

# Colby



Colby Magazine

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Volume 104  
Issue 1 *Summer 2015*

Article 6

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July 2015

## How Soon We Forget: The Luxury Of Disaster Amnesia

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### Recommended Citation

Pongan, Lauren (2015) "How Soon We Forget: The Luxury Of Disaster Amnesia," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 104 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol104/iss1/6>

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## How Soon We Forget The luxury of disaster amnesia

By Lauren Pongan '09

When super Typhoon Haiyan, one of the strongest storms in recorded history, hit the Philippines in November 2013, the damage was catastrophic. An estimated 6,000 people died and 3.6 million were displaced or otherwise affected.

More than a year has passed, but I haven't forgotten. My father was born and raised in the Philippines, and I have family and friends there. My connection to the country and culture inspired me to apply to my current master's degree program in international studies, focused on the Philippines.

For me, the effects of the disaster weren't wholly abstract. Shortly after Typhoon Haiyan hit, I was privileged to travel to Leyte, Philippines, and do some relief work. My language skills and my community of friends from the region helped me to meet typhoon survivors and record their experiences in both words and photos.

So of course I remember. But no surprise that now, if I mention Typhoon Haiyan, people only hazily recollect it. People are, with good reason, highly focused on Nepal and its recent devastating earthquakes.

After that trip and attentively watching the Philippines attempt to rebuild, I've become increasingly interested in studying disaster. How does disaster amnesia function for the international community? Why does anyone only care about the Philippines when a typhoon hits, even though their situation surrounding poverty, corruption, and hunger is pretty dire the rest of the time too?

*Lauren Pongan '09 asks questions, and provides thought-provoking answers. For the complete essay, go to [Colby Magazine online](#).* 