

## 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