



# **I'll Never Be French (No Matter What I Do): Living in a Small Village in Brittany**

*Mark Greenside*

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Tired of Provence in books, cuisine, and tablecloths? Exhausted from your armchair travels to Paris? Despairing of ever finding a place that speaks to you beyond reason? You are ripe for a journey to Brittany, where author Mark Greenside reluctantly travels, eats of the crêpes, and finds a second life.

When Mark Greenside—a native New Yorker living in California, doubting (not-as-trusting-as) Thomas, downwardly mobile, political lefty, writer, and lifelong skeptic—is dragged by his girlfriend to a tiny Celtic village in Brittany at the westernmost edge of France, in Finistère, "the end of the world," his life begins to change.

In a playful, headlong style, and with enormous affection for the Bretons, Greenside tells how he makes a life for himself in a country where he doesn't speak the language or know how things are done. Against his personal inclinations and better judgments, he places his trust in the villagers he encounters—neighbors, workers, acquaintances—and is consistently won over and surprised as he manages and survives day-to-day trials: from opening a bank account and buying a house to removing a beehive from the chimney—in other words, learning the cultural ropes, living with neighbors, and making new friends.

*I'll Never Be French (no matter what I do)* is a beginning and a homecoming for Greenside, as his father's family emigrated from France. It is a memoir about fitting in, not standing out; being part of something larger, not being separate from it; following, not leading. It explores the joys and adventures of living a double life.

## I'll Never Be French (No Matter What I Do): Living in a Small Village in Brittany Details

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Author : Mark Greenside

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## **From Reader Review I'll Never Be French (No Matter What I Do): Living in a Small Village in Brittany for online ebook**

### **Amanda says**

Haw haw, the French are so different from us and I'm a bewildered American who can't get anything right and blah blah blah blah. UGH.

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### **Mary Lou says**

The author is quite cynical and passive-aggressive towards others (mainly conservatives or the religious) who don't believe exactly as he does. It's subtle, but there are snide remarks throughout the book. He will have you believe at the end of each chapter though that thanks to the grace and kindness of others, he has become a better man. To think he's a college professor... I sure wouldn't want him shaping my youth's mind....the story itself is okay. It's Mark I couldn't stomach.

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### **Lesley says**

Mildly entertaining and a fast read. The author spends a bit too much time wondering (and deciding for himself) what other people think of him. There were some bits which were quite funny, and you may learn a thing or two about the French, Bretons, and the differences between the two. A nice look at a part of France not often publicized in literature, but a beautiful part of France with its own unique customs. Wish I could live in Finistere too! Overall, a decent memoir about owning a home in a foreign country. Recommended for: those who like memoirs, Francophiles or even those who have never been to France.

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### **Rose says**

Yet another place on earth to visit on my "bucket list"! :) I'm going to need to hit the lottery!

Mark Greenside writes a hysterical memoir of living and loving Brittany. As a bumbling, fumbling middle-aged American man who is discovering a new world so unlike the one he has known.

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### **Brian says**

When you work in publishing, as I do, you have access to all kinds of books. A bunch end up on first-come, first-served shelves. Maybe they were sent for review to the wrong address. Maybe they two copies came for publicity purposes when only one would suffice. Some just arrive looking for a home.

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I grabbed Mark Greenside's book "I'll Never be French (no matter what I do)" from a pile of very uninteresting books because it stood out. The bright red cover and witty title led me to discover a genre I fall in and out of love with – the expatriate memoir.

[Read more here](#)

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### **Julie says**

Mark Greenside grudgingly agrees to spend a summer in a small town in Brittany with his girlfriend. He figures that Kathryn speaks French, and it will be a nice place for them both to write for a while. Their relationship falls apart, but by then he has made firm friendships despite his utter lack of linguistic ability, and he finds himself under the spell of the French way of doing things. Unfortunately, although he appreciates the French way, he finds himself making one inadvertent faux pas after another. His anecdotes deal with this bewildered, middle-aged hippie buying a house and dealing with issues of ownership (insurance, banking, appliances, etc.), all without much command of French. After a while these anecdotes become somewhat repetitive, but his descriptions are charming and funny.

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### **Megan Martin says**

Loved this book. It was fun, light, and made me want to live in France, or at least experience it. Finished this one a day after reading *Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong*, so it was fun to have the two parallel books, one very educational, the other anecdotal. Both enjoyable and interesting. For me in my nerdiness it is fun to read multiple books on the same topic. Wow. I should make some friends or something.

Definitely would suggest to anyone who wants to imagine living somewhere whimsical. Fun read.

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### **Glory Gray says**

I'm a big fan of Peter Mayle and Frances Mayes, so I will read just about any book with a similar theme. Mark Greenside writes from the point of view of a hapless, poor, single American male who is a bit in awe of small town France.

The scenes of miscommunication are particularly entertaining. In the end, we cheer for Mark and wonder if he'll successfully navigate this new world and its alien culture.

I enjoyed the descriptions of Brittany. He provided just enough to make me want to visit without rambling on with too much detail.

About three-quarters of the way through the book, I became aware that many of the scenes have a lot of French conversations that don't include translations. My mind didn't register this at first because I know enough French to understand what was going on. However, someone who knows no French may get lost and not understand some of the humor.

## Barbara says

I can't resist reading about people who find themselves falling in love with another country and then bravely finding a way to live there (and here.) This book was entertaining, laugh out loud funny, and sweet. I enjoyed reading about Breton culture and watching Mark bumble his way through buying a house, redoing his floors, opening a bank account, trying to understand the French insurance system (which so totally beats ours), and attempting to learn the language. He is blessed with lovely neighbors who shower him with advice and of course wonderful food. Enjoy the read! Even better, try *Under the Tuscan Sun* (Frances Mayes), *Italian Neighbors* (Tim Parks) and *On Rue Tatin* (Susan Loomis).

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## MomIsReading says

I discovered this book when it popped up as a recommendation for me since I've read some books by Peter Mayle. This is one for those who enjoy reading about people who actually act upon their dream and live in other countries. The author never knew this was his dream until he actually visited one summer with a girlfriend and the idea to visit had been hers. He falls out of love with her and in love with France.

Mark Greenside writing is laugh out loud funny, no doubt about that. His writing style is visually descriptive. I found him likeable and so witty...completely able to poke fun of himself. I'd love to have dinner with him once. I wonder how his French is coming along now after all this time?

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## Dianne says

Mark Greenside was living with his girlfriend in New York when out of the blue she said to him: "Honey, let's go to France". He had been in France years earlier and it had not been a good experience, and he didn't speak French, so he wasn't thrilled with the idea. But she had answers for all his arguments and eventually she wore him down. They went to France - Brittany - for the summer. This is the story of how he fell in love with the country, bought a house and became a permanent part-time resident.

The title is what attracted me. He sounds so desperate to fit in. The fact that it's about France didn't hurt either, since I can't seem to turn down anything in writing that is set there or even mentions it a few times. There's a quote on the cover from the *Detroit Free Press* suggesting we all "run, do not walk, to the nearest copy of *I'll Never Be French*." They call it a "funny, funny book". I'm less enthusiastic. I think one "funny" is enough and walking is fine.

It's possible I've read too many of these stories and they just don't impress me that much anymore. I don't want that to be true but I don't know how else to explain my lack of excitement about this one. The writing is decent, the stories are interesting enough, his honesty about the helplessness he felt is (at least one) funny and the setting is perfect. I can't figure out why I was disappointed.

Greenside's experience was a little different than some I've read where trying to buy a house or a car turns into a nightmare. In this case people seemed to bend over backwards to help him and make it easy. What he did find difficult were the small things, like finding a locker at an airport or figuring out how to stand in line at a bakery. In his words: "It's extraordinary, really, the number of ways France finds to make daily life a

difficulty."

Well I don't care. Great book or not, difficult daily life or not, I still want to go to France. As for the book, I'd give it maybe a 5 or 6, depending on my mood, out of 10. As Randy Jackson likes to say...it was just ok for me.

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### **Sara says**

I must confess that I do not read a lot of travel books, but I was impressed with I'll Never be French (no matter what I do): Living in a Small Village in Brittany. Despite the lengthy title, the book is actually a rather brief literary romance between a man and his coastal French town. Against Greenside's best efforts, he and a girlfriend plan a vacation to France. The relationship doesn't last, but Greenside's growing affection for Brittany and the populace does. In the rashest move of his forty some years, Greenside is coerced into the purchase of a house. Comical miscommunications, anxiety, and miraculous good fortune ensue.

One of the things I enjoyed most about this book was the total debunking of the myth that the French hate Americans. Total. Debunking. Instead the charming and ridiculously polite strangers, neighbors and friends that Greenside meets, go above and beyond to help him out. They come across as near saints because it turns out that Greenside needs a lot of help. Self styled throughout the book as an incompetent, he spends a few chapters of the book in dirty ripped pants, repeatedly falling out of his window and buying things he has no way of paying for. Greenside effectively bumbles his way through life in France reconciling his bi-continental lifestyles. He compares himself to a three year old an apt description that endears himself to the reader and French alike.

It's worth noting that Greenside speaks and understands very little French. And his way of communicating such frustration with the reader, is to include a lot of French dialogue that he doesn't translate. So unless you have a working knowledge of French, Greenside leaves you as lost in the conversation as he was. While it is an effective technique and does incorporate the reader, it can also be irritating to traverse.

Injected with humor, I'll Never be French, transports with its descriptions. For those of us who will never make it Brittany, or who have been and are interested in Greenside's take, it is a delightful arm chair travel experience. Diane Johnson of L'Affaire, Le Mariage and Le Divorce fame calls it, "one of the nicest of the trillions of books about France." And I'd agree with that.

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### **Wellington says**

Started out as a potentially enchanting book but just tripped over itself. I last studied French in high school so a lot of the French dialogue can only be appreciated by someone who knows French. And then there were parts in the story that just seemed missing.

I could understand why the author would want to skip over the ending of a relationship. How someone just finds himself buying a house in France confused me too. It just felt like a chapter was missing there.

## Marita says

Read this book at your peril if you are learning to speak French, as the French spoken here is ATROCIOUS. If, however, you have some knowledge of French this can be a hoot.

It is one of a zillion stories of Americans, Brits and others buying property in France, and their trials, tribulations and triumphs. In this instance an American teacher buys a property in a Breton village after a holiday with a girlfriend. The house is aptly named "Kostez Gwer", which just so happens to mean 'green side'. The lady disappears from the scene, but Mr Greenside settles in and gets to know all about Breton peculiarities, and learns to behave like a local, abominable French notwithstanding.

*"... Finistère, the end of the earth in French, is Penn ar Bed in Breton—the beginning of the world. For me, it is."*

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## Phil says

A charming starting-over book, this time from the (rare) single male perspective. I enjoyed his perspective on the rural French lifestyle and the simple trust that villagers put in each other, something missing in Greenside's California upbringing.

Laugh out loud in a few places, slight smile throughout, a very pleasant read.

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