

Excerpt 3 - Sunset in Key West

It was the Key West social event of the day, simply known as “sunset,” when the island inhabitants gathered nightly at Mallory Pier to watch the drama of red and gold play out on the shimmering horizon. Young women wore homemade clothes, flowers, and beads, and were accompanied by their young men with Jesus-like hair and flowing beards. Most walked or rode bicycles to the wharf as befitted the tiny island community. Dancers, mimes, and acrobats entertained the crowds. Musicians came with their guitars, flutes, dulcimers, or banjos. Some played for free; others passed the hat in hopes of avoiding a real job a little longer. Colorful reptiles clung to the shirt of the lizard man, and conch salad was served in paper cups from a bicycle basket for a dollar each. The island, a long-time haven for pirates, wreckers, and ne'er-do-wells, now occupied by an array of artists, writers, homosexuals and wannabees, was as varied in charm and hue as the changing colors of the sunset sky.

As the people waited on the quay for the magical moment, the giant ball of fire touched the surface of the ocean and cast its reflection forward, creating the illusion of a giant keyhole on the horizon. When the last red sliver of sun was about to disappear, a hush fell over the crowd, and at the final moment, there was a round of applause...