

2023 AAS SETF Interview Transcript

Tyler Nordgren, PhD

This is going to be unlike anything you've ever seen experienced. It is going to blow your mind as you line up with the sun and moon and the entire universe aligns with you.

My name is Tyler Nordgren. I'm an eclipse artist. I do artwork for national parks and other

I've actually got a Ph.D. in astronomy, so I approached eclipses from the standpoint of scientist. But maybe I should even back up. My first eclipse was one that went over my house when I was nine. So, I've been around eclipses for the last 46 years.

I have always loved science. I've always loved astronomy. I read Carl Sagan's Cosmos. And so in 1979, when totality was coming to me, I loved it. I read everything about it. I was super excited. This was going to be the moment of my life. Up till that point.

I started out, interacting with students, with the public, the visitors to national parks, those are the folks that I'd give talks to, lectures to, I started drawing my posters and writing my books for. But honestly, for the last few years, I don't talk to anybody. I'm just an artist here in my studio. So that's weird.

They are the neatest mix of people that come to those as eclipse workshops. You've got the scientists, you've got organizers, but like the people that are like the Eclipse Task force organizers for their own individual town. They tend to be just these people and honestly, often women who are like, "Well, nobody else was going to stand up and do this." So they decide, "All right, I'm going to organize the eclipse." So it's an amazing mix of people!

A total solar eclipse is when the moon passes in front of the sun and the moon's shadow falls here on the earth. And from my standpoint, most importantly, when its shadow falls on you.

I think the one thing that I would say I feel is, or it really is the most unnatural, natural thing, and it just makes the hair on my neck stand up.

When I first started out communicating to people about eclipses, it was all about the science. I wrote a book about the science of eclipses. I wanted people to know exactly what it was they were looking at. But really, over the last decade, especially as I've transitioned from being a scientist to an artist, the thing that's really stuck with me is you don't have to know any science whatsoever to be absolutely blown away by an eclipse. So my number one goal is to get you there. If you don't know anything about science, I don't care. Just stand in the shadow of the moon. And that's what I do with my art.

One piece of advice I'd give to organizations, businesses, people in the path of an eclipse is, take the time for yourself. Nobody needs to be doing a bank transaction during totality. Nobody is going to be ordering a hamburger during totality. Nobody should be cleaning a hotel room

during totality. Everyone needs, just if nothing else, that 15 minutes, that half an hour, just takes that time. Go outside and look up.