

JOYFUL LIVING: PLAYING THE UKULELE COMPLETES THE CIRCLE FOR JOHN MCGIL

By [Emily Steele](#)

July 19, 2022



John McGil. CONTRIBUTED

Have you heard the saying, “Still waters run deep”? It is true of the West Virginia-born John McGil. The quiet, unassuming McGil came to Tavernier to visit his family and became a permanent resident of the Upper Keys. “When my mother and sister moved to Tavernier it was freezing in West Virginia. I grew to like the warmer climate and the people,” McGil explained.

McGil took a part-time position with the Key Largo Post Office, where he met Nancy Banker. He also met Banker’s sister Terry Gormley and her husband Roger. Banker was promoted and moved to Utah, telling Gormley to look out for McGil who, although he never drank heavily, or smoked, was dealing with liver failure.

One day the Gormleys knocked on McGil’s door. He opened the door and told them he was going to see his doctor. They said, “No, you’re not going, we’re taking you.” When they got to the doctor’s office they were told to take McGil to Mariners Hospital immediately. “I remember their arms around me, holding me up, and dragging me into Mariner’s emergency room,” McGil stated.

The Gormleys then moved him into their home. He lived in their living room for six months while he waited for a donor. The Gormleys transported McGil five times to Miami for a liver transplant, to be told the liver was not a match. One night, at 2 a.m., the Gormleys received a call and rushed McGil to a Miami hospital.

This time it was a match.

“They gave me the miracle of life,” said McGil. “The Gormleys did not have to take that call. They took all calls, they kept me alive for six months waiting for that transplant. Terry cleaned up after me, fed me, kept me from going into a coma, and they delivered me for life-giving surgery.”

Several years later, McGil received news that Roger had passed away. In April 2022, Terry was diagnosed with aggressive lung cancer and prescribed chemotherapy and radiation treatment. One day Terry went in for treatment and called McGil to tell him she was not coming home. At this point in the interview, McGil looked at me and said, “I will tell you about a connection with JOY not many know.”

“When I knew Terry would not come home, I loaded up my dog, Gracie, music stand, ukulele, and song book and went to see her. They would not let her grandchildren visit, but they let us in.”

At first Gormley did not want McGil to play. After she was made comfortable with medication, McGil set up his music stand, began playing his ukulele and singing to her. When he made a mistake he told her, “Let me try that again.” She would smile at him; he knew she was enjoying the music. “I played the whole book of songs, Gracie lying in her bed, and Terry smiling off and on.” McGil softly said. When Terry Gormley passed away she was surrounded by family and friends. Gracie and McGil stood among them, completing a circle of unconditional love and giving.

McGil, a lifelong learner, joined the JOY Center in 2018. He enjoys Ukulele JOY and Community Gardening. He is one of the “moisturizers” who kept the garden alive through the pandemic. McGil wants county leaders to know a community center could be instrumental in educating people about how the community is organized, providing resources, and classes that would help them become a valuable part of our Upper Keys community.