

Mum's emotional moment as she sees the moon for the first time in 20 years

She's not seen the moon or sparkle of the stars for 20 years.

But 45-year-old mum Natalie Mann finally got to see outer space in all its glory after attending a stargazing event for the South Downs National Park's Dark Skies Festival.

Overcome with emotion, the former nurse who suffers with severe sight loss said looking up at the wondrous night's sky through a powerful telescope is a moment she will never forget.

"It's been 20 years since I've seen the moon and I can't remember the last time I saw the stars," said Natalie, who lives in Brighton and attended a stargazing session on Brighton seafront.

"The moon is just a haze to me and I can't see the stars at all.

"I was able to see the moon in quite a lot of detail and see its craters. It was quite amazing.

"I was able to see the stars in less detail, but I could definitely see their sparkle.

"It was a very emotional moment for me. It made me feel very happy."



Natalie, who used to work as a staff nurse at Royal Sussex County Hospital, has three serious eye conditions and started to lose her sight 20 years ago.

Nine years ago the birth of her daughter, Ruby, left her blind in her right eye and with just 25 per cent peripheral vision in her left eye – meaning she has no central vision that allows the eye to focus on objects.

Dealing with the day-to-day struggle of sight loss, Natalie never had time to think about seeing the moon and stars.

But a friend recommended she attend the Brighton Seafront Star Party, an event organised by the South Downs National Park as part of the annual Dark Skies Festival. The fortnight of events celebrates the National Park’s special status as one of the best places in the world to view the stars.

“It was just a spur of the moment thing,” said Natalie.

“I was very excited about it, for two reasons. One, I’ve never looked through a telescope, and the other thing that came straight to my mind was it’s been such a long time since I’ve seen what’s going on up there!

“Sight loss can make you feel very insular because you spend your life only seeing what’s going on three or four feet in front of you – everything beyond that is completely out of focus.



“Finally seeing the moon and stars again gave me an incredible feeling of connection between myself as a human being on Planet Earth and all that is going in outer space. It was a moment I will never forget.”

So inspired by the experience, Natalie decided to attend the South Downs National Park’s Dark Skies event in Lewes the following day and listen to talks by local astronomy experts.

Natalie was happy she got to share the experience with her daughter.

“Having Ruby was the best thing I ever did,” added the full-time mum.

“She was really keen for me to see the moon and stars again and I could tell how much it meant to her too.”

And, now she has the stargazing bug, Natalie doesn’t want the journey to end.

She explained: “It was inspirational for me and left me wanting to know more.

“Ruby and I have been talking about how much it would cost to buy a telescope. It could be a few hundred pounds so we’ve added to our Christmas wishlist!

“It’s something I’d like us to take up to the South Downs and see what else we can see in the Dark Night sky.”

Dan Oakley, “Dark Skies” Lead Ranger at the South Downs National Park, added: “It was a real privilege to help Natalie see the moon and stars again and it’s been wonderful to hear about how inspired she was. We look forward to welcoming her and Ruby to many more stargazing events in the National Park.”

Notes to editors

The South Downs National Park was awarded International Dark Sky Reserve status in 2016. More than 25,000 individual measurements were taken to map the night skies quality across the South Downs. With two million people living within five km of the National Park the reserve is one of the most accessible in the world. There are around 2,700 streetlights in the National Park and local lighting authorities are gradually replacing these over time to comply with Dark Sky standards. For more information see: www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/dark-night-skies/

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