

## 2023 AAS SETF Interview Transcript

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Totality is a metaphor for life. You know—it is brief, intense, fleeting. You experience it, you live it, you're in that moment. And then it's over.

I live and breathe eclipses.

I'm Kate Russo—Author, Psychologist, and Eclipse Chaser, and Founder of Being in the Shadow. I do many things related to eclipses. The two main areas that I'm involved in are the experience of totality and community eclipse planning.

I first became addicted to eclipses after my first total solar eclipse.

I had always wanted to see one. Circumstances happened in 1999 where I was able to get into the path of totality to see my first total solar eclipse.

I thought it was going to be something that I would experience once. I was not prepared for it to have such an impact on my life. I was not expecting the experience would change the trajectory of my whole life and my career.

It wasn't until 2005 when for the first time I did an eclipse trip as a participant with other eclipse chasers. I realized we are a unique group of people with similar values, priorities, and ways of thinking about the world. And I thought: someone needs to look at this group of people.

There is something unique about the total eclipse experience and something unique about the people who chase them. Our outlook, our connection, our gratitude. I really did feel that someone should explore this further. It took me a little while to figure out that someone actually should be me. That's when I started looking into the experience of totality.

After the total eclipse in Australia in 2012 I became much more involved in eclipse planning, and have actively been involved in planning since then. I was heavily involved in planning efforts for the 2017 total eclipse. After a little break, the Solar Eclipse Task Force reached out again to say, hey, you know, we want you to be part of this planning effort leading into the solar eclipses of 2023 and 2024.

And I've been a very active member ever since. These people are my tribe.

I get invited to do presentations for a variety of audiences—from astronomical groups to town halls, library events, private businesses, and community groups. Anybody and everybody. I relate the total solar eclipse experience as a human experience. You don't have to be someone who knows about astronomy to enjoy it, understand it, or make sense of the experience.

From that perspective, I reach a wide audience and engage in a lot of media too. I'm also championing eclipse coordinators on the ground because they usually have not experienced totality before but must share the experience with others. They do not know what's involved or how difficult things can be to prepare a community and all the decisions you need to make.

I think that is probably my most important role— championing and supporting those doing the hard work on the ground.

I also work with the Chamber of Commerce, to bring businesses together to help them think about what they need to do to support the community and prepare for the eclipse.

I work with a range of companies, event planners, and stakeholders as well. I work with a variety of audiences.

Everyone involved in the AAS Solar Eclipse Task Force is really quite passionate about sharing the experience and doing outreach about the eclipse to the general public.

I live and breathe eclipses, and others involved with the taskforce live and breath eclipses too.

A total solar eclipse is life itself. It is just everything, and who I am.

I consider totality a nature event. I know it's a celestial event, but it's a nature event because, as I have said many times, it happens above you, around you, and within you. Totality is something so profound and unexpected, different and unique. As an experience, it really is unlike anything else.

We experience a complexity of emotions during totality. But it's not just during totality — intense emotions happen in the lead-up to the event, during the event in-the-moment, and then afterwards as well.

Can the totality experience be summed up in one word? One Emotion? (pause). I actually think is impossible, because there are so many sensations and emotions that happen to us within a very short period of time. It is bigger than anything.

A total solar eclipse is one of the biggest triggers of awe that we could possibly experience in the natural world. Totality is so immersive, beautiful and unexpected. I am a psychologist, so the emotions, what we feel and experience, and how we make sense of it fascinates me.

A total solar eclipse is the perfect metaphor for life. You know, you really have to embrace life's moments when you can. This is why I will spend my life chasing total eclipses because it's the metaphor for how life should be lived.