

Joseph Cross

June Tabor

There's word from the caf?
That the old mans ailin'
His eyes are pailin'
And the weather took his hands
They say the ring on his finger
Was shaped from a bone
From some white man in Missouri
That spilled whiskey on his wife

He has traveled in a sacred circle
And he has traveled on a white man's train
He's killed for hunger his buffalo brother
He's killed for anger and a white man's name

His name was Joseph Cross
And he was raised by the mission
Just one of a hundred Indian boys
That wouldn't tie his shoes
He cried the night his grandpa died
And told him in a vision
"Stay close to the ways of the rattlesnake
Stay close to the ways of the grizzly"

In the 1919
Chill of December
The bear and the rattler
Coil sleepin' hardly breathin'
It's a penny to the kitchen boy
To run get sister Lydia
"Now you tell her that old Indian
Is sleepin', hardly breathin'."

Someone said it just weren't right
To give him a white man's funeral
Someone said they'd just as soon as not
Float him on down the river
But no one touched the ring
And no one said a thing about his chest
Where it looked like a bear had ripped him
And a rattler kissed his cheek