THE GREAT AMERICAN SOLAR ECLIPSE OF 2017 THAT I WASN'T PREPARED FOR!

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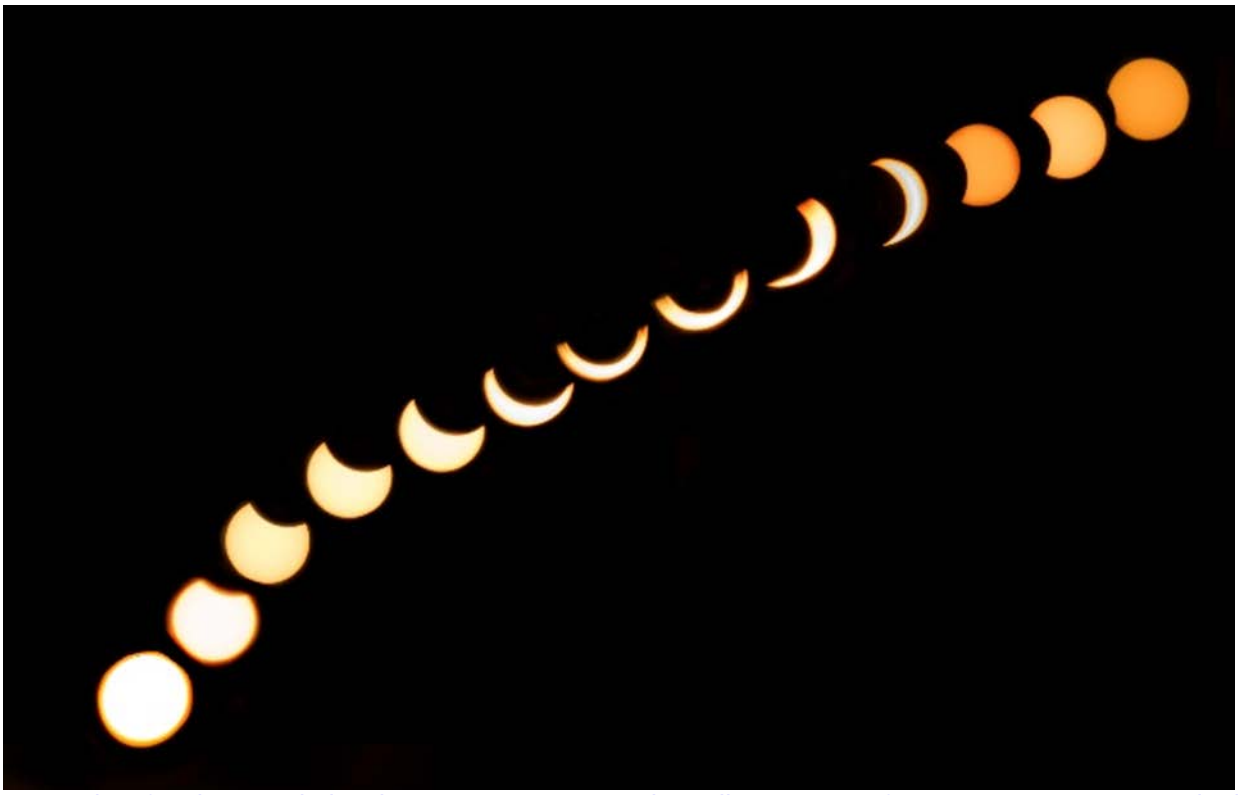

Composite of 13 images during the August 21, 2017 Solar Eclipse as seen from 39° 22' 49.584" N Latitude by 106° 18' 34.992" W Longitude in Colorado, USA.

I was excited about being relatively close to the path of totality at least three years before the eclipse. I even thought we may be able to drive up to Wyoming to watch it. In the weeks leading up to it, all my favorite media outlets hyped up the importance of actually experiencing the total eclipse, and having a life altering experience. I bought into it. However, as for most small business owners, life takes over, and we are not able to do what we want at any given time. Still, given that the Vail Valley in Colorado fell into the predicted path of 92% of totality, I was going to embrace it and experience as much of it as possible.

About a week before the eclipse, I realized that I really needed to get some specialty supplies to watch it, and definitely to photograph it. Most, if not all, people I asked, knew that they needed special eye protection to look at the sun. However, what many didn't know is that a camera's digital sensor and various other mechanisms are vulnerable to the sun's rays, as well. In fact, with the magnifying power of a telephoto lens, my camera would be more vulnerable than my eyes. There are some excellent shops and on-line proprietors of such goods in the U.S., where I could have gotten all the necessary provisions for my adventure, but a week before the eclipse, just about everyone was sold out of everything. I managed to find one seller of solar glasses that were of a legitimate quality, but were available only in bulk packages of ten

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pairs. I ordered one of the last three packages they had left in stock. A couple of days before the eclipse, I was the most popular person in the Vail Valley, I presume, as I had spare pairs of solar glasses to give away, when no one could get any anywhere. I considered my small investment as a public service, saving many a pair of eyes from certain blindness, or in the least from future cataract or glaucoma. For my camera, the road was more difficult. Even my favorite large photography supply superstore in New York was sold out of every lens mountable solar filter. I wanted to photograph the eclipse with the longest lens I owned, a 600 mm telephoto, but at this point, I was willing to settle for any solar filter that matched the diameter of any lens I had. No such luck. I decided to go the DIY (Do It Yourself) route. I was going to get a SolarLite white-light solar filter film sheet and a few rubber bands to cover my lens and try to get the images that way. However, I quickly found out that even the film was completely sold out everywhere. I did some research and learned that since my magnification level was below 100 times the normal angle of view (a 600 mm lens magnifies 12 times the normal angle of view), I could use the silver-black polymer white-light solar filter film sheet (the same material used in solar glasses) and be safe, and of course, my favorite New York superstore had one last packet of this film remaining, which I promptly ordered with 2-day shipping to ensure a timely arrival. I don't think I was ever this anxious watching the shipping tracking updates than two days before the eclipse. It was all coming together, and I felt like something really big and really important was about to occur.

August 21, 2017 10:20 a.m.

According to a local news source, the solar eclipse was going to start just about 10:21 a.m., reach 92% of totality at 11:44 a.m. and end at about 1:12 p.m. On August 21st, 2017, I made sure I had no appointments and was going to figure everything out in the morning before the start of the eclipse. Once, I rubber banded the solar filter film sheet to my lens, I realized I had no good way of finding the sun. The only thing I could see through the viewfinder of my camera was the sun, but only if I pointed the lens directly at it. However, since I could not look at the sun without my solar glasses, I could not see my camera to aim the lens at the sun. It became a delicate dance of taking my solar glasses on and off and moving the lens in small

increments to finally catch the sun in the view finder. When I finally saw it, it was larger than life. The orange fire ball on an almost black background looked surprisingly peaceful. I spent the next almost three hours, making slight adjustments to the angle of my lens as the sun moved across the sky, capturing each little change, and running down to my husband's home office to get him to take a look.

August 21, 2017 11:06 a.m.

August 21, 2017 11:39 a.m.

August 21, 2017, 12:41 p.m.

August 21, 2017, 1:05 p.m.

As the eclipse approached the middle, the temperature outside dropped significantly, and it got rather dark. The eclipse reached approximately 92% of totality at the point of the day when we photographers do not like to take photos of our subjects because of such high contrast and the harshness in the quality of light, but on August 21st, my camera was aimed right at the source of it. It was dark, and cold and it felt really eerie, but I was overwhelmed with emotion. I wondered what everyone else was thinking who was looking

up at the sky in that moment, trying to take in this rare phenomenon. In this age of polarizing politics and a world so divided, it didn't matter what anyone believed that day. So many of us stopped what we would normally do on a Monday, and stared at the sun. It was larger than us, it was larger than life and for a moment, it brought us closer together. Scientists say that the next full solar eclipse visible from the continental United States is not until April 8th, 2024. I plan to watch it and photograph it in the path of totality, hopefully on a more peaceful planet.■

* **OLGA BENTSMAN KUNDRA BARRON** was born in Russia and spent the second half of her childhood in New Hampshire. Her interest in photography was first piqued by her family's purchase of an Olympus OMG camera which she took on her hikes around New Hampshire and later to Israel and the Nepal Himalayas. Eventually, Olga traded New Hampshire's White Mountains for the Colorado Rockies, where she lives full time with her husband. She is an avid hiker, runner, skier, SCUBA diver and photographer.