

Butler Eagle

BC3 grad travels long way

Student of Year born in S. Africa

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BUTLER TWP — Renate Muller is not your typical Butler County Community College graduate.

The 33-year-old South African native and newly minted nurse graduated magna cum laude from the college Wednesday night.

Muller, who previously taught young children in Taiwan, was swayed into studying nursing following a family tragedy, after a car accident left one of her younger sisters, Douwne, a quadriplegic.



Renate Muller, 33, a native of South Africa, is the Butler County Community College Student of the Year. She graduated magna cum laude from the college Wednesday night with a nursing degree.

“When she broke her neck, I was in the hospital for eight months with her,” she said. “The nurses were so amazing in the ICU. They were so compassionate.”

“They understood what was going on, and they tried to teach us what was going on. We asked questions day in and day out, and they were never impatient with us. That's where I got my feet wet with the nursing.”

Her younger sister and her parents moved to Chambersburg, Pa., around the same time Muller was considering nursing school, further motivating her to move to the United States.

She decided to attend BC3 after hearing about the nursing program from her brother-in-law, who also attended the college. Her older sister, Helene Rovnan, and her family live in Saxonburg, and that's where Muller has lived since moving to the United States at the end of 2010.

Since enrolling in the spring of 2011, the BC3 Student of the Year has been involved at the school as a student ambassador, leading tours and answering questions for prospective students; a student representative for the Committee of Academic Affairs; a member of Phi Theta Kappa, the college honors society, and had a work study job in the Admissions Office.

“Every time, if an opportunity comes, and if I could do it, I would, because why wouldn't you? The campus, the people have done so much for me, why wouldn't I give back?” Muller said.

“I don't think I'll ever be able to give back the amount of support I've received. It's been amazing.”

She added, “Since I set foot on this campus, it's been fantastic from the start. Everyone has been so helpful. Everybody was so interesting. I've had a very, very good experience.”

On top of all that, she also needed to focus on nursing studies and get acclimated with American culture.

Even with juggling all of her responsibilities, BC3 instructors describe her as a model student. “She is very smart. She has fantastic critical thinking skills. She's very professional,” said Julia Carney, who taught Muller several times in lectures and clinical rotations.

“She's very intuitive with patients and our patients' needs. Not just disease wise, but just emotional, psychological. Things that go on besides giving medication.

“She understands what the patient feels. She has great communication with her patients. And her patients truly enjoyed having her because she always took the time, cared for her patients, more than just passing meds.”

Muller's two sisters and her parents, Douw and Linda Muller, were at her graduation. She also has a third sister, Corlia, who is a kindergarten teacher in Vietnam.

Muller hopes to live in this area and to get a job at a Pittsburgh hospital.

When she's not studying, she enjoys exploring the outdoors, running and camping. She ran the Pittsburgh Marathon in 2012, and the half marathon this year.