

**The Quiet Life
of
Marta G. Ziegler**

Maggie Reid

Copyright © 2013 by Maggie Reid
Cover Artwork by yoyo7
Design by Crooked Cat
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author or Crooked Cat Publishing except for brief quotations used for promotion or in reviews. This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

*First Crooked Cat Tales Edition,
Crooked Cat Publishing Ltd. 2013*

Discover us online:

www.crookedcatpublishing.com

Join us on facebook:

www.facebook.com/crookedcatpublishing

Tweet a photo of yourself holding
this book to [@crookedcatbooks](https://twitter.com/crookedcatbooks)
and something nice will happen.

This book is dedicated to Michael,
Joseph and Daniella.

Acknowledgements

My gratitude always to Michael Stoten.

I wish to thank the wonderful Steph and Laurence Patterson for their belief in Marta Ziegler and her adventures...which will take her around the globe.

About the Author

Maggie Reid has written stories since she was a small girl living in the countryside. Every Saturday, her mother and Granny Jenny took her to the local library to choose books before dancing classes.

She attended the prestigious Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow, studied Drama and has a post graduate degree in Education from Strathclyde University. Her ambition as a writer is to simply write from the heart.

**The Quiet Life
of
Marta G. Ziegler**

Prologue

I am Marta G. Ziegler. **Marta**, not **Martha**; everyone makes that mistake.

I am a fighter. Trouble is, nobody cares. Mum is too busy and Dad travels the World. He will come home one day soon...I know he will.

I was born deaf which seems to worry Mum more than me. I can think and dream and when the World is not perfect...I use my imagination. I can escape...

My name is Marta Ziegler and I know what I want. I want to get a gold star, and fly to the moon on a clear day when there is no torrential rain. The truth is, I'd trade in the gold star if Dad would come home...

I was born to the sound of Bow Bells, which would be great, if I could hear them! I'm a Londoner, and there is nothing better than wearing my top hat as I gaze out of my window at the Bloomsbury Skyline.

My heart is in London, but one day I will travel the Globe with my imagination. I can feel it...

Chapter One

Marta Z None

The World has no corners. No sharp edges, or so they say.

Let me introduce myself. My name is Marta Ziegler and I like to imagine that I can paint on a big canvas something exciting that is different to life here.

I like to hide in the two concrete tunnels in the commando playground with the zip wire where I live in Clerkenwell. I carry a telescope to paint the pictures, and a bottle of Red Cola in case I get caught red-handed thinking of places far away. Mums and Dads don't like you to think. They like you to keep smiling on a long journey in the Ford Cortina and not attempt to puncture your sister's satsuma space hopper.

I hate school like I hate the black smoke that comes out of the Ford Cortina that steams up all the windows and blackens my nose.

I hate school, and I can tell you why.

There are thirty-five paving stones that lead from the gritty school car park to the school gate, and I can count fast.

On the count of thirty there is a paving stone that looks like a hexagon and I scratched out "M" for Marta on the wet concrete. When you reach thirty-four you are facing the two pillars wrapped in barbed wire that reinforces the fact that I am entering a prison. The barbed wire is jagged and loose, and you can cut your hand if you kick a football too high. I've cut my hands so many times, so I am a bit like a pirate walking the plank. You have to keep steady as you walk and keep your eye on the sea of skipping ropes and mangled crisp packets beneath your feet.

In the mornings I play the pirate game and pretend that school is different to what I see. School is a place where I have never belonged. I don't belong because I can **feel** and I can write words that are not in tune with the teachers' merry dance.

It is obvious I am different. They call me deaf. I don't know what deaf actually is. It is only one word that explains **who** I am, or what I **think**.

Deafness means different. A lousy fat difference that leads to being slumped at the back of the class at a solitary desk with a rickety leg that wobbles and creaks. The desk leg, not mine.

Being at the back of the class feels like being painted with magenta spots, while other children snigger, covering their mouths with tissue so I cannot **hear**.

My teacher, Miss Lacey, would love to talk to me in Sign Language, but it is not in her "remit" – whatever that means. The important list of things to be done for Miss Lacey includes a manicure every Friday. That is unfortunate, because she looks like a reptile with sea green piercing eyes and she rolls her tongue when she is angry. Her skin is flaky, and she spits into the pots of glue.

Miss Lacey is a "pointer" not a "speaker" and points at me on a daily basis. I don't like being pointed at like a nobody - being hidden at the back behind the paint trolleys. My name is Marta Ziegler!

It is **Marta**, not **Martha**, and **Ziegler** with a capital "Z".

I am not Marta...Z none. Z nothing. Z no one.

My name is Marta Ziegler and I am not stupid. I wish someone could **hear** me.

I wish someone would understand deaf should not be **hidden**. Deaf is not **stupid**.

Chapter Two

The Z Club

It is a Wednesday, and I hate Wednesdays. The headmaster could wrap electrodes and spaghetti wires all over me as if I were a spy, and the answer would be the same. I **hate** Wednesdays.

Wednesday afternoon is reading, and unfortunately Miss Lacey has no imagination. She could not imagine marshmallow telescopes used to watch a creamola sky with chocolate drop stars.

Miss Lacey wrote in red pen spilling lines through my story. "Not realistic, Marta."

I don't want to live in Miss Lacey's world. Her armpits smell of Gorgonzola, and she has a "favourite" in the class. Everyone knows it. Her name is Georgia. She cackles at Miss Lacey's jokes. I am glad I am deaf. Then I don't have to pretend Miss Lacey is funny.

I am in the Turquoise Reading Group. There are two of us in the group, and if we were to sit any further back in the class we would be in the gravel playground!

I think Turquoise is a secret code for the children Miss Lacey is confused about. The other Turquoise member is Bobby McGonigal. Bobby is like me – not quite perfect.

Bobby has a scared retina on his left eye, so some words are blurred. So blurred the words look like a flurry of snow. The Doctors say they can't do anything about helping his eye until he gets older. My Mum said it was caused by toxoplasmosis. I don't know what it means but it sounds like the kind of word used by robbers running through a car park. "Grab the sack of gold coins and the toxoplasmosis!"

Never mind, at least I have made a friend. Bobby is quite funny, and has the ability to talk a little slower so that I can understand by lip reading. The code for Miss Lacey is a right hand gesture of throwing a custard pie in a circular motion. The Turquoise Group can tell good jokes.

Bobby has one ambition, to be a dentist. It is quite strange as he has crooked teeth with a fancy brace that creates a zigzag shape in his mouth. I think Bobby's teeth are fine, but he says dentists have to be a mirror to the World. He says when he has straight teeth he is going to fly a plane over the ocean.

Georgia Deevy and Noella de Coeur, the class bullies with no imagination, call Bobby "just part of the Z Club. Z for zigzag, and Z for Ziegler". Crikey!

I may not be able to **hear** Georgia but I can **see** her waving her arms around like a Swiss watch, and a face like a beetroot. My Mum says she has bad manners. She writes stories about her Dad being a Lawyer. Who cares? This is a playground, not a courtroom.

Georgia can do everything. She is in the Gold Reading Group, and they receive a badge with gold stars and glittering sequins. I think Bobby and I should have gold badges, but I have cloth ears, and he has a dodgy eye, so there is no hope.

Georgia is a baton twirler. She can skip on one leg, eat a candyfloss and hold her nose (all at the same time). Georgia has a display cabinet at home with an array of Faberge eggs in an assortment of colours...magenta, turquoise and taupe. I have a plastic yo-yo, and my Dad is a lorry driver. Never mind, one day Georgia's fancy eggs will crack. She will have golden yolk dripping all over her face.

I feel bad for saying it, but Georgia smashed Bobby's glasses against the barbed wire railings because "he looked sad".

Georgia thinks the Z Club are losers. Georgia may go for fancy holidays in Morocco, but she never smiles. Never.

Chapter Three

The Window to My World

I live in a top floor flat with a “casement” window to the World in my attic room pointing north to a Bloomsbury skyline that turns velvet at dusk. The kitchen has a bowed ceiling with a peeling plaster and thimble paint. Every room in the flat is sky blue apart from my room – they ran out of paint the higher they got!

I have a bright orange room – called “mango” if you live in Knightsbridge. It is always noisy downstairs and our landlord is called Mr Shapiro. I sometimes have to hide behind the door when the rent is late (which it is almost all the time).

Nan gives jars of home made marmalade to Mrs Shapiro and he shrugs his narrow shoulders. His eyes dart around the room as if he can sense and smell a scampering ferret.

I do not think that Mr Shapiro likes me, because he gave me a second hand bear for Christmas. It had ripped stuffing at the back of it, and the satin ribbon around its neck is tea stained.

When you are poor, people give you second hand things that they think you should be grateful for, don't they? I didn't have the heart to throw away the bear. I washed him and mended him. I'm sure he's deaf like me, and that we are kindred spirits.

Mr Shapiro has made the rent higher every year. It's like an obstacle course. Soon they will be too high to jump. I **hope** we don't have to leave. That's what happened in our last flat. Mum was crying and we had to pack quickly. Mum sold everything that was gold in her jewellery box. I gave her my gold signet ring. It is only nine carat but I thought it would surely help.

We didn't get our deposit back because Flick my Ferret chewed up the carpet, Nan tried to sew up the carpet and fix it but the rips were too long and jagged. Dad didn't come home to help us pack. He was busy working – which is good, because one day we will live somewhere that's not got a wet carpet and black patches on the wall paper. When we move again maybe I will get a budgie or even a larger type of parrot like an African Grey or Macaw.

Our kitchen is small and there are hooks on the ceiling where Nan hangs silver spoons that she collects. There is always a smell of spices and particularly Star Anise and cinnamon. Nan makes chutneys for the homeless hostel down the road, and sometimes I get to go and give out sandwiches. But Flick is barred as she ate the boiled eggs faster than we could make them into sandwiches and people scream at her, thinking she's an oversized rat! How can a harmless ferret look like a rat?

I have a heavy brass telescope that is bigger than me and was given me as a present from my Great Auntie Queenie who lives in New York. She sent it with a card.

“Now you can reach for the Moon and the Stars, Marta!”

I can go to New York anytime that I want – it will have to be when Nan wins the National Lottery!

Pinned to my walls are pictures of my heroine Coco Bonheur Chanel. I would like to be like Coco and have my designs all over the World. I have a tailor's dummy that Nan picked up from Camden Help the Aged. It was a wee bit crooked but Nan fixed it, no problem. It looks just like new.

All the neighbours give me their old clothes and I'm not too proud to look in a recycling bin if I spy a tiny piece of velvet with my telescope.

Drains are very good too. You can find lovely cufflinks and buttons near drains.

One day I would like to go to New York and see my clothes on **real people**...big, small, and tall. Flick would be really excited. You see having a ferret as a best friend means that you never need to worry about them being by your side because ferrets are fearless but loyal. They are not moody or revengeful. But they **are** mischievous!

I design and make my own clothes, so if you have an old tablecloth or curtains, do not throw them away. You can turn them into something magical with Imagination, needle and thread and **patience**. I have made things badly, but I have still **tried**.

All the girls at school think that they are something special. They have hoity toity shoes made from real leather. Mine are “faux” leather, which is not as good, so they say. I might be famous one day. The girls have proper school satchels, and I have a tapestry carpetbag with a hole in it, but it was made by lovely Jenny at the magical Bead Stall in Leather Lane.

Jenny made the bag with all my favourite colours, sewing in her famous beadwork of garnets and pearls and amethysts. The fabric colours are of pink, sapphire and midnight blue with an embroidered golden “F” for Flick. This makes sense as Flick jumps into it when she wants a lift!

I am working on a range of skirts and jackets at the moment. One day, I want my own stall at the market to breathe in the air of excitement and coins in your hand.

At school they laugh at what I wear. Georgia and Noella laugh and smirk. They clap their warty hands when they want something. It wouldn't matter if I clapped my hands three hundred and sixty five days a year, I still wouldn't get what I asked for! Well, apart from custard and jam sponge if I'm good.

I do not get holidays wherever I want in The Globe no matter how many times I stamp my feet. Georgia Deevy has been everywhere – Paris, Rome, New York...cruise ships, the Orient Express. Oh, and don't we know about it! She wrote a journal called “My Life of Privilege and Travel.” In other words, she is saying that she is spoiled and she is going to show off with photos of herself scuba diving, walking on water, swimming with dolphins and jabbering with monkeys as she scratches her armpits. It's the monkeys that I feel sorry for. They look unhappy.

Georgia Deevy is not my favourite person. She is a bully, but gets away with it because she gets prizes for everything at school. Why does she get prizes? Her Mum and Dad donate the trophies to the school! My Nan offered to be a bingo caller for a charity night at the school. She was told thanks but the schedule was already full. Rubbish! The Headmaster thought bingo was too downmarket. He has been terrified ever since he hired “After Dinner Vince” as a toastmaster having been told that he was a “learned and debonair raconteur” when he was in fact, “lavatorial”.

I wear my top hat everywhere and everyday I feel like a “proper somebody” in it. I was given it for Christmas from Carlotta who was in the Circus for years! It belonged to the Ringmaster. She lives at Number 4 downstairs and she can spin plates, and can speak more languages than you hear clever people speak on a quiz show. The hat was way too big when I was given it aged five years old. I used it to hide in it. In fact I recommend the top hat as the best costume you could ever have...and a great igloo for a ferret!

Carlotta is maybe ninety years old and can still do star jumps. The thing is, and this quite delicate...she has a snake! Yes and not a small, easy to camouflage grass snake but a huge python called (wait for it)...Houdini!

Houdini by name, Houdini by nature. It escapes in search of my best friend Flick. Snakes and ferrets would not go on a picnic together down the road in Regent's Park!

As much as I have a vivid imagination, I could never sit on a tartan tablecloth with Carlotta, Houdini, Nan and Flick. It would be too awful a dream, wouldn't it?

I do not know what age Houdini is, but he is longer than the crochet scarf Nan made for me that's in lemon and lavender. I don't really like Houdini at all. Sometimes it's good to pretend though, isn't it? Especially to spare someone's feelings. Not the snake's!

Carlotta has a poorly chest. She coughs a lot, and I think it's getting worse. She lives on her own so I always say hello. Houdini is in the tank (thankfully). Flick trembles when we walk near Carlotta's. Ferrets sense danger quickly and avoid it.

Carlotta told me once that she joined the Circus because her Mum and Dad were disappointed

with her. She struggled to read and write as well as her three brothers and she always wanted to dance. Her brothers laughed at her but Carlotta tried hard by herself with a worn pair of second hand ballet shoes with ribbons. She found these in a jumble sale.

Carlotta used to fill up with tears when she told her story. "I saved up all my ice-cream money for the shoes, and when I told my Dad he called them filthy, flea-ridden things, fit only for the bin. I hid the shoes, and still have them today..."

Not everyone likes people with dreams do they? They torment them and laugh at them...people that want to sing, or draw or paint or act in the theatre. Not everyone sees it like I do. They see it as wasteful.

How lost they are!