WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Learn more about how you can get involved in the campaign to Free the Mississippi Five:
https://www.studyandstruggle.com/ms5

Write to Loretta:
Loretta Pierre, #71843
DCF
3800 Co Rd 540
Greenwood, MS 38930

FREE THE MISSISSIPPI FIVE

Loretta Pierre

“What do you think?”

cover portrait by phan
illustrations by a f azar
text by the MS5 zine team

Loretta's experiences with the opaque and dehumanizing parole process mirror others who have been denied. After 36 years of incarceration and 14 denials, all Loretta is left with is a lot of questions.

"What is the point if they are never gonna let me go?

I don't understand how they can just keep me here like this because I was not sentenced to die here in this prison.

I was sentenced with the possibility for parole after 10 years.

And considering all of the people they have let out of here, I don't know how they can do any different."

The "**Mississippi Five**" originally described five women - Lisa Crevitt, Anita Krecic, Loretta Pierre, Evelyn Smith, and Linda Ross - sentenced to life with the possibility of parole in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Despite their achievements, personal growth, the loss of loved ones outside, and even recantations of key witnesses, **they have been denied parole irrespective of their actions** and the people they have become.

After Jacqueline Barnes was denied parole a second time on Christmas eve in 2024, we added her to our campaign. These six women are now between the ages of 60 and 83 years old. They have collectively been imprisoned over 200 years and denied parole 50 times. In the words of committee member and organizer Pauline Rogers, the parole board continues to act as "judge, jury, and executioner."

It is time to **Free the Five and Free Them All!**

This zine is part of a six-part series in the campaign to Free the Five–an effort to bring home the women while raising awareness about parole as a repressive political tool.

It is based on an oral history interview with Loretta Pierre recorded on September 1, 2023.

Want to get involved? Join us:
www.studyandstruggle.com/ms5

As of the publication of this zine, Loretta's son Damien is now 38.

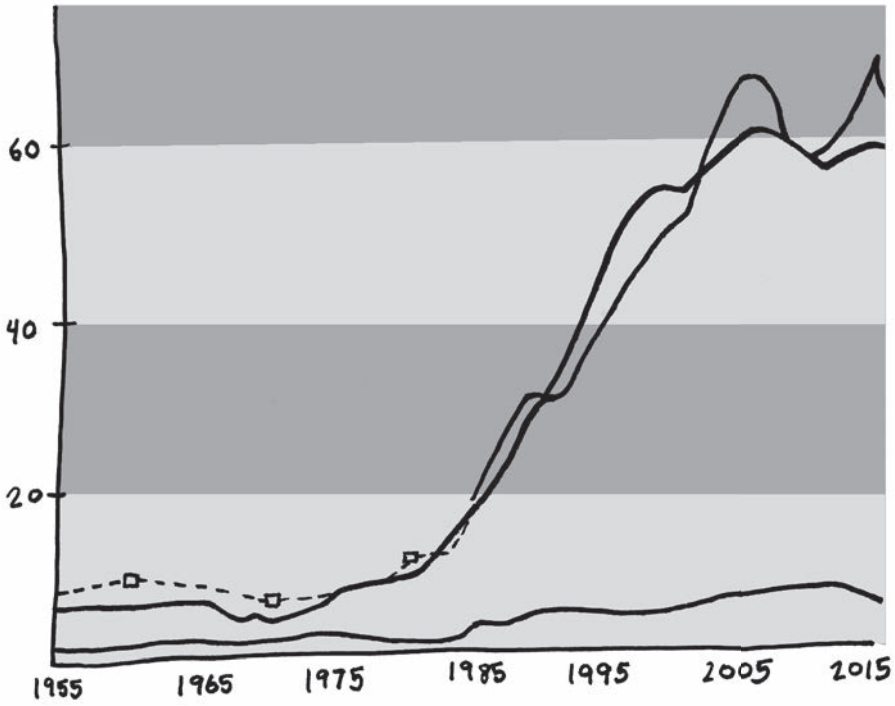
He has no memory of her being anywhere but prison.

Loretta Pierre first met Anita Krecic, another of the Mississippi Five, when she was pregnant in jail. They even shared a lawyer. Nearly four decades have gone by.

In 2022, they were both denied parole along with several others of the Five. It was their 10th and 14th denials respectively.

Loretta was convicted in 1989 as part of an unprecedented rise in women's incarceration.

Between 1980 and 2021, the number of incarcerated women in the United States increased by over 525%. Women's imprisonment has outpaced men's twofold during that time. The majority of those in state prisons have been convicted of what are considered violent crimes.



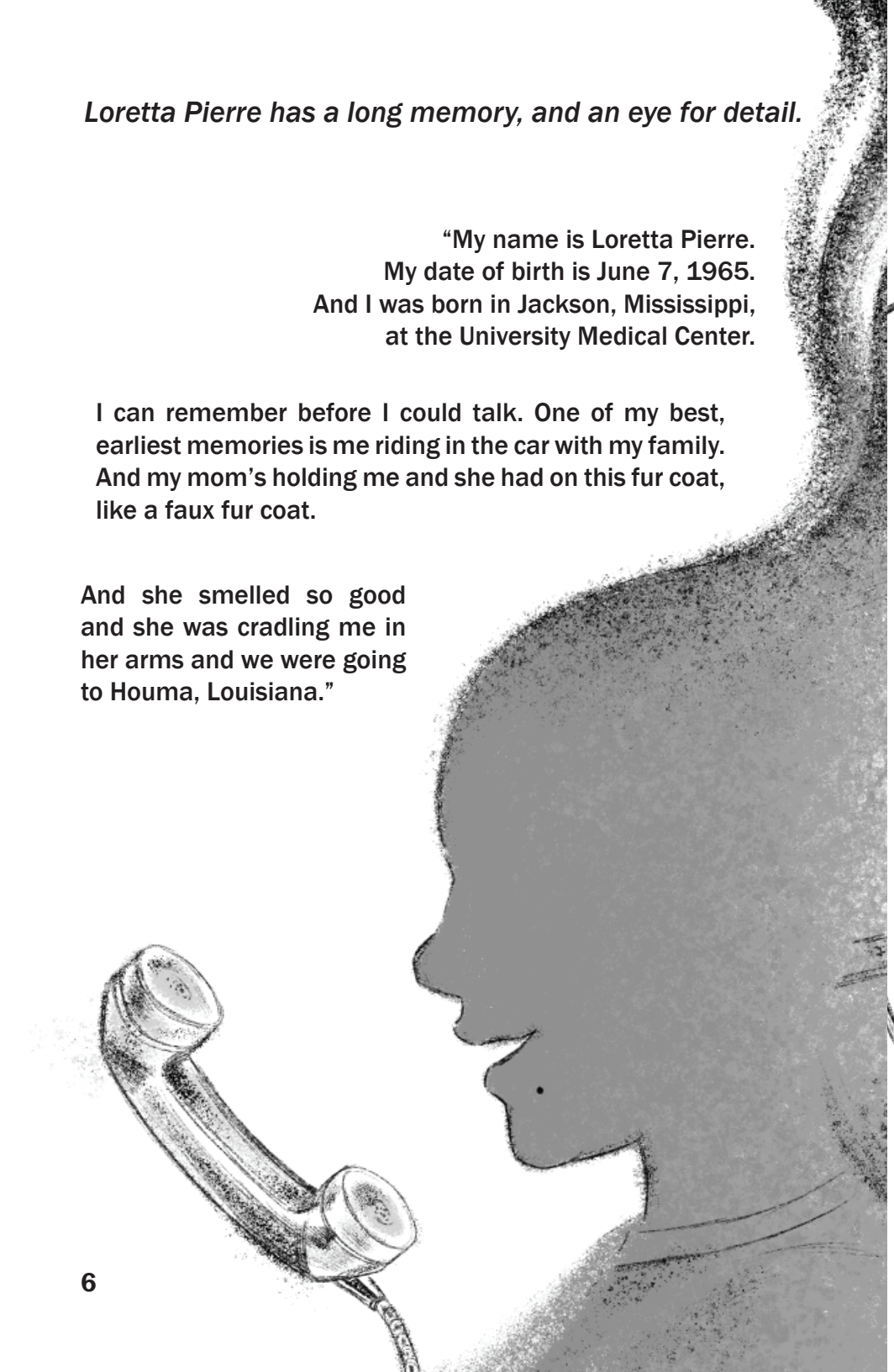
[Image based on graphic from Wendy Sawyer, "The Gender Divide: Tracking Women's State Growth," Prison Policy Initiative, January 9, 2018, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women_overtime.html; data also gathered from Niki Monazzam and Kristen M. Budd, PhD, "Fact Sheet: Incarcerated Women and Girls," The Sentencing Project, April 3, 2023, https://www.sentencingproject.org/fact-sheet/incarcerated-women-and-girls/]

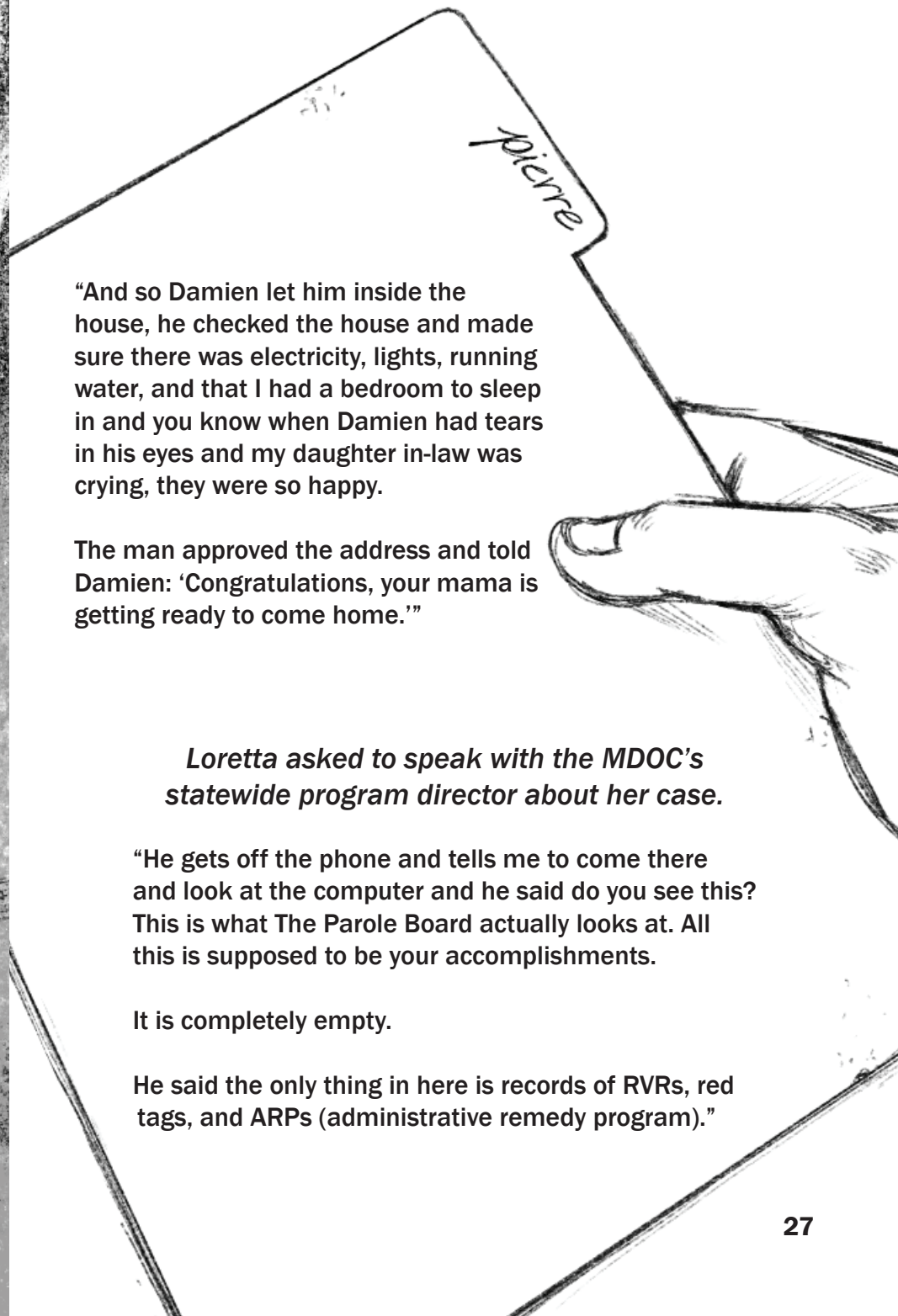
Loretta Pierre has a long memory, and an eye for detail.

"My name is Loretta Pierre.
My date of birth is June 7, 1965.
And I was born in Jackson, Mississippi,
at the University Medical Center.

I can remember before I could talk. One of my best, earliest memories is me riding in the car with my family. And my mom's holding me and she had on this fur coat, like a faux fur coat.

And she smelled so good and she was cradling me in her arms and we were going to Houma, Louisiana."





"And so Damien let him inside the house, he checked the house and made sure there was electricity, lights, running water, and that I had a bedroom to sleep in and you know when Damien had tears in his eyes and my daughter in-law was crying, they were so happy.

The man approved the address and told Damien: 'Congratulations, your mama is getting ready to come home.'"

Loretta asked to speak with the MDOC's statewide program director about her case.

"He gets off the phone and tells me to come there and look at the computer and he said do you see this? This is what The Parole Board actually looks at. All this is supposed to be your accomplishments.

It is completely empty.

He said the only thing in here is records of RVRs, red tags, and ARPs (administrative remedy program)."

Loretta's last parole hearing, in January 2022, marked her 14th denial. She believes it is more than any woman in the state's history.

What happened after shows the ways parole denials function as a psychological, as well as a physical, punishment—one meted out against her entire community.

"I went up for parole and before I actually got the physical results back, they called me to the Mississippi Highway Patrol to ID me out.

They woke me up at 5:30 in the morning and took me across the street. They had me fill out my papers for where I would be. They had my birth certificate and social security card, everything I would need to get my state ID. They took my picture. It made me believe that I had made parole and that I was fixing to go home.

Then, I come to find out that that was a mistake.

A friend called the board and they told her I got a 4 year setoff. I'm thinking that somewhere between them talking to them and this particular moment, maybe they changed their minds.

Four months later, on April 5th, 2022, a MDOC parole officer went to my son's residence in Jackson to approve my address. When Damien came to the door he said it must be some kind of mistake. The officer said no, it's not a mistake, this paperwork came across my desk at 4:30 and it has to be approved today."

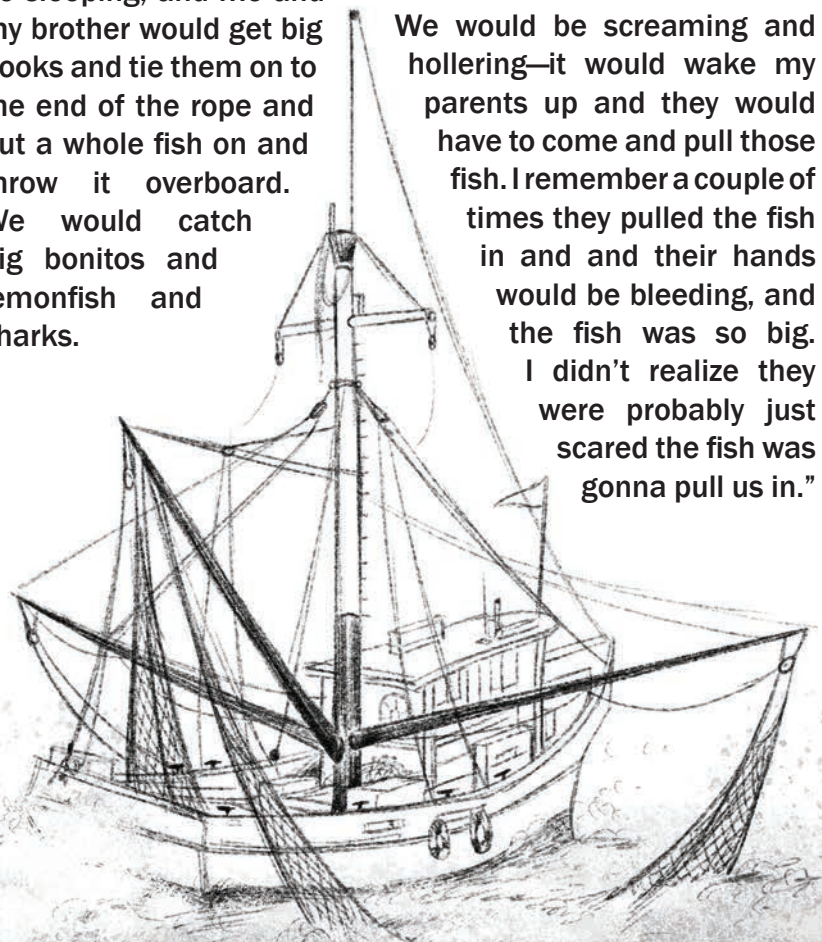
One of the first things she'll tell you about is her childhood in Gulfport, Mississippi.

"I loved being with my daddy; I was just a real fool for him.

He always had a big boat, a shrimp boat, like a double rigger boat with 40 foot nets. And we would go out on the boat and go shrimping.

And in the day they would be sleeping, and me and my brother would get big hooks and tie them on to the end of the rope and put a whole fish on and throw it overboard. We would catch big bonitos and lemonfish and sharks.

We would be screaming and hollering—it would wake my parents up and they would have to come and pull those fish. I remember a couple of times they pulled the fish in and and their hands would be bleeding, and the fish was so big. I didn't realize they were probably just scared the fish was gonna pull us in."



I've never met my grandchildren. I've seen the pictures, I've heard of them.

But you know, I've never actually met them.

Damien's been waiting for me to come home. And, you know, I feel like he thinks it's my fault that I can't come. But I'm not here by choice. I'm here by force."

Loretta has been up for parole 14 times. Each time, her hopes have been raised and plans have been laid. Each time, she tries something different, but the result is always the same.

"I was thinking that if I didn't make it I was probably going to receive about a year setoff before I could see the board again. But I was the first woman to receive a 5 year setoff.

I tried to not get any more RVRs (Rule Violation Reports). I tried to not get any RVRs, period. I went 11 years without getting any paperwork. That didn't change anything.

I mean, nothing I've tried worked.

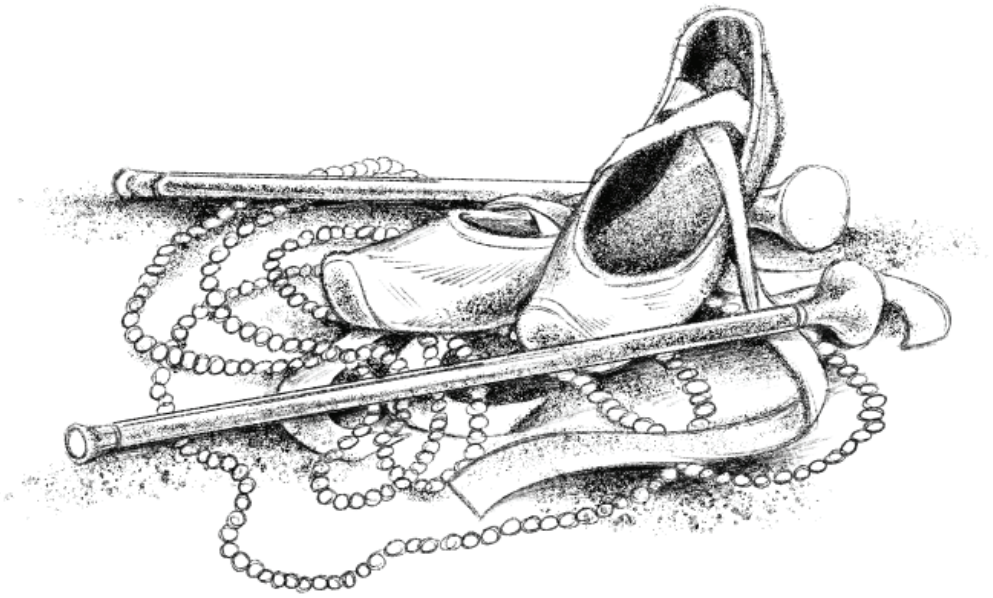
A new governor came in and ordered the parole board to bring everybody who had been set off for more than a certain amount of time to be brought back up for parole. So they brought me in 16 months early. I'm thinking, it's got to be a sign. It can't be anything bad. You know, if they're bringing me up early, surely they're gonna let me go, right?

So I asked my mama to go to North Mississippi, she went to Horn Lake and rented me a brand new townhouse and nobody had ever lived in it. And it was on Joy Boulevard. And I'm thinking oh, it's gotta be a sign, Joy Boulevard, it's gotta be a sign, I'm fixing to go home. Then when I went for parole, I want to say I got a three year setoff.

"And I remember the one time we won a fishing rodeo—second prize in the fishing rodeo, and my brother won a rod and reel and we had never had a rod and reel before. So one time we were at Ship Island and he was on one side of the pier and I was on the other and the boat was docked at the pier. I saw him drop his rod and reel and run to the beach. And so I got on board and ran down the beach to see what was what was going on with him. He had pulled in a hammerhead shark right up on his feet.

And I remember being at the bow of the boat, and seeing the dolphins swim with the boat as it was going out into the Gulf."

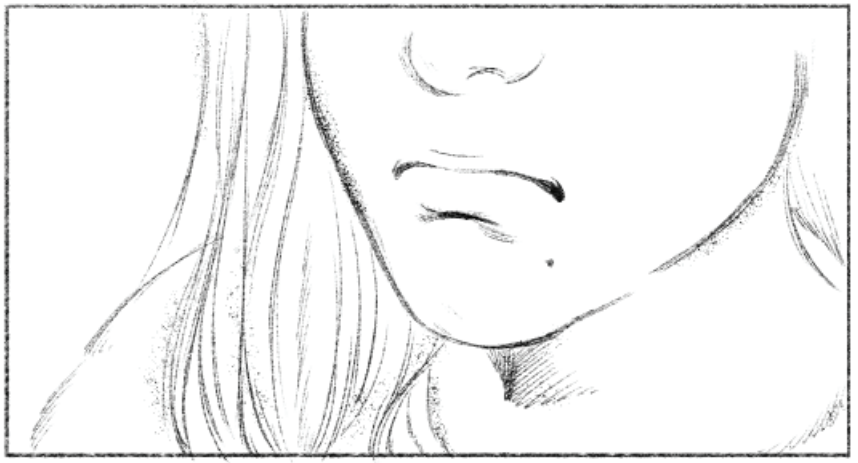
Loretta remembers being happy with her family.



“My mom, my parents, they were, I guess, liberal with us.

We were eating good food and, you know, visiting with family. And oh, my mama always had me in ballet, tap, and jazz, and twirling, and beauty pageants. And you know, I would always ride in the parade in a convertible throwing out candy and Mardi Gras beads or whatever. Whatever the occasion was. They had Christmas parades and St. Patrick’s Day parades. So whatever the case may be, I was always marching in the parade with my twirling troupe.

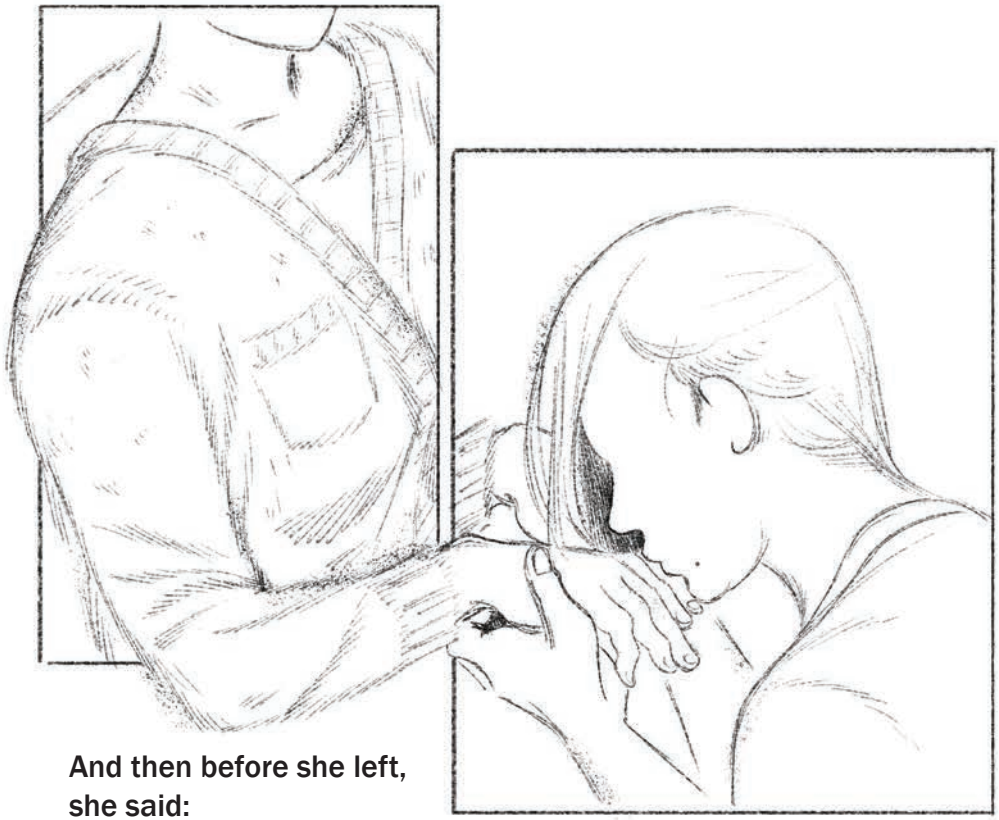
I didn’t realize how much my parents did without, because they loved their kids.”



She was talking about the kisses I had put in her pocket.

I’m gonna tell you something about my mama: her entire world revolved around her children.”

"The last time I saw her, she had on a little cardigan over her shirt and I put kisses in her hands so she could put them in the pocket of her shirt, so she could save them for later.



And then before she left, she said:

"I opened my own business when I was eight years old.

My daddy owned a seafood market in Gulfport. I opened my own business inside it and I sold candy and potato chips. Me and my brother had two pinball machines, two drink machines, and a snowcone machine. So that was our business inside of the seafood market."

"My worst fear was that my
daddy would have been taken from me...
That was my worst nightmare."

Family separation is a key cruelty of prisons. When the Department of Corrections moved Loretta, they made it more difficult for her family to see her in the few ways they were still able.

"We lay in bed and watch TV, whatever we wanted to cook, and so that's how we bonded, through that family house. I could go every three months, and so we went every three months."

"July of 2011, was the last time we went to the family house together.

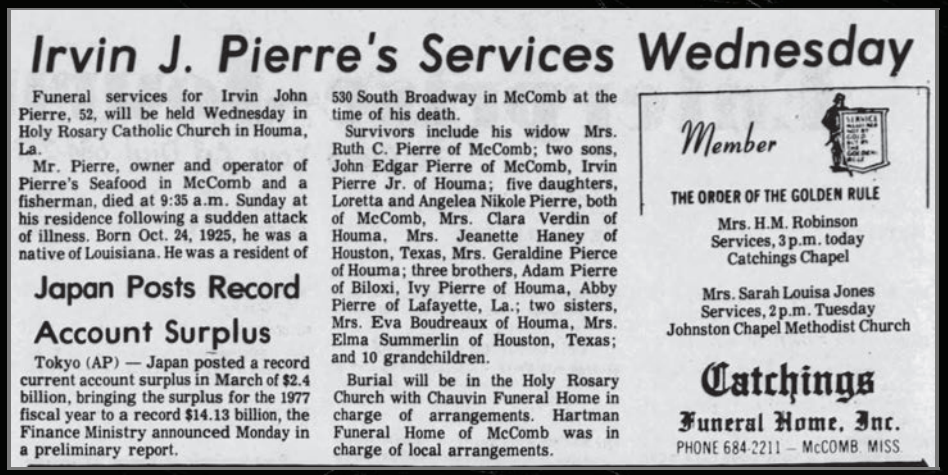
And after that I started noticing little things about my mom. If I asked her something, she'd give me one word responses, and things like that.

Then in 2015, my brother told me that my mom had Alzheimer's."

"I had been denied parole for the first time in October 1997. Then I got A custody.

I was able to go to the family house. So my mom, Damien, and my sister come and stay with me 47 times at the family house. We would go from Monday to Friday or Friday to Monday. Sometimes it would just be me and my mom or sometimes it'd be just me and Damien. And so we spent some really good quality time over there. Because they had a little apartment and we could grill outside we could slip and slide, play basketball. They had playground equipment, you know, for Damien."

"When my daddy died the world just crumbled. My whole world just stopped revolving."



Irvin J. Pierre's Services Wednesday

Funeral services for Irvin John Pierre, 52, will be held Wednesday in Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Houma, La.

Mr. Pierre, owner and operator of Pierre's Seafood in McComb and a fisherman, died at 9:35 a.m. Sunday at his residence following a sudden attack of illness. Born Oct. 24, 1925, he was a native of Louisiana. He was a resident of 530 South Broadway in McComb at the time of his death.

Survivors include his widow Mrs. Ruth C. Pierre of McComb; two sons, John Edgar Pierre of McComb, Irvin Pierre Jr. of Houma; five daughters, Loretta and Angelea Nikole Pierre, both of McComb, Mrs. Clara Verdin of Houma, Mrs. Jeanette Haney of Houston, Texas, Mrs. Geraldine Pierce of Houma; three brothers, Adam Pierre of Biloxi, Ivy Pierre of Houma, Abby Pierre of Lafayette, La.; two sisters, Mrs. Eva Boudreaux of Houma, Mrs. Elma Summerlin of Houston, Texas; and 10 grandchildren.

Burial will be in the Holy Rosary Church with Chauvin Funeral Home in charge of arrangements. Hartman Funeral Home of McComb was in charge of local arrangements.

Japan Posts Record Account Surplus

Tokyo (AP) — Japan posted a record current account surplus in March of $2.4 billion, bringing the surplus for the 1977 fiscal year to a record $14.13 billion, the Finance Ministry announced Monday in a preliminary report.

Member

THE ORDER OF THE GOLDEN RULE

Mrs. H.M. Robinson
Services, 3 p.m. today
Catchings Chapel

Mrs. Sarah Louisa Jones
Services, 2 p.m. Tuesday
Johnston Chapel Methodist Church

Catchings
Funeral Home, Inc.
PHONE 684-2211 — McCOMB, MISS.

"He died in 1978, right before I was 13 years old."

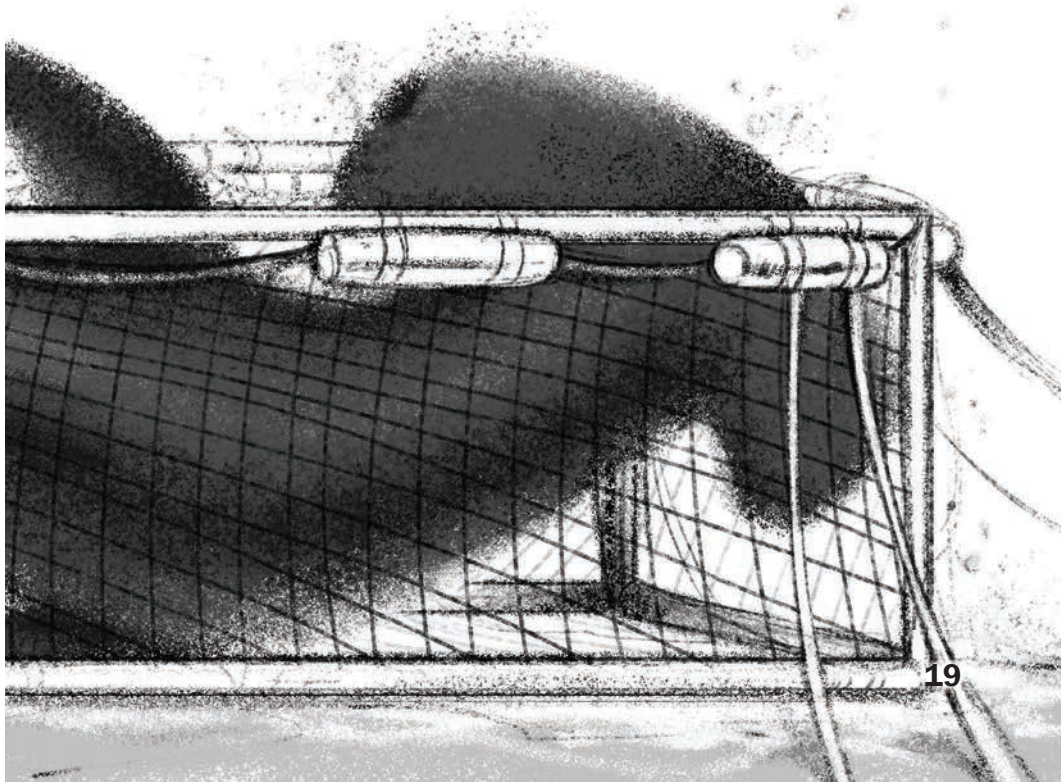
Loretta already struggled in school, but after her father's death, she dropped out and started dating older men, and selling drugs with them.

"I quit school in the seventh grade."

Life inside was difficult and Loretta was incredibly isolated during her first years in prison.

"They designed a whole new custody level for me. It was called D custody. They said it was approved by the legislature. I was the first person to go in there. I couldn't have a visit, phone calls, or canteen for a whole year.

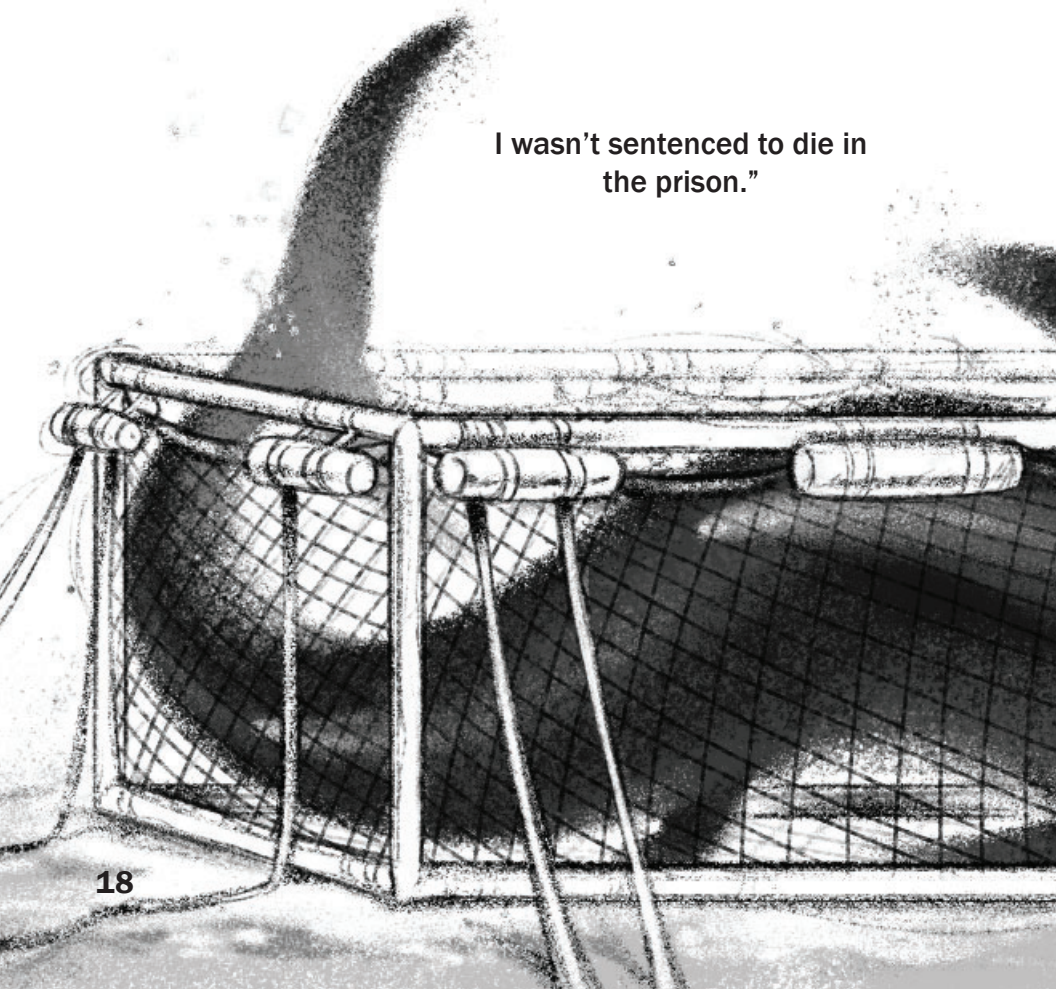
[After that] I saw Damien a lot, except for that one time I couldn't see him for a whole year. And when I tell you Damien was bouncing off the walls, and then on the phone he was calm, cool and collected. I mean, that's just how much time had gone by. And how much he changed."



Loretta had already served a year and a half in jail by the time she arrived at Central Mississippi Correctional Facility. Credited with this time, she believed she had only eight and a half years before she would be released on parole.

"I was sentenced to life with the possibility of parole after 10 years.

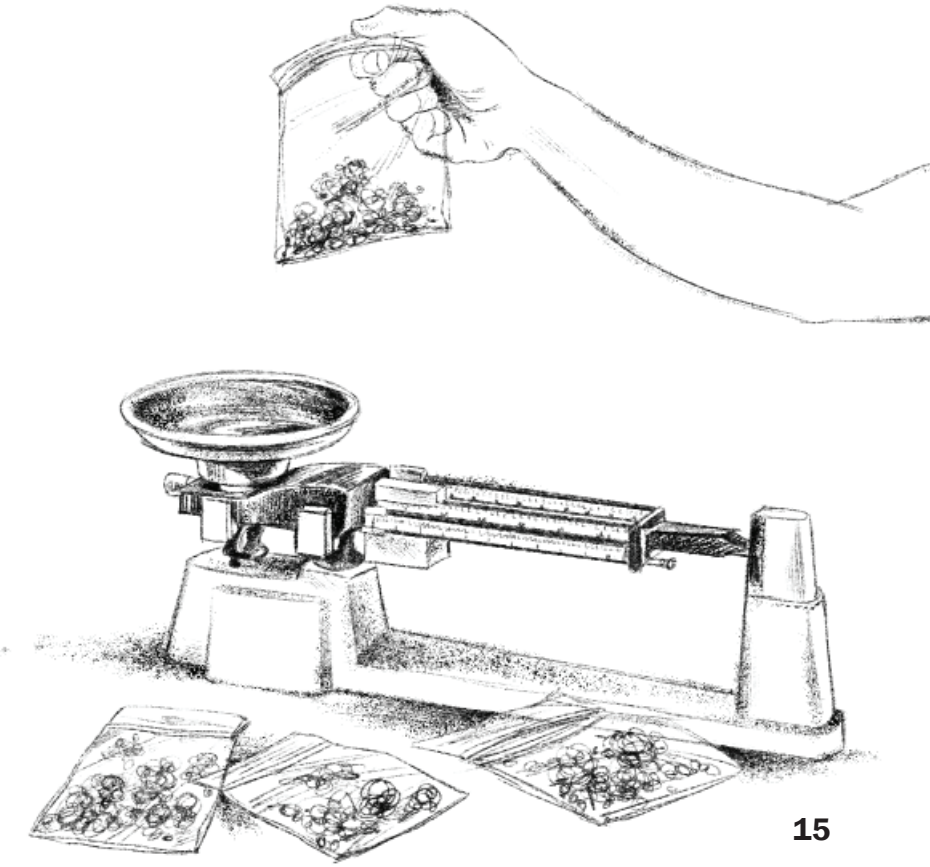
I wasn't sentenced to die in the prison."



"We just really just started doing whatever we wanted to do. You know, we were smoking weed.

When I was maybe 13 I got a boyfriend. He was older than me, like 23 years old. And then when I was 14, I met Sherman. Eventually I moved in with him.

He sold dope on the side. I sold the dope while he was at school and work. I learned everything I needed to know about that from him. I already knew how to weigh the stuff because I had worked in the seafood market. So I was good at weighing stuff. And then I was a good business person from working in the seafood markets, too."

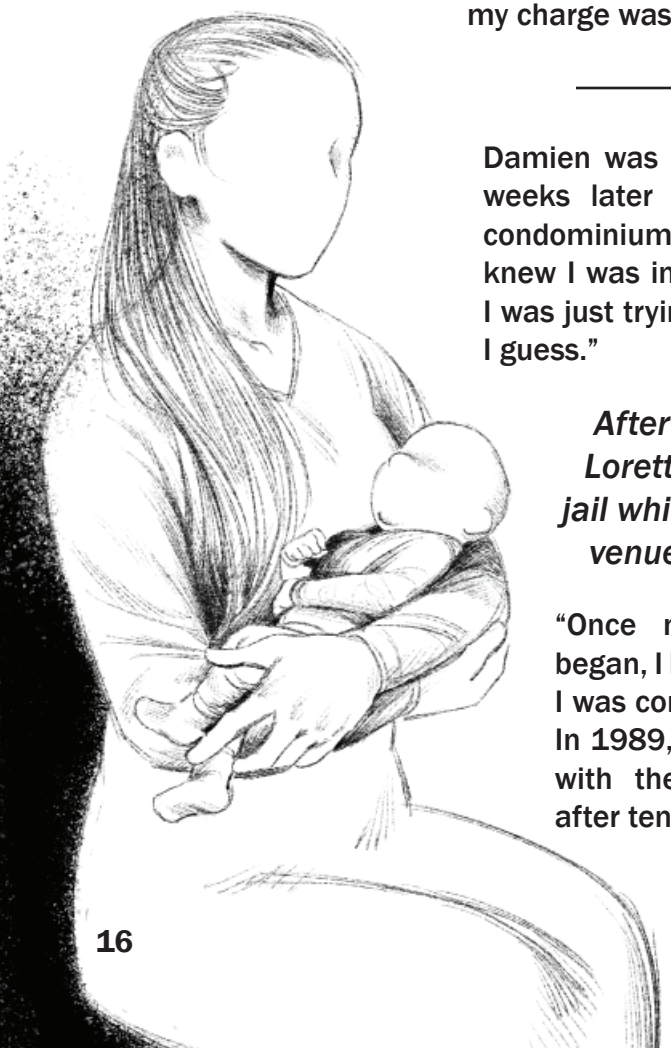


When Loretta was arrested, she was five months pregnant.

"In 1985, when I was twenty years old a woman threatened to kill me and my unborn child. Acting in self-defense, I shot her. I immediately called 911 for help, but tragically, she did not survive.

When the police arrived, I was arrested for aggravated assault. The woman's boyfriend, who was the father of our child, died by suicide two days later. Scared for my life and desperate to stay with my baby, I said he killed her.

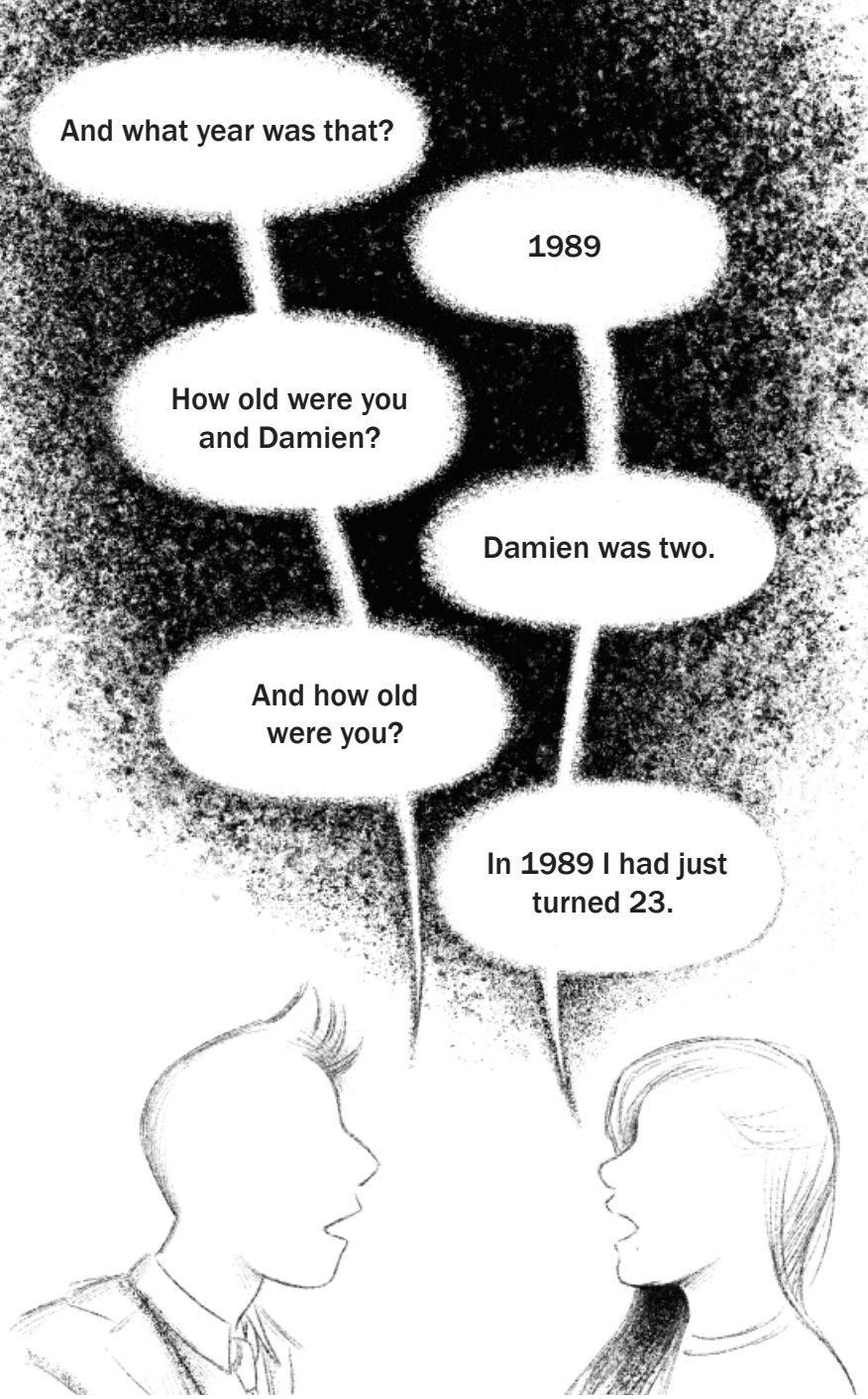
When I eventually confessed the truth, my charge was upgraded to murder.



Damien was born on April 8. Two weeks later I moved into these condominiums on the beach. I knew I was in serious trouble, and I was just trying to live my best life I guess."

After Damien was born, Loretta was in and out of jail while on trial in multiple venues across the state.

"Once my court proceedings began, I had five mistrials before I was convicted at my sixth trial. In 1989, I was sentenced to life with the possibility of parole after ten years."



"...And I spent 20 months with Damien, 20 months total."