

Saints Graduate Recognized for Her Spirit and Inspiration

It did not take long for **Jennifer Castro '22** to have as big an impact on her college as she did at Canterbury. A marketing major at Boston College, Jen was named the 2022 BC Strong Scholarship recipient, an annual award that celebrates a student with a permanent physical disability who has overcome adversity.

Jen is the sixth recipient of the scholarship established by a group of 2005 Boston College graduates to honor their friend and classmate, Patrick Downes, and his wife Jessica Kensky, who were seriously wounded in the Boston Marathon bombings in April 2013. Members of her new Boston College family are quickly discovering what we already knew—Jen Castro is an extraordinary person.

“Jen’s infectious spirit, resiliency in the face of obstacles, and



Patrick Mills, Boston College Class of 2024

determination to care for others breathe fresh inspiration into the mission of the BC Strong Scholarship,” Patrick said. “When you are in her presence, you just know she is special and will leave a lasting imprint on any community she is a part of.”

She already has. Although Jen was born without a left arm below the elbow, she has not let that stop her from doing great things in the classroom and beyond. At Canterbury, she played varsity basketball and lacrosse and was

a member of the School’s Honor Society. Jen credits the hilltop with providing a supportive environment that has greatly aided her transition to BC in a number of important ways.

“Canterbury prepared me well socially. It is a very warm community; you are expected to walk around campus without AirPods in your ears so you can say hi to everybody,” she said. “That has made it easier for me to meet people here at BC. The hilltop helped me with time

Top: Jessica Kensky, Ansel-Ikaei Kufta, and Patrick Downes join BC Strong Scholarship recipient Jennifer Castro '22 (second from left).

Above: A young Jen with famed journalist and sportscaster Bryant Gumbel at a Wounded Warrior event.

management as well. Canterbury has such a packed day, and it was great having that structure before coming here. Also, I benefited from taking rigorous AP courses. If I had any advice for students, it would be to take those optional AP



At left and below: Jen with mentor Greg Reynolds at the Wounded Warriors Amputee Softball Team Kids Camp in 2014, doing one-armed pushups and learning how to tie her shoes.

Opposite page, bottom left: Appearing on MSNBC’s *Sports Matters* with host Rob Simmelkjaer and two Wounded Warrior mentors.

Bottom right: a 2015 visit to a children’s hospital in South Carolina.

tests because you can get a head start on a lot of core requirements in college. Stay on top of your work.”

One thing Jen has stayed on top of is being a mentor for younger children who face some of the same challenges she did growing up. She has been active in both Wounded Warriors and the Challenged Athletes Foundation. “When I was 11, I attended the Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team camp,” she shared. “It is run by veterans who all led normal lives before being wounded at war. They show young people that life without a limb is limitless, and you can do whatever you want despite any differences you have. My mindset switched after that. So many people are willing to help me, so why shouldn’t I help other people?”

That mindset led Jen—who has used a prosthetic since she was six months old and did not learn how to tie her shoes until she was 12—to continue her involvement with Wounded Warriors. She traveled with the softball team for games and joined them for hospital visits

as far away as South Carolina. “We went to many different hospitals and hung out with kids who had just been through surgery due to cancer or an accident or something like that,” she recalled. “We would tell them, ‘Look at us; it’s going to be okay. We are still having a great life.’”

Jen has also done some traveling for Challenged Athletes, a foundation benefiting athletes looking for help with prosthetics. “They granted me my first softball prosthetic in 2017,” she said. “In 2019—my first year at Canterbury—I flew out to California for their triathlon event in which many amputees participate. Meeting young kids there was awesome. You pair up with a younger child who has a disability and run a 5K with them. There are so many cool people who are looking to help.”

Jen is certainly one of those “cool people”—and we could not be prouder that she is a Saint.

