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# Maike van Niekerk named Dalhousie University's 90th Rhodes Scholar

Neria Aylward of St. John's and Angela Yu are other recipients from Atlantic Canada this year

By Shaina Luck, CBC News Posted: Nov 22, 2016 6:15 AM AT | Last Updated: Nov 22, 2016 6:15 AM AT



Maike van Niekerk is one of two 2017 Rhodes Scholars from Atlantic Canada. (Shaina Luck/CBC)

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A fourth-year nursing student at Dalhousie University is heading to Oxford, England as one of 11 Canadians named as 2017 Rhodes Scholars.

Dalhousie announced Monday that Maike van Niekerk of Corner Brook, N.L., had achieved the honour and will be the school's 90th Rhodes Scholar.

"I was so excited I started crying," van Niekerk said.

"It's still kind of all setting in. I'm a bit in disbelief, still. I'll probably become even more nervous as the time comes to move to Oxford, but if anything I'm really excited for the challenge and to meet such a diverse group of people."

### Personal connection to oncology

She will complete her PhD in psychiatry at the University of Oxford. She hopes to develop tools to improve the overall well being of cancer patients. She specifically hopes to work with Indigenous Canadian and refugee cancer patients.

When she was 15, van Niekerk lost her mother Katrin to breast cancer. Ever since, she has dedicated herself to helping people with cancer.

In the summer of 2014, she bicycled from St. Anthony to St. John's to raise \$35,000 for cancer treatment.

The funds went to a charity she founded called Katrin's Karepackage, which helps offset the costs for cancer patients who have to travel to medical appointments.

### 'A little bit stressful'

A year ago, she ran seven marathons in seven days across

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Newfoundland to raise money for the Canadian Cancer Society. Van Niekerk's mother was on her mind throughout the Rhodes application process.

"I was thinking about her when I was writing my essay, my personal statement for the Rhodes Scholarship," van Niekerk said. "How she's influenced my everyday life, how she's influenced the way that I treat other people, my future career goals."

She said the scholarship interview itself was "a little bit stressful" but thinking about her mother helped.

"I think she would probably cry and just be so happy for me, but she would also probably have a little bit of an 'I told you so' moment, because she knew that this was probably the field that I would end up going into. She knew that I always loved academics," she said.

### 3 scholars from region

Van Niekerk has received numerous awards for scholarship and for her humanitarian efforts. Van Niekerk will be Dalhousie's 90th Rhodes Scholar.

She is one of three Rhodes Scholars-elect from Atlantic Canada in the 2017 class. Neria Aylward from St. John's, N.L. Aylward is currently studying at Pembroke College, University of Cambridge.

Angela Yu studied biology and women's studies at McGill in Montreal and is another recipient from the Maritimes.



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