

# Sally McKechnie

Born 1975

## Lawyer

Sally McKechnie describes the scholarship application process as very rigorous, involving 'about 400 zillion forms', six referees, a statement of intent, an essay about herself and an interview with a panel of seven at Otago. And that was before the national selection process was carried out. She admits, 'I didn't think I would actually win'.

At the interview at Government House, she 'spent a lot of time thinking – "what am I doing here?"'. The one-hour 'intellectually gruelling' interview was adjudicated by a panel of seven luminaries, including previous Rhodes

scholars, the governor-general, professors and a high court judge. She told *University of Otago Magazine*: 'You see your application on the table in front of them, all covered in circles and highlighter marks. It was terrifying'.

The names of the winners were read out alphabetically. When the name Duncan McGillivray was read out her heart sank, because 'I was not sufficiently *compos mentis* to realise that "McG" is still before "McK" in the alphabet'.

Her reaction once her name was announced was that of disbelief. Winning the scholarship has been an overwhelming experience for McKechnie. She describes the change in her lifestyle 'from a junior solicitor in Wellington to rowing at 6am on the Isis, bike-lights on the front to warn oncoming boats'.

Now back in Wellington and working as Assistant Crown Counsel at the Crown Law Office, McKechnie maintains that Oxford was wonderful, 'seeing and learning things that I wouldn't have otherwise'.

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*'They flew us to Wellington for this incredibly intimidating cocktail party, where they ask very cocktaily things like, "So do you think it was Mountbatten's fault India was partitioned so poorly?"'*

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Sally McKechnie in New York where she spent time as an intern at Columbia University before returning to New Zealand. (Photographer: Blake McElDowney, *University of Otago Magazine*)