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Coastliners
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As a French-speaking child growing up in the English countryside, I quickly earned the inevitable nickname Froggy. I was bewildered by this until I first went to school, when an older girl kindly explained to me that it was because the French ate frogs. At the time I was completely astonished — of course I knew that some people ate frogs' legs, but we never did. Cuisse de grenouille is a very expensive dish; calling me Froggy was like calling a Russian peasant "Caviar."

My grandfather called me Froggy too, La Grenouille, but for him it was a term of affection. He had a fisherman's cottage on Noirmoutier, an island off the French coast, and we spent all our summer holidays there together. It was idyllic. I ran wild; I went fishing and sailing, I explored the woods and the beaches. I knew everyone in the village; no one seemed to care where we came from. I grew up feeling that Noirmoutier was where I really belonged.

Little of the original place remains now; the fig trees have been cut down to allow for extra parking space; a wide boulevard runs in front where once there were only dunes. The place I knew has all-but vanished, except for the things which have found their way into my books. But the wonderful thing about writing is that it enables you to travel wherever you want, and nowhere — not even the past — is inaccessible. If you want to visit the France of my childhood summers, you can find it in *Coastliners*.