



# The Blessing Next to the Wound: A Story of Art, Activism, and Transformation

*Hector Aristizábal, Diane Lefer*

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Hector Aristizábal grew up in the barrios of Medellín, Colombia, where he and his siblings had to use all their wit, wiles, and wherewithal to survive poverty, the ever-present allure of cheap drugs and very dangerous money, and the endemic violence from leftwing guerrillas, rightwing death squads, cocaine cartels, and the armed power of the State. As a young actor and psychology student, Hector was seized by the military, held in secret, and tortured. He survived and went on to find meaning in his ordeal as he channeled his desire for revenge into nonviolent activism both in his homeland and during decades of exile in the United States.

While challenging the State-sponsored causes of much suffering in the world, Hector reached out to some of society's most marginalized—at-risk and incarcerated youth, immigrants, and many others—using his theatrical skills and psychotherapeutic training to help people shape their own stories and identities. He sought to understand his own identity as well as that of one brother who was a revolutionary and another who was gay—and how his belief in personal integrity and political freedom might square with the realities of a country under the yoke of toxic ideologies. Hector was forced finally to examine his own motivations and commitments, and begin to heal his own gaping wounds.

Shockingly honest, heartbreaking, and vibrantly told, **The Blessing Next to the Wound** is a passionate and evocative memoir that, amid enormous suffering and loss, is a full-throated affirmation of life.

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