

Father, son prepare for eclipse after missed 1979 viewing

1 August 2017, by Gillian Flaccus



This frame grab from a video shows Gene Brick, 92, left, and his son, Bartt Brick, peer through a telescope in Madras, Ore., June 12, 2017, that they made together in 1964. The two plan to watch the upcoming solar eclipse together Aug. 21, 2017, as it passes through Oregon. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)

The last time a total solar eclipse blacked out the sun in Oregon nearly 40 years ago, Gene Brick was working in a timber mill that refused to shut down for the spectacle.

The World War II veteran and amateur astronomer was devastated when his friends raved about experiencing a pitch-dark sky in the middle of the day.

"Everyone who was outside got to see it, and they enjoyed telling me all about it—and I was hurt by that," said Brick, now 92. "But work is work, you know."

Brick will get another chance to witness history this month, when a [total solar eclipse](#) begins its path across the U.S. in Oregon.

The one he missed in 1979 covered the Pacific Northwest and parts of Canada. This [total eclipse](#) will be visible from coast to coast across the

nation—something that hasn't happened in 99 years.

Brick plans to watch the event with his son using two telescopes: a fancy new one and one the two crafted together 53 years ago in their basement.

The men will peer at the sun through both during the eclipse's totality, when the moon's shadow completely covers the sun for just over two minutes. They also will use special filters to photograph the eclipse through the newer machine.

For Brick, who survived a kamikaze attack on the USS Drexler during the Battle of Okinawa, the opportunity is the experience of a lifetime.



This frame grab from a video shows Gene Brick, 92, left, and his son, Bartt Brick, peering through a telescope in Madras, Ore., June 12, 2017, that they made together in 1964. The two plan to watch the upcoming solar eclipse together Aug. 21, 2017, as it passes through Oregon. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)

"I always loved to look at the moon," he said, after peering through the [telescope](#) the pair crafted in 1964. "I still do."

The Bricks will have a prime location for their father-son moment. The town of Madras, in central Oregon, is in the high desert, where summertime skies are often clear and cloudless. Up to 100,000 people are expected to flock to the town and surrounding Jefferson County for the Aug. 21 event, creating worries about overcrowding and traffic.

Brick's son, Bartt Brick, is on the Madras City Council and will be on call during the eclipse. But taking the time to watch the event with his father is important to him. The elder Brick got the last four credits he needed for his [high school diploma](#) by signing up for the U.S. Navy and never attended college—but even in his 90s, he's studying particle physics.

The pair decided to build the telescope when the younger Brick was 14, after finding a piece of glass in his late grandfather's garage that was hand-ground into a concave lens for a telescope. Gene Brick worked long, hard days cutting logs at the mill then stayed up into the night working on the project with his teenage son.

"We'd bought ourselves a book on telescopes and a new dictionary, and after about - what - four or five months, we had a telescope," Bartt Brick recalled on a recent summer day.

"I'd sleep about half the night," his father added with a chuckle.



This frame grab taken from a video shows Gene Brick,

92, left, and his son, Bartt Brick, standing with a telescope in Madras, Ore., June 12, 2017, that they made together in 1964. The two plan to watch the upcoming solar eclipse together Aug. 21, 2017, as it passes through Oregon. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)

The two dragged the telescope outside on the night they finished, aimed it toward the heavens by propping it on a stepladder, and peered into the night sky until they spied the Ring Nebula, a dying star in a constellation about 2,000 light years from Earth.

"We were so excited, we ran in and told Mom. But at 2 o'clock in the morning, she wasn't as thrilled as we were," the younger Brick said.

Over the years, the telescope got a lot of use from the family and from a string of neighborhood children who lined up most evenings to peer at the moon.

But when the 1979 total solar eclipse came along, the elder Brick was working, the younger Brick no longer lived at home, and the telescope went unused.

When Bartt Brick moved back to Madras three years ago, the stars aligned for another crack at a shared celestial show.

On Aug. 21, three generations of Bricks will assemble. They'll have a sleek black, new telescope equipped with a remote control and a USB cord for snapping photos through a computer.



This framegrab from a video shows Gene Brick, 92, right, and his son, Bartt Brick, sit together in Madras, Ore., June 12, 2017. The two, who made a telescope together in 1964, plan to watch the upcoming solar eclipse Aug. 21, 2017, as it passes through Oregon. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)

But they'll also have on hand the unassuming, unmounted metal cylinder they worked on so long ago.

"Dad's had a message for me ever since I was 2 years old, and it was, 'Be curious,'" Bartt Brick said. "And boy, did I learn how to be curious with this."

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