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## **Hanging Out with Janice**

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By Lauren Kelly-Jones on [February 23, 2013 3:33 PM](#)

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Hi, I'm Lauren, a third-year Law, Letters & Society and English double-major from London. Here's what happened when I got to hang with Janice Guzon...



"I want to understand how society works, and what I can do to change it."

For Janice Guzon, the winner of [Glamour's Top 10 College Women Readers' Choice Contest](http://www.glamour.com/inspired/blogs/the-conversation/2013/01/the-2013-top-ten-college-women.html) (<http://www.glamour.com/inspired/blogs/the-conversation/2013/01/the-2013-top-ten-college-women.html>) , it all started with a letter. "It was my Junior summer [of High School], and my family got a letter from my Aunt back in the Philippines asking for money to buy eyeglasses, which kind of took me by surprise because I couldn't understand why...of anything...she would be asking for eye-glasses."

Sitting on the sofas in the Reynold's club, Janice - who was born in the Philippines and moved to the United States at the age of four - tells me about the moment she realized that poor vision and limited access to eye care are problems that often amplifies themselves. "My Dad read the letter out-loud," she says, "and it became pretty apparent to me that the reason why she couldn't get the money to buy the eye-glasses was that she couldn't see well enough to work. It was a cycle, which intrigued me."

So in 2008 she founded EYEsee, a non-for-profit that organizes the donation of eyeglasses to poverty stricken countries, which led to her winning the Glamour award in January for her outstanding contribution to global health. But from the beginning, Janice had big intentions. "From the very beginning I told my friends that I don't just want to go door to door. I wanted to have a much larger impact."

Eventually, Janice created a structure that would allow EYEsee to both personally collect glasses, and manage partner organizations and drop-off destinations. "I decided that we would create an 'End-to-End' process," she says, "It's really grown from that vision into a reality with a very concrete structure." Although the organization began with just collecting glasses at churches, senior homes and schools, they've since expanded into optical stores and public and private offices, including AT&T. Now, more

than 31,000 people in countries such as Haiti, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Uganda have received donated pairs of eyeglasses.

And it helps. "You're really raising their quality of life, and allowing them to be productive and employable members of the community," she says. But that doesn't mean that the organization hasn't had their share of problems, too.

Janice admitted that when it comes to distribution, the agencies they work with to send the glasses out have difficulties: "Some places they just can't reach." Which is why she'll be using the \$1500 prize money from Glamour to pursue her vision of permanent EYEsee Vision Centers in developing countries, in order to provide year round ophthalmological services to people in remote and dangerous, medically under-served areas. "[When I graduate] I think I want to take up EYEsee full time," she says "and apply my policy and sociology knowledge to international development work."

We were in the same storytelling class in our first year at UChicago, and as you can probably tell, Janice told pretty good ones. When getting to know people here, the *why UChicago* question often comes up. What drew her here was the Life of the Mind, she explains, "There's theory behind everything. I wanted to know that I would have a holistic understanding of an issue." If the issue is global eye care, I'm pretty convinced she's an expert.

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