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## After the Quake: Melissa Meyer '16 Studies Fukushima Disaster

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# After the Quake

**After experiencing the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan, Melissa Meyer studies the government's response**

When the strongest earthquake ever recorded in Japan hit on March 11, 2011, Melissa Meyer '16 was stuck for eight hours on a bus between her home in Tokyo and her high school in the suburbs. Then, when she learned the earthquake and resultant tsunami had caused a meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, she barely left her apartment for weeks.

"You can't really do anything in nuclear fallout and so there was a huge amount of worry," she said. "And then there were the aftershocks. The earthquake didn't just stop, it kept going. Every few minutes for a month there were tremors."

The disaster was blamed for 15,887 deaths and left Meyer questioning whether the Japanese government had done enough to keep people safe and informed. By the summer, when she evacuated to the United States with her Japanese mother and American father, she'd already learned that many of the things she'd taken for granted—electricity, food, and safety—could easily be taken away.

Meyer was born in Japan (where her parents, Minako and Joe Meyer '79, met) and attended the American School in Tokyo. Last winter she spent Jan Plan working for Japan's Financial Services Agency, the equivalent of the Securities and Exchange Commission. This summer Meyer drew on her own experience and resulting interest, working closely with Professor of History Paul Josephson. Meyer's research will become a chapter in a book Josephson is writing



*Melissa Meyer '16, who was home in Tokyo during the Fukushima disaster in 2011. Meyer went on to study government response to natural disasters. At right, devastation three days after the tsunami.*

called *Technostories*. She's written case studies of Fukushima, Hurricane Katrina, the *Exxon Valdez* and Deepwater Horizon oil spills, and the 1984 chemical leak in Bhopal, India, to see how responses to those disasters have missed the mark.

In the process, she's learning that history is as much about the future as it is the past.

"Before, I was just blaming the government," Meyer said. "But by this research I was able to step back and see it from a more unbiased way. I realized that we can't keep blaming people because it's already happened, and what we need to do now is figure out a way to prevent this thing from happening again."

—Jacob McCarthy



*AP Photo by Tsuyoshi Matsumoto, the Yomiuri Shimbun*