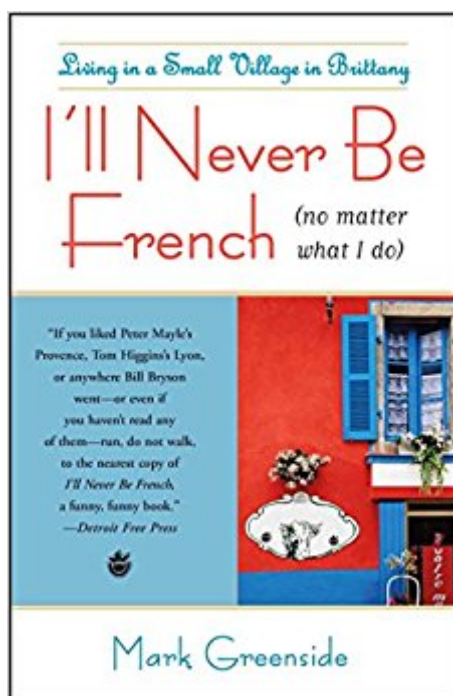


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I'll Never Be French (no Matter What I Do): Living In A Small Village In Brittany



Synopsis

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 crÃªpes, 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 FinistÃ¨re, "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.

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Customer Reviews

In 1991, Greenside, a teacher and political activist living in Alameda, Calif., found himself at both the

end of a relationship and the end of the world. The French world, that is: Finistère, a remote town on the coast of Brittany, where he and his soon-to-be-ex-girlfriend spend 10 weeks. Preternaturally slow to negotiate the ways of life in a small Breton village, he gets help from Madame P., his slow-to-melt landlady and neighbor. At summer's end (as well as the end of his relationship), his attachment to France became more permanent through the quasi-impulsive purchase of an old stone house, which was made possible with the help of Madame P. She figures prominently and entertainingly through the rest of the book, facilitating several of the author's transactions with the sellers and the local servicemen who provide necessities such as heating oil and insurance. At times the author's self-deprecation comes across as disingenuous, but his self-characterization as a helpless, 40-something leftist creates an intriguing subtext about baby boomerism, generational maturity and the relationship of America to France. Greenside tells a charming story about growing wiser, humbler and more human through home owning in a foreign land. (Nov.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Writer and academic Greenside reluctantly goes to Brittany with his ladylove in 1991. Few words are spent describing the demise of that relationship, rather the love affair described is the one he has with Brittany itself. This part of France isn't like anything he has experienced before. The generosity and fairness of the locals and the beauty and history of the place woo him until he finds himself borrowing money from his mother to buy a house. The sellers are honorable and upright as are all the repair and craftspeople it takes to maintain his new possession. But as the title of the book tells the reader up-front, this man does not exactly blend in. His language skills improve somewhat over the years, but his behavior never quite matches. No matter, he is always treated patiently and politely. There are few new insights here, but for those who love the move-to-a-foreign-country-and-survive genre, this is a fine addition to their collections --Danise Hoover --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Really loved the book! An interesting story, well told. Loved the part about arriving at the house in the village, meeting the neighbor, his experiences trying to communicate in French, his reason for going to France. Loved the part where he bought the house almost against his will! Actually, loved the whole book and have read it twice! Funny how an event can cause your life to veer off in an entirely unexpected direction that changes everything that comes after!

Good job. Well written. I was surprised about how well it was written (most of these expat stories aren't), and how the story made me really feel Brittany and want to be there.

What a charming, funny book. Felt like an invisible houseguest as he braves home ownership and all its woes with the added challenge of another language and culture.

My 91 y.o. father, husband and I had many chuckles and outright guffaws, as we read through this book while traveling in BrÃ©tagne, France. Hilarious and spot on 90+ percent of the time.

I visit friends every summer in the eastern part of Brittany and Mark settles much further west. However, much of what he experiences as he settles in is exactly what I have observed as a visitor. It's much fun reading about his friendships and work relationships with the locals, particularly his neighbor who becomes his saviour in terms of finding good workmen with great prices. Relationships can be everything in a village. I also find very amusing his use of French; even though fractured, he manages and the villagers, of course, love him for it. A great read.

This is a book that I find myself reading over and over again. Not only does Greenside paint a picture of rural France, but he does so with a degree of humor that makes the book truly enjoyable to read. You can't help but picture the places the author visits, or imagine the many people he meets and describes. I loved how he allows his discomfort of being stranded in a foreign country grow to become the very things he loves about the place. This isn't a book that focuses on the glitzy landmarks of France, but instead delves into the humble, sleepy villages of Brittany. If you want to know what it is like to live and learn about the culture of France, this is definitely a book to read.

To paraphrase F. Scott Fitzgerald's wry comment about the rich being different from the rest of us, the experiences and adventures of humans in middle age differ from those of our youthful days. For one thing, we know ourselves better and are more resilient to change, perhaps more forgiving. For another, we don't take it all so seriously. That wisdom is the great gift Mark Greenside shares with us in this delightful book. Whether or not we've had the same experiences as he, we can follow along without holding our finger underneath the words. There are moments of humor, wisdom, insight, naivete, joy, and yes, DUH! - it's all here, cast in the French countryside, brimming with life and beckoning us to give it a try, not to remain stuck in our usually boring, often dreary, day-to-day "la vie sans passion." Give it another go, Mark signals us in sharing his own adventure. I haven't

regretted it, and neither will you, he advises. The book works as perfectly as an armchair travel narrative as it does a do-it-yourself guide. Another distinctive feature is that Mark's adventure takes place in Brittany, which is a little under the radar for most Americans who think of France as either Paris or its southern regions. We learn a bit of this Western region's geography and scenery, but I found myself on the web because I wanted to learn more, see more. I wished Mark's ancient stone house were on Zillow because I would love to see it. Once Mark buys his maison, he begins experiencing many of the contractor relationships familiar to any homeowner, but with a French-cultural difference: apparently the contractors aren't out to take advantage of him. I was reminded of my first experiences touring Germany: when buying something, I had no idea the amount the clerk was asking for, so I stuck out a handful of money and he or she removed the [ostensibly] correct amount. So it was with Mark, where the costs were always fair and the work quality always excellent. In the process, he shares a great many wonderful relationship experiences, which I shall defer mentioning and instead urge you to read about herein. One spoiler alert: in the course of events, Mark does become pretty fluent in French! One more thought. Traveling together as a test of a relationship is a popular truism. Mark goes to France on a vacation with a woman he's been dating, but their relationship doesn't survive. I couldn't help thinking of how I had the same experience, traveling with a woman to Paris for a week. I thought I was crazy about her, and she about me. We went everywhere, did everything: the Rive Gauche, Sacre Coeur, Louvre, opera, countryside - but then, toward the end of our trip, a most bizarre event drove a spike through the heart of our relationship and it was over. Perhaps if Mark and I had been French we would have laughed, poured another glass of wine, forgotten the rift and kept the relationship on a steady course, but we did not. And so we carry this shared memory and life-lesson learned as older, wiser, middle-aged men.

Finally a book that really explains how it is to live in France and with the French. Greenside is very witty and so perceptive at times that I laughed out loud and had to then read those parts to my husband. We are Americans who divide our time between life in a tiny village in lower Normandy (quite close to Brittany if you don't know the area) and also equally in a central Paris apartment. Because we live in extremely different cultural situations here between sophisticated big city and country village it makes us even more aware of the way people react. We are always astonished at the critical things said about the French because we cannot find a single instance of anything but helpfulness and politeness with all we come into contact with, and we have lived here for 10 years. We have had many of the very same things happen to us as Greenside so not only is the book is

absolutely true to life, but it is funny and heartwarming as well. Great combination and I hated to see the book end. Has anyone written a book like this about Paris and Parisians yet? Please do.

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