

Travis McGuire Series (Prologue)

Sometimes ideas just fall out of the sky. This one was a combination of me watching one of my favorite YouTube adventure series called Back to Basics and a long lost memory from the past.

When I was in the Navy, I spent two years on a guided missile destroyer. I could have been the poster guy for “Join the Navy and see the world”. I did see the world. I made two Mediterranean cruises in addition to going to St. Thomas, Guantanamo Bay, the Bahamas, and the Azores. It wasn't always fun times on liberty. It was more like thirty days at sea and three days in port. So I had lots of time to read. One of my favorite book series by author John D. MacDonald was called “Travis McGee”.

Here is a synopsis of the fictional character.

Travis McGee lives on a 52-foot [houseboat](#) dubbed *The Busted Flush*. The boat is named after the circumstances in which he won the boat in what McGee describes as a "[poker](#) siege" of 30 hours of intensive effort in Palm Beach—the run of luck started with a bluff of four hearts (2-3-7-10) and a club (2), which created a "busted flush," as described in Chapter 3 of *The Deep Blue Good-bye*. The books are all narrated by McGee, writing in the first-person past-tense. The boat is generally docked at slip F-18 at Bahia Mar Marina, [Fort Lauderdale, Florida](#). A self-described "beach bum" who "takes his retirement in installments," McGee prefers to take on new cases only when the spare cash (besides a reserve fund) in a hidden safe in the *Flush* runs low. McGee also owns a custom 1936 vintage [Rolls-Royce](#) that had been converted into a [pickup truck](#) by some previous owner long before he bought it, and another previous owner painted it "that horrid blue." McGee named it *Miss Agnes*, after one of his elementary school teachers whose hair was the same shade.

I have never thought of writing a series, but that is the way most successful writers make tons of money. I am not interested in making money though. I have enough to pay my utilities, food, and taxes. Most importantly, I have enough to keep my supply of wine flowing. The blog I created is called

“Wine Induced Short Stories”. I was drinking some wine when this idea came to me. Fits right in.

I can't even remember the plots in those paperbacks so I will have to make my own. That is the way I like it anyway. So, lets get started. I gave this series the name of my brother-in-law Matt. I didn't want to plagiarize the whole series name. I could have called it Matt Helm too.

Travis McGuire Series

(Episode 1)

(Indigo Farewell)

I am currently moored in an expensive marina in Fort Lauderdale. There are cheaper moorings elsewhere, but none offering the clientele with the deepest pocketbooks. My 36' Catalina sailboat is not brand new, but I bought it from a guy who gave up sailing. Before he did, he upgraded just about everything and I benefited from that at a discounted price. Here is what it looks like.





I once had a house and a wife. Our personalities clashed and we realized this was not in the best interest of either. We parted our ways, but still remained friends. Since then I found out that staying single was a much more stress free lifestyle. Did I own a home or did it own me? Something was always breaking down or plugging up. Now my environment has shrunk to this space which I find adequate to maintain. Sure there is still stuff to fix and clean, but I have lots of free time. That is when I am not working. I don't have a typical job either. No alarm clock to jar me out of a peaceful sleep or boss yelling at me for going over budget. I hire myself out to fix situations others have gotten themselves into. Maybe they had been taken advantage of by someone, or got scammed out of their life savings. I don't advertise in any papers, all my clients are referrals from past successes.

I don't have a steady girlfriend. There are plenty of beach bunnies willing to have casual entertainment without commitment. I do have some girl friends though. One of them was Carly. She is aboard my boat at this moment complaining about her boyfriend Jake while practicing her dance moves. I imagine Jake would not be happy that she was here. He is of the jealous type.

Carly knows what kind of business I have. Besides complaining about Jake, she has a friend that needs my help. Look Carly, I really don't need another job right now. I still have adequate funds left over from my last one. I also have one lined up for next month. But Travis, she is my friend and she really needs help. One evening when we were both drinking a little too much, she revealed the jest of her troubles. Can't you talk to her. OK, but I am not promising anything. I guess you can call and let her know that I will at least hear her out. Oh Travis, I knew you wouldn't deny me. She will be here in

20 minutes. Why do I feel like I have been set up? When she arrived, Carly said I will give you some privacy. I need to take a bath. A bathtub was one luxury item the former owner installed. I agree, you do need to take a bath. She pinched me on the arm as she left the salon.

Her name was Charlotte. Perhaps in her late 30's. It is hard to tell. Carly said they met in dance practice. She had the slim and trim body of a dancer. So she related this long story to me. I sat patiently listening. Her voice had an eloquent tone to it with a slight southern accent.

This is the story she related:

Her father had been in the military. His last two years were spent in Europe. When he returned back to the states he got himself into trouble. Drinking in a bar, he got in a fight and killed someone. Feeling desperate, he fled the scene and ended up at his daughters home. He said, I don't have much time. The police will come and arrest me for the fight I just got into. I just want to tell you that I have the means to give you the life I had always promised. When I get out of jail, I will make that happen. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison. He never was able to fulfill his promise. He died in prison. Six months later, a guy named Ray Allen showed up at her door. He said he was a cellmate of her father's. She let him come in wanting to hear what he knew about her father's time in prison. He was asking her all about where her father spent most of his time. She told him about a fishing shack on a remote island he often visited. As time went on, he started a relationship with Charlotte, but continued to question her more about her father's habits. He made a trip out to the island and returned visibly frustrated. She couldn't understand what would make him so. He was also digging up her backyard saying that he wanted to help her plant some trees. In front of her house, her father had fashioned two brick light stanchions. They really didn't go with the rest of the decor of her house. She had mentioned to Ray Allen that he had put those in shortly after he returned from Europe. The next morning, Ray Allen was gone. Both of the brick stanchions were smashed. The only thing she found in one of them was a piece of cloth made of some army material.

She thought she had heard the last of Ray Allen. He resurfaced about two

months later driving a new sports car and the owner of an expensive yacht. She also heard that he had moved into a high class widow's home. This was a small town and she didn't expect someone like her to take someone like him in. Then again, she herself was fooled by his brute like demeanor. This remains a mystery to me. A woman will put up staying with a man who does not treat her properly and in fact treats her as if she were beneath him. Then, other woman will leave a man who treats her with the utmost respect and is good to her. It must be something in ancient genetics. They see that caveman type as a challenge and take the caring type for granite. I guess that is where the sayings "Nice guys finish last", and "Women are attracted to the bad boys" come from.

I am kind of in the middle. I am usually of the nice type, but I can be bad when called for.

Ray Allen stayed with the woman for about a month, then suddenly left. The woman was left emotionally in shambles.

Charlotte suspects that Ray Allen only appeared to like her because her father must have told him about whatever he had brought back from Europe that was going to make her rich.

This sounds complicated. I am not sure if I can help you. I might not even be able to find Ray Allen, but let me think about it and get back to you. Charlotte left and Travis could hear splashing from the master bathroom. He approached the closed door and asked, can I get you a towel? Sure, bring one in. He didn't expect to see her in all her glory, but there she was. Maybe she was trying to get revenge on Jake for something he had done. Uh! Carly, you need to cover yourself up as he handed her the towel covering his eyes. Can you dry me off. The implied invitation was obvious. Look Carly, I value you as a friend and I want to keep it that way. Here is the towel and I will join you for a drink in the salon after you dress. When she returned, she had a shy embarrassed look on her face. Sorry Travis, I guess I was somewhat angry with Jake and was going to use you to get back at him. I am glad that you were adult enough to save us from an embarrassing situation. He was thinking, did I just refuse such a tempting offer? I should give myself a gold

star. He needed to do some research before he agreed to help Charlotte.

Travis McGuire
(Episode 2)

Travis agrees to help Charlotte. He invites her back to his boat. He named it “The Cool Breeze”. The Breeze for short. Sailing on the blue ocean with the wind in your face is as relaxing as it gets. He could have opted for a cruiser, but he figured the wind is free, although not always reliable. That is why the Breeze was equipped with a 12 hp diesel engine. Another upgrade. It was capable of motoring him at least 100 miles, if the wind quit on him.

He asked Charlotte about her father's past. What service was he in and did she know the names of any of his military buddies? He was in a group called “Air Transport”. She remembered two of his buddies names. That was a good place for him to start. He also wanted to question the widow about Ray Allen's assets that he suddenly came into. Her name was Lois.

The next day he made a trip to her residence. He noticed a for sale sign in the front yard. He was surprised to find the front door open and only an unlocked screen door preventing bugs from entering. He knocked several times and when he didn't get a response, he cautiously entered. The living room was a mess, as was the kitchen. Dishes piled up in the sink and empty fast food wrappers everywhere. He called out her name and when he got no response he walked around. He found her passed out on the bed fully clothed. That was fortunate. He didn't need to be accused of inappropriate actions. He shook her awake. Who are you? I'm Travis and I came here to ask you questions about Ray Allen. With that admission she broke down into a crying fit, then abruptly fell asleep again. He needed her coherent, so he just left her there and busied himself with housecleaning. About two hours later, she emerged from the bedroom. He had made some coffee and scrambled eggs. That was the only thing he could find that was not spoiled. He offered her a cup. Instead, she opened a cabinet and pulled out a bottle of Jack Daniels. Poured herself a hefty shot and sat down at the dining room table.

Are you a bad man Travis? At least she remembered his name. Sometimes I am bad to those who deserve it, but I will not be bad to you. Why do you want to know about Ray Allen? Because he seems to go about ruining woman's lives and I hate that kind of person. I am helping another woman named Charlotte and if I find Ray Allen, I might be able to make him pay for his bad deeds. With that, she once again broke into a crying fit. If you want me to leave you alone, just say the word and I will leave. I can see that you have cleaned up my home. I appreciate your effort and I really don't want to be alone. You need to stay off of the booze. I can visit with you and help you get back some strength, but you have to make an effort. Drink some coffee and eat some eggs. She complied.

What's the deal with the for sale sign? As you can see, I am not happy living here anymore. I need to leave this place where I suffered the my most humiliating experience of my life. Where will you go? I haven't thought much about that, as you can see I am not in the best condition to make decisions. I don't like leaving you here in your present condition, how about you stay on my boat while I go investigate Ray Allen's movements. Don't get me wrong, I am not going to pile on more humiliating events than you have already endured. I just don't think you are well enough to leave alone in this place. You need to get out of here and breathe some fresh air. Fresh air is what my boat "The Breeze" is all about. It didn't take much convincing for her to accept his proposal.

When she felt more human again, she answered some of his questions. Ray Allen had met her before at a gas station where he worked. She didn't even give him a second glance. This wounded his pride and that is why after cashing in on something he had taken from Charlotte, he found out where she lived and appeared at her front door dressed nicely and sporting a new fancy car. She invited him into her home. Later, he invited her to his yacht where he wine and dined her. He had named it "Play Pen". Appropriate for his evil intentions.

Travis knew most of the local yacht brokers and it didn't take him long to find where Ray Allen had bought his. His next move was to talk to the sales guy.

Joe, the sales guy said he remembers the sale mostly due to the strange way Allen paid for the boat. He paid in cash, but with multiple cashiers checks. Travis figured this was because Allen had deposited the money from selling whatever he had stolen from Charlotte in small amounts in different banks so as not to alert the IRS. Any deposits over \$10K would be under suspicion.

The Play Pen



Travis needed to find out more about what Charlotte's father was doing at the end of the war. His first contact was Allen's coworker in the Air Transport division. His name was Bert.

Luckily he was living in Florida. He called him on the phone and told him he had some news about his former army buddy, Steve. He agreed to meet Travis at a local pub. Travis was use to interviewing informants. The best way to illicit information from someone was to ply them with booze. This gave the interviewee a false impression of him. Thinking that he was a friendly guy. At first, Travis just confirmed his association with Steve and the time they spent together. There was no way that he didn't know about whatever Steve was doing to make money. Travis slid into the discussion slowly and when Bert was sufficiently plowed, got down to the root of his questioning. What was Steve doing to make money? I didn't know too much about his operation, but my guess is he was buying artifacts on the black market at extremely low prices and transporting them via Air Transport back to the US. He had also picked up lots of gems. What about you? Did you participate in this operation? No way. I just saw what he was doing. Travis doesn't totally believe him. What do you do for a living Bert? I was a salesman, but I am retired now. Travis's previous research had uncovered

Bert's residence. He was living in a high end retirement community in the Florida Keys. Not somewhere that a salesman would be able to afford. I think you know more about what Steve was doing than you let on. If you really want to know the truth, you need to ask his Master Sargent Ken about that. I think he had partnered up with Steve in whatever they were doing.

Master Sargent Ken was next on my list.

First I had to return to Fort Lauderdale to check on Lois. I found her asleep in my master bedroom. She looked much better than I had last seen her. She must have heard me come aboard and she sat up. Glad you are back. How did your investigation go? I got some useful information, but I need much more to track him down. I had gone to the local fish market and purchased some swordfish steaks and cod portions along with some asparagus. I grilled the steaks and cod on my deck BBQ and added a savory butter sauce to all.



I would have preferred to serve this along with a nice Merlot, but due to Lois's previous condition I opted out.

Author's note: This is actually a picture of one of my own meals.

Lois ate it up like she had missed many a meal, and I expected that she had. Nothing like returning from oblivion with a hungry appetite.

Travis McGuire
(Episode 3)

Master Sargent Ken was next on Travis's investigation list. He tracked him down in a upscale residential section of Miami and received a cordial invitation when Travis told him about trying to help his old military comrade's daughter. If Bert's information is correct, Ken should know much more about what Steven was doing and most likely participated in the venture. At first, Ken was open to answering questions about Steve's activities until Travis implied that he was also a partner in the operation. No, no, I did not get involved with what he was doing. Ken, what is your occupation. I am an accountant. Accountants must make lots of money to be able to live in this community. I know what the cost of these homes are. OK, OK, maybe I did do something, but not on the level of Steve. I don't want my wife to know anything about this. Let's take a drive and have some coffee or a beer down at the local pub. They left and ordered a couple of beers and a sandwiches. Several beers later, Travis still did not get the information he needed. Travis did not drink as much as Ken and they had taken his unique Rolls Royce. Travis had bought it from a guy who had converted it into a kind of a truck. Travis named it Miss Agnes.



So on the way back to Ken's house, Travis took a detour. He had expected that his interrogation of Ken might reach a dead end. He needed to know how much money was involved, how did they transport the contraband, and how did they sell it. When they left the bar, Travis tied Ken's hands with a bungee cord. He was already drunk and it didn't take much effort to push him into the back seat and drive off.

Still groggy, Ken made aware of himself tied to a chair in strange place. He started yelling help help. Travis said, you can yell all you want, no one will hear you in this place. Travis pulled out a gun from his pants belt. Ken sees him take out all but one bullet. So Ken, I imagine you are familiar with Russian Roulette. I am going to ask you some questions and I hope you will answer while you still can. How did Steve get the contraband to the states? I told you that I didn't really know much about his business. Travis spun the chamber and pointed it at Ken's head. Travis could see where the bullet was positioned in the chamber. I will ask you again. Ken repeated the same answer. Travis pulled the trigger. Click. What are you doing? I really don't know the answers. Travis spins the chamber again. Ken, are you a gambler? There is a 16% chance the next bullet is in firing position. Ken thinks Travis is just scaring him. Travis sees the bullet is in firing position. Travis fires the bullet into the ceiling. Ken jumps. Travis reloads another bullet and spins the chamber. Ken suddenly feels like talking.

Travis learns that the transport of stuff to the states occurred over a period of two years. Somewhere in the order of \$500K worth. Many artifacts were sold off in the black market. Some gems were fenced, but not many. He estimated that Steve's stash might be worth at least \$200K depending on how much was left. Travis releases Ken and drives him back home. He assures Ken that he is not interested in turning him in. He only wants to find Ray Allen and retrieve what he took from Charlotte.

Travis returns to his boat. Lois had done some minor decorating. Adding a woman's touch besides general cleaning. Travis liked what she had done. Later, after a BBQ on the boat deck, they retire to the master bedroom.

Travis does not want to take advantage of her in her unstable mental state and

he tells her so. Still, she encourages him to continue. She abruptly stops and says, you are right, I am not ready for this. Travis leaves her and moves to the guest bedroom and falls into a deep sleep.

The next day he plans his next move. He needs to meet this Ray Allen, but not confront him yet. Where does he keep his stash? That is the information he needs to find out. It is not hard for Travis to find where the Play Pen is docked. He knows all of the marina owners and after a few calls finds where it is. He thinks Ray Allen would not keep his treasure too far away from himself. The most likely spot would be in some secret compartment on his boat. Travis makes a call on his friend Rufus. Rufus is a jack of all trades and is also one of Travis's best friends. They have a long history of helping each other. Rufus, I need a specialty item made. I want a fake gem big enough to embed a GPS tracker chip in it. Can you do it? No problem, these things are readily available and microscopic. Travis also finds out that Ray Allen plans to leave for the Bahamas in four days. He is just waiting on receiving a new generator. There isn't much time so Travis has to move quickly. He arrives at the boat dock where the Play Pen is moored. No sign of Ray Allen, but there are a couple beach bunnies on board. Travis is a handsome guy and portrays a friendly demeanor. He strikes up a conversation with Alley. She invites him on board. She says that her and some of her other friends are going to travel to the Bahamas with what she calls Ray Allen, their sugar daddy. The only problem is she feels she is a fifth wheel and would like a companion to go with her. This gives Travis the opportunity to initiate his plan. Alley brings out the booze and they begin a drinking session. Travis lets on that he is some kind of gem dealer but the implication is he is a jewelry fence. It isn't long before Alley becomes extremely drunk and invites Travis to the stateroom bed. She is too inebriated to do much but pass out. Travis drops his fake gem on the floor and leaves a note. Sorry you fell asleep, I was just getting to know you. I will return later.

Alley finally wakes up from her slumber and discovers the fake gem on the boat deck. When Ray Allen returns, she tells him about Travis and shows him the gem. He takes it and goes below deck. He adds it to his treasure box in his secret compartment.

The next day Travis returns to the Play Pen. This time Ray Allen is aboard. Travis introduces himself, but Ray Allen isn't too receptive to another male going along. Alley complains and says she doesn't want to be the only one without company. Travis adds some incentive telling Ray Allen that he is a gourmet cook. OK, show us what you can do. Travis leaves and goes to the local fish market. He buys some lobsters, crab, and some ribeyes. When he returns, he cooks up one of the few meals he is really good at. Surf and Turf.



Ray Allen gives in and agrees to let Travis accompany them to the Bahamas.

Ray Allen is probably more interested in Travis's ability to off load some of the gems than he is in his culinary talents.

Travis returns the next day and Ray Allen is gone again. He learns that he has gone to the shop to pick up the generator he had ordered. This has been what Travis had been waiting for. His chance to find the stash. He goes below deck and locates the secret drawer. Using a tool he had brought, he pries it open. True enough, there is a bag of jewels and some cash. He grabs the cash and bag and is ready to escape when Ray Allen suddenly appears. Travis is not a weak person and has had his share of scraps. Ray Allen charges him, Travis steps back, then hits him hard right between the eyes. This would have knocked out most normal men.

At this moment, the partial lyrics of an old Johnny Cash song came to mind. "A Boy Named Sue".

Well, I hit him hard right between the eyes
And he went down, but to my surprise

He come up with a knife and cut off a piece of my ear

Ray Allen did come up, but instead of a knife, he was holding a gun. There was nothing Travis could do but dive out through the shuttered window on to the deck as bullets went flying by his head. He continued over the rail and dove into the harbor water. Bullets still peppering the water near him. He stayed under water and came up under the nearby dock. For the moment, he was safe. Ray Allen gave up shooting.

Travis moved away and pulled himself up. He was not too far from Rufus's place and made it there without harm. He borrowed a scooter from Rufus and rode back to his own boat. Lois was happy to see him, but wondered why he was all wet. She said your friend Carly called. It sounded urgent. Travis called her back right away. What is going on? Charlotte is in the hospital. What happened? She ran in to Ray Allen just by chance and confronted him about stealing her father's money. Ray Allen is not one to take a brow beating from a woman. He beat her up pretty good.

Travis figured Ray Allen would be leaving as soon as he could expecting Charlotte would have called the police.

Travis was not going to let him get away.

Travis McGuire
(Episode 4)

Travis had to act quickly. He arrived at the dock where the Play Pen had been moored. It had already left. Once again he visited Rufus. Do you still have that old cigar boat? Yes, I am ready to retire it, but it is still working and is all fueled up. What is your need? There is a guy fleeing justice and I need to catch up with him. He left for the Bahamas not long ago. Well, Havana is still fast enough to catch any cabin cruiser. That is a good name for your cigar boat.

The term "cigarette boat" is especially popular because it is a brand name for a line of go-fast boats that popularized and largely defined the class in the 1960s, made by Don Aronow's Cigarette Racing Team. "Cigar boat" is often preferred because it avoids confusion with the brand.



You say that you are ready to retire her? Well, there is a chance that I might retire her for good. She is all yours.

I caught up with Ray Allen 10 miles out of port. There was no need to be subtle. I passed him on the starboard side and then made a 90 degree turn. When his broadside was in front of me, I gave Havana full throttle. Put the pedal to the metal, as the truckers say. The bow hit the Play Pen right at the water line. Just before impact, I jumped overboard. The bow hit and there was no doubt what was going to happen. I swam to the rear transom and pulled myself up. When I dropped down below deck, Ray Allen had opened his secret drawer and was holding two bags. Not waiting for an invitation, I went full force ahead on a body tackle. He dropped both bags and this time I hit him even harder than last time. He was momentarily stunned and half the bag of jewels spilled out on the deck. I grabbed the cash bag and the rest of the jewels and quickly moved to the upper deck. The last I saw of Ray Allen, he was scrambling around the deck trying to retrieve the fallen gems. I untied the dingy and motioned for the two beach bunnies to jump on board. As we were motoring away, the Play Pen didn't take long to begin its death

spiral to the bottom of the Atlantic. No sign of Ray Allen was ever seen again.

I hoped Ray Allen got pleasure from holding on to his gems as he plunged to his death.

I told Rufus the whole story. He said that helping get rid of a creep like Ray Allen was a good use of the Havana and he didn't mind how I instrumented her demise. Are you going to have trouble with the police? I don't think so. Neither of the girls cared about reporting the incident and they don't know where I keep the Cool Breeze. They probably think since I told them about my illegal fencing racket that I was probably some underworld hood and it was better to leave well enough alone.

Now as far as fencing is concerned, do you know anyone who can convert these jewels to cash? Did you forget who you are talking to? Pardon me, I just wanted to make sure you still had some connections.

I visited Charlotte in the hospital. She was almost recovered from her injuries sustained in her last encounter with Ray Allen. I told her he is in no condition to ever hurt her again. I also told her when she gets released from the hospital to come to the Cool Breeze. I have something of value to give you.

A week later, she stepped on board. I introduced her to Lois. They had lots to talk about as I knew they would. Lois was busy cleaning up after my latest BBQ meal, so I took the opportunity to talk to Charlotte in private. I told her that after converting the gems to cash, the total amount I took from Ray Allen only amounted to \$40K. I handed her the whole amount. I can't accept all of this Travis. We had a deal, you were to retain 50%. Normally, I would, but I feel this is not a lot of money for everything that you went through and I really don't need the cash. Taking care of Ray Allen is compensation enough for me.

Later, after Charlotte left, I found myself once again opposite Lois in my king size master bed. Lois, we already talked about this. I still think you are in a

vulnerable state and I don't want to take advantage of you. I am not doing this for you Travis. This is for me to retrieve my dignity and self confidence. This is part of my healing process. Travis had already turned down too many invitations of this kind and who was he to get in the way of her healing process. Maybe he should give back his gold star.

The End