

# She is that girl

## 2001 graduate inspires movement, women's

**It started here. Ten years ago, 2001 Westlake** graduate Alexis Jones sat in these desks, listened to these teachers and became the girl who would start a revolution. With more than 15 chapters participating locally and 32,000 likes on Facebook, 27-year-old Jones has influenced millions with her female empowerment movement. She's just one girl who had a dream and who wanted to change the world, one person at a time.

"Who I am is because Westlake believed in and supported me," Jones said. "I credit so much of my success to having come from Westlake. [I knew] I made it in life when I got a phone call from Westlake asking me to come and speak. I think when people ask me what is the most important talk I've ever given, and having just been to the White House to speak, I still say speaking at my high school. It meant so much to me to walk into those halls and get to have that conversation with a group of students whom I really care about."

When Jones spoke to Westlake students Feb. 11, she had a chance to reconnect with her teachers and come back to her roots. A large part of her success today can be traced back to the life lessons and ideals her teachers instilled in her.

"I had the most incredible teachers at Westlake," Jones

said. "They cared so much about me as an individual, not just as a student, and that really gave me confidence. When you have teachers saying, 'Hey kid, you've got real potential,' that's when it really starts. Ms. [Denise] DeMartino, for me, really defined that smart is the new sexy. She taught me it's cool to be the smart girl."

Jones carries with her the concept of beauty that she gained in high school

### how to get involved

Go to [www.iamthatgirl.com](http://www.iamthatgirl.com)

"I think it starts with the **individual**," 2001 graduate Alexis Jones said. "I could list all these ways to get involved in the organization, but I would rather set the **challenge** to be what we are preaching. Be that girl. I know that sounds cheesy, but I mean it. Be the **best version** of yourself. That's what I really ask."

as she shares her message through her company, i am that girl. The name of this beauty message is Bellism.

"Bellism is an idea, but ideas are what can change the world," Jones said. "While it's easy to chalk it up as the 21st-century women's movement, it's really so much bigger than that — it's a human movement where we are all reminded of the preciousness, fragility, power and reverence women deserve. The coolest part is I get to watch real men step up to the plate and make this mission their own as much as any girl. I believe revolutions start with a single thought, but the vehicle of change are the people who buy into that insane thought and make it everyone else's reality."

During her sophomore year of college at the University of Southern California,

Jones' ideas for i am that girl blossomed when she saw a progressive play about women's rights by Eve Ensler.

"I realized that I was really passionate about women's issues, mainly because I just didn't know that all these atrocities were going on with women around the world," Jones said.

"Quite frankly, it really pissed me off because I didn't know that things from child marriage to acid burning were going on, and I remember thinking that I could wake up every day and fight [against] that."

From Ensler, Jones discovered how she would spread her newfound message to the world.

"Eve Ensler taught me to entertain first and educate second," Jones said. "Rather than come to a high school and say, 'I'm going to talk to you about integrity,' I just want to entertain. I have all these stories — about being on *Survivor*, about winning *The Price is Right*, hiking

Mount Everest and [losing] one of my very dear friends, Ashley, in a car accident. I would much rather use my storytelling capabilities, and have someone learn something within that story. Through my stories, it allows me to have a more important conversation. After having this crazy exciting story about *Survivor*, I can say, 'By the way, let's talk about integrity. Let's talk about how challenging it was for me to not sell out my best friend for \$1 million. Let's have a conversation about what integrity really looks like.'"

Although there have been many obstacles since she began her company, Jones persevered, relying on the gratification of impacting girls everywhere to keep her going.

"When things get hard, I have a file on my computer called 'WHY' [filled with emails girls have sent me]," Jones said. "They're all these happy emails, and I called it 'WHY' because every time I wonder why I do this, I go back and read all these emails and all these notes. I think you have to know why you're doing what you're doing because the moment you forget or lose track of why, you're pretty much done."

Out of the thousands of emails in her "WHY" folder, Jones was particularly moved when she received one from a model in New York.

"[One person who emailed me was] a model, and she had just lost one of her best friends from anorexia," Jones said. "She wrote me one really late night, saying she had come across our website and had seen clips of me speaking. She said she was quitting the modeling industry and felt like I was the only person in the entire world who was going to understand that. She saw her best friend die because they were telling the models, 'You're too fat. You're too fat.' She said, 'I can't live like this anymore. I feel like I'm living a lie. I am struggling. I'm not eating, and in work I'm being rewarded for it. Everyone thinks I'm crazy for leaving, but [if I don't] it will cost me my life.' It was one of the more profound emails I will ever receive."

However, the most rewarding moment came to Jones during a conversation she had in Florida.

"I was hired to speak at three [Paul Mitchell beauty] schools in Florida, and some of the owners took me out to eat," Jones said. "We're sitting there, eating this divine meal, and I look over, and there's this older man with his daughter. He looks

Alexis Jones has  
**100,000**  
followers on her websites  
including social media

# empowerment

over and says, 'Are those mashed potatoes good?' I was like, 'They're so good. Here.' I make a bite for him, put it on a plate and take it over. We start chatting, and I say, 'I have this empowerment company. I'm actually speaking tomorrow. I think you should take off work, and you should come and listen to me speak.' I don't

even know why I said this, but I [was] totally trying to get this guy to skip out on work to come hear me, some girl who runs an empowerment company for girls, speak. I wrote down all the details. I was like, 'I hope to see you there.'"

Jones was surprised to find that simply sharing her mashed potatoes could lead to a memorable event that would impact both of their lives.

"He showed up the next day, totally playing hooky at work," Jones said. "So I give my little talk, and I actually talk about Ashley, my dear friend who passed away in a car accident. I use that story to talk about resilience. We get done, he shows up crying and little did I know, he had just lost his wife three days prior. He said, '[Last night while eating at her favorite restaurant] was one of the hardest nights in my entire life, and you, out of nowhere, came up to me. I got into my car to go to work, just like any other day, and it was just pulling on me to come. I was just going to stay for 15 minutes, but I stayed for the entire thing. I've never felt so much like God told me exactly what I wanted to hear through you. I'm just trying to be the best possible dad for my daughter. After listening to this, I want my daughter to be involved. This would have made my wife so proud. My wife would have wanted to be a part of something like this.' You never know who you're talking to. You never know what's going on in their lives. It was really special for me. We've stayed in touch ever since."

Although she has already touched many lives, Jones continues to look forward and set revolutionary goals for herself and her movement.

"I think when you invest in people and individuals specifically, it allows you to see the most beautiful side of why we're here."

—Alexis Jones



photos by Theo Doucet



When speaking to students at Westlake, 2001 graduate Alexis Jones encourages them to get involved. "How many conversations do you have in a day?" Jones said. "Thousands? Donate one of them. Like at lunch, say, 'By the way, do you know what Bellism is?'"

While on a return trip to her alma mater Feb. 11, Jones (third from left) visits with Student Council members juniors Sarah Butler and Caroline Furst, sophomores Bril Flint, Thomas McNair, Kael Anderson, Spencer Flynn, Rusty Hutson and Tanner Thompson and freshman Grace Robertson.

## What is Bellism?

"Bellism is our rendition of the 21st century **battle cry** for the women's movement," 2001 graduate Alexis Jones said. "Rather than deconstruct the **negative stereotypes** regarding 'Feminism,' we've coined a new word with a new mission. We are committed to **redefining** our society's narrow definition of **beauty**, to build a powerful community for girls and to inspire authentic confidence in women everywhere. We are also determined to **celebrate** the phenomenal men who love and support phenomenal women. We're looking to make smart the **new sexy**, inspire contribution over consumption and collaboration over competition."

"The real mission statement of Bellism is to inspire authentic confidence in girls and women everywhere," Jones said. "And that is a very, very bold goal. My goal for Bellism would be to build the most powerful community that our country has ever seen for women and including the powerful men who support them. [I would like to see a place] where girls are getting to come in and have a conversation about something bigger than themselves. That brings tears to my eyes to actually think about what that would look like."

Throughout her journey, Jones has found success and fame through publicizing her company. However, for her, the real satisfaction comes from connecting with individuals and touching their lives.

"Recently [I was] personally invited by Michelle Obama to the White House to meet her and discuss i am that girl," Jones said. "But it's never about the Michelle Obama meetings. In all of those big moments, I can genuinely say none of that touches the individual conversations I have with girls after a talk. Nothing. There's always one person who comes up and says, 'What you've done has changed my life.' I get paid more in listening to those beautiful confessions than any dollar amount. Because that's real. The TV shows, the glitz, the glam, the White House, it's just icing. Sprinkles. But why I get up out of my bed every day is for the model in New York who had a revelation that she didn't want to lose her life to anorexia just to be someone else's standard of beauty. It's for the dad who just lost his wife three days before. All these individual lives that I have the luxury of getting to play even the smallest role in, that's where the magic is."

—Hailey Cunningham and Zelda Mayer