California Faith

California Faith
(Debby McClatchy)

Come gather 'round and listen, I want you all to know
What became of Maggie and California Joe
They left old Mad Jack's cabin, packed all the cart could hold
And it's off to California and searching for the gold

They settled down in Marysville, the Sierra mother lode
A booming mine shack city built where the Feather River flowed
They built a home of logs and stones where the river starts to wind
And Joe worked running buckets in the Little York Hydraulic Mine

Just before the first snowfall Maggie bore a little girl
They named her Faith and Faith became the center of their world
Ten years passed and Faith grew strong in a piney mountain home
And everyone in Marysville felt Faith to be their own

Joe was second foreman, he still worked in the mines
And he often said to Maggie, I'm worried about springtime
Slickens are ever rising, the bottom's up five feet
If this year's snow is heavy, then we're in for a lot of grief

I've tested out that river every springtime we've been here
And just as I suspected it's risen every year
I've spoken to the manager, he won't give me a chance
All the owners are for profits and the owners live in France

That winter was both cold and long; the woods were choked with snow
And with the thaw, the Feather grew to a swollen raging flow
And as the swirling waters hit the mine above the town
Well, the slickens were so heavy, water had to move to higher ground

Forty-six million cubic yards of gravel, muck, and mud
Turned the peaceful Marysville to a fifteen-foot high flood
And high above the city Joe found his Maggie safe
But none of all the neighbors there had seen a sign of Faith

She'd gone down to the river to find flowers in the snow
And, Joe, I could not find her when the river overflowed
I searched, I cried, I called her name, but I heard no returned sound
Then the waters got so very high I had to move to higher ground

Oh, Maggie dear, don't fret, don't mourn; I'll find our little girl

I can't believe that God above could take so sweet a pearl
He has so many treasures, I know we'll find her safe
And the very next time you see me, I'll have our darling Faith

All the neighbors gathered there searched far into the night
And up and down the flooded town were boats with bobbing lights
As the first shell-pink and grey brought promise of the dawn
Weary searchers went on home to bed, but Faith had not been found

Two days passed and hope grew dim; there'd been no sign at all
And many friends gave up the search as the river began to fall
There'd been so many loved ones lost, the toll was mounting high
But why should Faith so young and strong have been chosen then to die

Joe searched and seethed and cursed the mines and mourned all he had lost
The price they'd paid was worthless now; they'd paid to
(The gold they'd got was worthless now; they'd paid too high a cost)
And when the night brought darkened hopes he knew the time had come
Well, he climbed the hill above the town and blew up the Little York Mine

All the neighbors came to watch, the sky was lit by fire
All the world grew warm and gold and the flames leapt even higher
And from the dark into the glare a small form crept alone
And someone shouted, Joe, come see, your Faith at last is home

Oh, daddy, I'd gone down to find some flowers in the snow
And then a mighty water-wall pushed me on down below
I caught and held a sturdy log and prayed I would not drown
Oh, we floated down for miles and miles 'fore I could reach some higher ground

At first I thought I can't go on, I cannot even try
Then someone whispered close at hand, I'll save you or I'll die
Since then I've walked through snow and mire; my strength was fading fast
That voice kept me from losing hope and now I'm home at last

Now hoses, pumps, and buckets are all gone from Marysville
They passed a law in ninety-three, the mine is ever still
The men went back to panning and digging for the gold
The family is together and my story has been told

"I wrote California Faith for two reasons. One was, I really was in love with a ballad Jim Ringer sings called California Joe, and thought it would be nice to write a sequel. But I also wanted to write a song about the hydraulic mining that had gone on in California during the Gold Rush. That's a type of strip mining like what's going on in Kentucky and Tennessee right now, but done with water pressure.

"They would wash down whole hillsides and get out the gold

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through sluices, use of mercury, and all that was left would be the hillside, minus its gold, and it would be left in big slagheaps called 'slickens.' Or it would be by the side of a river and it would be washed down the river and hit the lowlands and build up in the river over a period of years, and there were absolutely devastating floods that left the California lowland hi
mining had done itself.

"But they finally did outlaw it. Kentucky really should go over and look at California, because even though it was almost a hundred years ago that this was stopped, it's still barren land.

"This is my soap-box opera song." DMcC
JN

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