An excerpt from Dear Indio

TELL HIM

By Kathy Gutierrez

"Tell your brother..."

Think of all the people I might have brought you a message from while you were in San Quentin. Would his name ever have crossed your mind? Everybody knew he'd committed the murder you were doing time for. I can still see him in front of me, his hands clasped together, his knees just clear of the floor.

That night in the garage off Freedom Boulevard was the last time I saw the people we'd grown up knowing. A few bars of Brenton Wood's "I Think You've Got Your Fools Mixed Up" and I'm back on the end of that couch, watching him shake the rain off his jacket. I'd known his face since Rolling Hills Middle School, but I'd never seen him with this crowd.

He looked straight at me. There were girls sitting to my left, though, and for the few steps it took him to reach the couch I could still tell myself he might turn to one of them. He stopped at my feet, squatted down and took a breath.

"Hi, Kathy."

"Hi," I answered.

Around us, people went back to talking. I'd catch somebody glancing our way, and to this day I wonder what they could see in my face as I listened to him talk about you. He might as well have reached into my chest, ripped out my heart, and tossed it across the room to see who would catch it first.

He had one last thing to say before I got up and left. "I want you to know, if there's ever anything you need, I'm here."

I've carried that offer with me for thirty years. What I needed that night was you home.