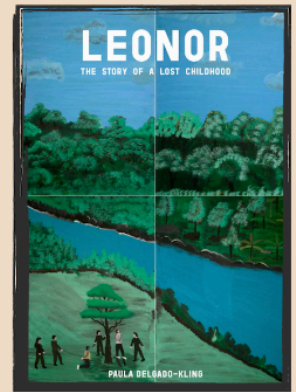


PAULA DELGADO-KLING

ABOUT THE BOOK

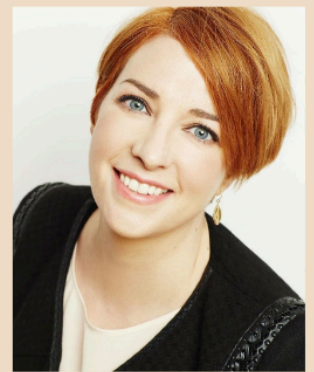
Paula Delgado-Kling takes us to her homeland, Colombia, where she finds answers to the country's drug wars by examining the life of Leonor, a former child soldier in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), once a deadly cocaine-trafficking group on the U.S. State Department's terrorism list. The author followed Leonor for nineteen years, from shortly after she was an active FARC member forced into sexual slavery by a commander thirty-four years her senior, through her rehabilitation and struggle with alcohol and drug addiction, to more recent days, as the mom of two girls.

Colombia's violence also touched the author's family. The idea for this nonfiction narrative began with the question: why was Paula Delgado-Kling's brother kidnapped, and why were his guards teenagers?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paula Delgado-Kling holds degrees in comparative literature/French civilizations, international affairs, and creative writing from Brown University, Columbia University, and The New School, respectively. *Leonor*, for which she received two grants from the Canadian Council for the Arts, is her first book. Excerpts of this book have appeared in *Narrative*, *The Literary Review*, *Pacifica Literary Review*, and *Happano.org* in Japan. Her work for the Mexican monthly news magazine *Gatopardo* was nominated for the Simon Bolivar Award, Colombia's top journalism prize, and anthologized in *Las Mejores Crónicas de Gatopardo* (Random House Mondadori, 2006). Born in Bogota, Colombia and raised in Toronto, Canada, Delgado-Kling now resides in New York City. To learn more, please visit PaulaDelgadoKling.com.



PRAISE FOR LEONOR

"Leonor's story is tragic and unforgettable and offers a compelling perspective into Colombia's decades-long civil conflict."

– **Emily Nemens**, author of *The Cactus League*.

"Delgado-Kling writes with courage, deep insight and empathy about an important global human rights issue."

– **Jeffery Renard Allen**, author of *Song of the Shank*, *Rails Under My Back*, *Holding Pattern*, *Stellar Places*, *Harbors & Spirits*, and *Fat Time and Other Stories*.

"...a compelling firsthand account of the greed, social neglect, and deliberate misrule that has forced many Latin American children and families to seek a better life in the arms of terrorist groups."

– **Ernesto Quiñonez**, author of *Bodega Dreams*, *Chango's Fire*, and *Taina: A Novel*.

"...incredibly well-researched memoir is a brave and devastating investigation of the decades of violence that have torn apart Colombia."

– **Luis Jaramillo**, author of *The Doctor's Wife*.

Title: *Leonor: The Story of a Lost Childhood*

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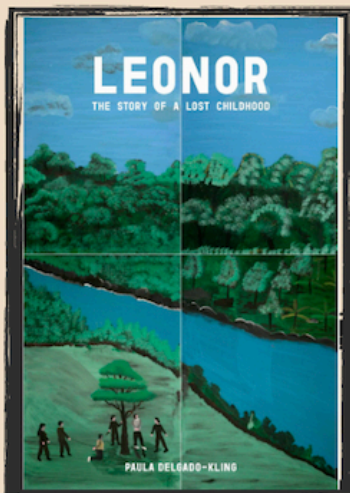
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SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PAULA DELGADO-KLING

- 1- What was it like growing up in Colombia?
- 2- Why did you have to leave Colombia?
- 3- Did all of your family flee the country?
- 4- Could you please share the story of your brother's kidnapping?
- 5- How did you meet "Leonor"? your brother's kidnapping?
- 6- Why do you think Leonor agreed to be interviewed? meet "Leonor"?
- 7- What do you believe can be done to prevent children from joining guerilla groups in Colombia?
- 8- How long did it take to write the book, Leonor? What do you believe can be done to prevent?
- 9- Who else did you interview for this book? Leonor?
- 10- When did you know you wanted to be a writer? Who else did you interview for this book?
- 11- Where can readers find out more about your book? you know you wanted to be a
- 11- Where can readers find out more about your book? writer?

EXCERPTS FROM LEONOR BY PAULA DELGADO-KLING

Chapter Eight, pages 96-97:

After Mercedes whipped her, Leonor lost track of the number of nights that she slept on the street. Having learnt the lesson from her father's behavior, Leonor dressed like a boy, and she believed it was insurance against men touching her. But by her dainty hands and her walk, and by her small waist (and perhaps she already possessed that habit of hers, of coquettishly swaying her shoulders), it was easy to tell—even by her voice—that here was a beautiful girl.

On the street, Leonor met Redhead. He was a boy her age—she called him “el pelirojo”—because he had paprika-like freckles sprinkled on his cheeks and hair like the head of a matchstick. To know that Redhead—though lanky and feeble—kept a piece of a broken bottle within his grasp consoled Leonor. She was sure he would protect her, and so she followed his lead, and they squatted inside deserted buildings. With him securing the space, she was able to give in to slumber for a few hours.

Some days, Leonor and Redhead sold slices of watermelon at streetlights. They were employed by an old woman who had approached them. But Leonor was often starved, and she devoured the watermelon, its juices jetting down her chin and arms. The woman slapped Leonor when she came back without money, and so Leonor went car-to-car begging drivers for pocket change. Most cars were scraps of tin, spewing dark smoke. Once or twice, a luxury car, overdone with tinted windows, shiny hubcaps and immense headlights, circled the neighborhood. As Leonor approached the cars, the drivers rolled up the windows. She stood by the car windows, and the drivers looked elsewhere or pretended to fiddle with the radio. She caught glimpses of her reflection on the cars' side-view mirrors, and she was repulsed by her tattered clothes and soiled face.

Redhead was shrewd, and one day, he returned with plates loaded with mountains of rice and arepas. By word of mouth, he discovered they would be offered food if they showed up at FARC camps located in Mocoa's jungle periphery. Feeling faint, aware she could not go another day without food, Leonor ventured into FARC camps to be fed. She accepted seconds of rice, beans, and lentils, and soon, she helped herself to them. She became a regular at the encampments, and she began thinking of FARC members as friends and allies, compassionate to her situation. A FARC nurse disinfected the wound on her leg, from her mother's beating, and covered it with bandages after white pus oozed from it.

Some nights, Leonor lingered by the fire in the middle of camp while someone strummed a guitar and others sang. It was then she was able to sleep uninterrupted, without worrying whether Redhead and his broken glass were watching over her.

Members of the FARC intermingled in the daily life of her town and of the entire area, and many of them were people she knew. Some locals wore FARC fatigues, others didn't—but nearly all of Mocoa's residents were sympathetic to the group's Communist roots. For Leonor and for many teens in Colombia's southern communities, the FARC camps offered diversions. There was booze, and sometimes there was dancing, and there was also the thrill of being allowed to handle a gun. The camps were akin to a rite of passage, a way to rebel against parents.

Mercedes kept the door of their home locked. When Leonor strolled by, Sergio rushed to the window and waved kisses at his sister.

Chapter Seven, pages 76-77:

Alejandro awoke again in the stuffy room, a room so tiny it fit only the queen-sized mattress he lay on. Black Mask and White Mask were cross-legged on the floor, at the foot of the bed, and each fidgeted with a machine gun. I pieced together such fragmentary details through the years, mainly by staying quiet and making myself invisible when the subject was brought up. The masks both wore jeans and black T-shirts. Black Mask was extremely skinny; he had a tattoo of a bouquet of black roses on his bicep, and from his wrists red amulets of the Virgin Mary hung. White Mask was on the fleshy side. Long dark hairs grew on his fingers. Evidently following an order, they did not address my brother except for the required “baño está aca” on the first day. Their cigarettes kept them behind a veil of smoke.

The boys stole sideways glances at Alejandro.

My brother repeated in his head: Padre Nuestro que estas en los cielos.

White Mask was saying, hermano, there's more to life than your mamá's frijolada.

Black Mask responded, No jodas con mi mamá. He shook his machine gun, and for a moment, it looked like he'd use it to body-slam the fat kid. You like her beans. Puta, si que usted es un puta chanco, he said, laughter erupting. Black Mask handed White Mask the Walkman they shared. Su musica es pura mierda, he said.

Alejandro tensed hearing them disagree until he realized their tone was part of their friendship.

With each passing morning, it became easier to think about the abduction. On February 5, 1992, at eight-thirty in the morning, Alejandro sat at his desk, coffee in hand. The cleaning lady could be heard objecting, Señores, you are not authorized to come in. Señores! She appeared small next to the six men in military uniforms filing in. They flashed Uzis, AK-47s, and grenades. They ordered everyone against the wall and demanded to see ID's. Afraid, disoriented, Alejandro and his co-workers complied. A much older associate, who was known to have weak health, yelled, Who are you? Then, a muscled voice said, It's this short one, este es, and four of them were half-lifting, half-dragging Alejandro out the door.

Outside, six more men in military garb were waiting. A police car drove by without pausing.

Alejandro, who's about five and a half feet tall, held onto an electricity post but two of the giants rifle-whipped him until he let go. Once in the tiny room, the scar on his forehead began healing. He'd needed stitches, but only peroxide and paper towels were left for him on the mattress. Alejandro caught Black Mask nodding approval when he used it to clean the wound.

We'd been half-expecting a kidnapping since the days of M-19. The security specialists our family consulted had said not to keep a routine, and not to divulge on the phone where we planned to go. We grew up fearing the car that followed us. Once, an unknown driver who was parked on our street for too long prompted me to sleep with my street clothes on, and Alejandro taunted, “Loser, you let fear win.”

Where had my brother's two bodyguards disappeared to? The bodyguards accompanied us everywhere. As a teen, Alejandro ran away from Angel, and Angel had to drive all over Bogotá looking for his car.

“Stupid,” I'd said to Alejandro, though there had been a time when I had been willing to follow him, to run away together, and Angel cajoled us home.

Angel was not with him on the day he was abducted. Angel had retired from security and was driving a city bus. But the bodyguards with Alejandro on that day had worked with our family for over ten years, and in the loneliness of captivity Alejandro could not accept that they'd been paid off. Later, it was said his bodyguards could have been involved though nothing was ever confirmed. For this reason, for some time, I hesitated to trust Juaquin.

The kidnapers appeared trained by Special Forces—the way they transferred him from car to car every few blocks, abandoning the white Mazda at the corner where the blue one was waiting. The next stop they shoved him into a Renault, next into a Chevrolet. They'd rehearsed the routes, studying the traffic at that time of the day. Within forty-five minutes, Alejandro was in the room with the mattress, being told to put on the dark green sweats. They still had the tags from the store. To put them on would be to accept being there, so he resisted.

