a way of explaining why policies around mandatory animal trials have created a system that is damaging to both people and animals, and to urge the funding of alternatives. Thus, I can see it serving an educational purpose in a number of contexts.

6. What does winning the Prize mean to you?

Winning the award has allowed us to promote the film widely since its release, and to prepare DVD formats of the film that will reach an even broader audience. The DVD is being released in two very affordable formats, that will allow individuals, advocacy groups, and institutions to carry and present the film. The production of the film and the subsequent DVD package has been entirely independent of any studio or broadcast funding, and so the Lush Prize allowed us to spend the proper amount of time to put the DVD together, and to include subtitles in Spanish, Italian and Polish. Anyone who wants more information can visit the website (www.maximumtolerateddose.org).