

It's not nice to forget Mother Nature

My wife and I have been vacationing the past week in south Florida. On the first night of the eight-day trip, we took the hotel clerk's dinner recommendation and headed to the restored riverfront in historic Fort Myers.

It was a pleasant setting two blocks off the river near the marina.

The restaurant, a hot new four-story complex in an old tire company building, featured a rooftop bar with unobstructed views of the waterfront and surrounding downtown.

The bar and surrounding open-air lounge were packed with a mixture of older locals, younger 20-somethings, and vacationers like us.

As the orange sun started slipping past fluffy, light pink clouds toward the horizon beyond the river bridge, you could feel people shuffling and jockeying for position to catch the sunset.

We had already secured our own prime spot along the railing, and I had my cellphone camera ready to capture the moment.

As people bunched along the rail beside us, we took turns guessing the exact time remaining before the orange orb would kiss the skyline beyond the bridge.

There were appropriate "oohs" and "aahhs" as the



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scene unfolded. There was also the cynic standing just behind us saying to no one in particular: "It'll do the same thing tomorrow. It happens 365 days a year, you know."

"Yes," I finally turned and said. "The sun will rise and set tomorrow, but we may not." And, that got me to thinking about how much beauty and wonder we take for granted in the natural world around us.

I also pondered how some people become so hardened against seeing and feeling that beauty.

This guy wasn't content to only shut it out of his world; he felt the need to pour the cold water of his cynicism on everyone around him.

It didn't work; we enjoyed our sunset anyway.

For all the great achievements of our modern western culture — in science, technology and the arts — the most fitting criticism of our society would be the ex-

tent to which we've lost our sense of place in nature.

Indeed, as we were taught in high school, "man against nature" is a prevailing theme of western literature.

And, our proudest engineering feats are often those harnessing nature's forces and bending them to man's will by damming rivers, irrigating deserts, and controlling floodwaters to create our habitat where we want it — often at the expense of other species.

Whereas people of the Native American nations saw God in the sun, the moon and the stars, our western minds look right past the wonder of the setting sun to its utility for generating power.

Interestingly enough, they honor every sunset here in Key West with a celebration at Mallory Square. Of course, people here will use any excuse to party.

But, I also sense that living at the mercy of Mother Nature, 110 miles from the mainland, on an exposed strip of sand jutting into the Straits of Florida where tropical storms and hurricanes amble on their way from the subtropics to the Gulf of Mexico, you learn to strike a bargain with the forces of nature.

Even as I write, a pleasant and sunny morning has

erupted into booming thunder, driving rains and churning seas.

This too shall pass, but it's an ever-present reminder of my place in nature and the extent to which my happiness hinges on accepting come what may.

Ever since I was a child, trips to the beach were highlighted more than any other moment by that instant when we crossed a bridge or rounded a turn to catch first sight of green ocean waters stretching to the horizon and beyond.

It's a feeling I've never lost, and it hits me all over again every time I journey to the sea. Despite the enormity of the ocean and my miniscule place beside it, I feel anything but insignificant standing next to nature's incredible beauty and raw power.

In fact, I feel very special indeed, to be connected in any small way with something so vast, so mystical and so marvelous.

The sun is shining again! Cheers!

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