

1985

By the Toussaint River

Debra Benko
Denison University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Benko, Debra (1985) "By the Toussaint River," *Exile*: Vol. 32 : No. 2 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol32/iss2/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Denison Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Exile by an authorized editor of Denison Digital Commons.

By the Toussaint River

She led me here, to her river,
named for its explorer, the first in Ohio,
a Frenchman who had come to the Great Lakes via the Saint Lawrence

We leaned against a willow
at the edge of this trickle
which meets more trees, a bridge,
and a gold neon sign flashing "Toussaint Tavern"
before river becomes Lake Erie.

I read her a poem of hands, of my hands
like shoes polished black for Sunday, and her hands,
pale sheafs of corn in the December fields.
My hand, her first recorded explorer,
became a milkweed pod, covering, releasing,
the white tufts that were her fingers when

she forgot me.
The willow tree divided us.
She forgot the first time my hand met hers.

We were recklessly laughing when our hands collided,
and hands being hands, my hand
pushed aside my list of "Don'ts"
and introduced each one of my fingers to hers.

For the moment a lightning bug is a lantern,
she forgot she brought me under the willow.
She knew only that her hand
is the underside of a willow leaf
and mine is willow bark.

When she was nine,
for days after her father told her never
to watch another horror movie
the yellow bulb of her night light
became a shadow passing into her,
entering under her fingernails.
Seeing bullheads swimming near her pole,
licking ice cream in her head —
did not stop the shadow —
only her arms wrapping her father's neck.

Tonight she thinks ripples, cattails, cicada songs.
A willow branch brushes her cheek.
Her hand hugs mine.

Debra Benko