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Enikő Farkas Remembers

2016 is the 60th year since the 1956 Revolution. My life was profoundly influenced and shaped by those events. I was born in Hungary in 1941, and grew up in the small city of Vác during the Communist era. Vác is located on the banks of the Danube, 33 kilometers north of Budapest. After completing elementary school, I was not accepted into high school because of my middle class background. My father had Alzheimer's by 1954 and couldn't work, so my mother got a job as a cleaning lady in a restaurant, then in a canning factory. There was no welfare. I was dying to go to high school, but under the circumstances I decided to work. As a 14-year-old, I first worked in a canning factory, then in a sewing co-operative in Budapest. I got a special permit to work underage. I had to take the train to go to Budapest to work. My aunt invited me to live with her and family in Budapest. In October 1956, when the revolution against communism and the Soviet Union broke out, I had no future ahead of me. The area we lived in, the 8th district was a hotbed of the Revolution. There were intense periods of fighting when the tanks were shooting at the tenement houses. We couldn't leave the apartment for days and could have died in any minute. In order to relieve boredom and hunger, my aunt gave me an embroidery book to look at. I drew one of the small designs on a piece of cloth and using old thread, followed written instructions and stitched it. My aunt and her family, bombed out of their apartment, fled to the West after the Communists took over again.

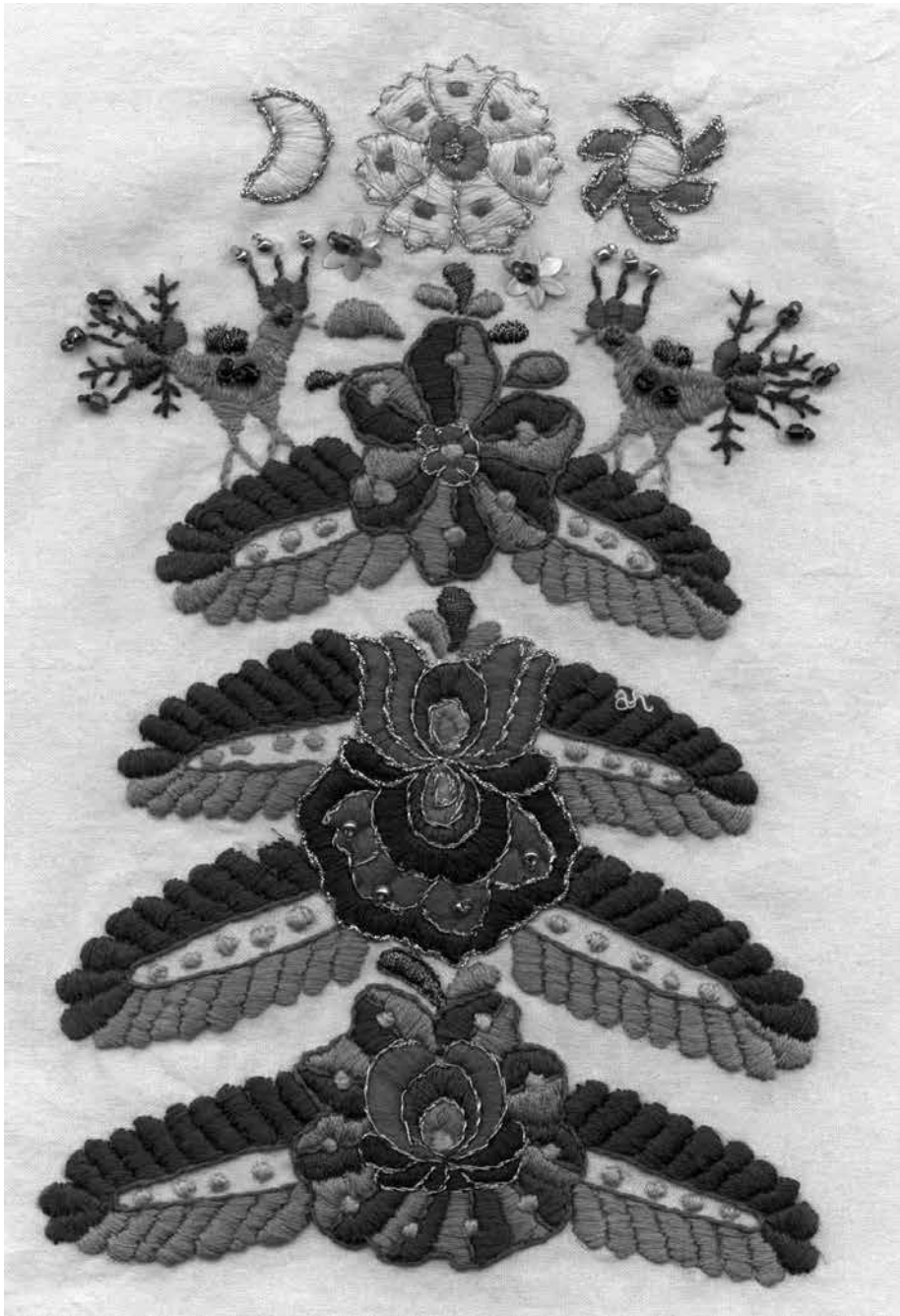
Even though the Revolution was crushed, life eased. When I applied for admission again to the Geologist Technician High School, which had rejected me before, I was then accepted. I continued to embroider in my free time, picking up information on embroidery from other people. Embroidery was considered to be a "petite bourgeois" activity, not looked upon favorably by the Party. I graduated from the Geologist Technician School in 1961, and worked as



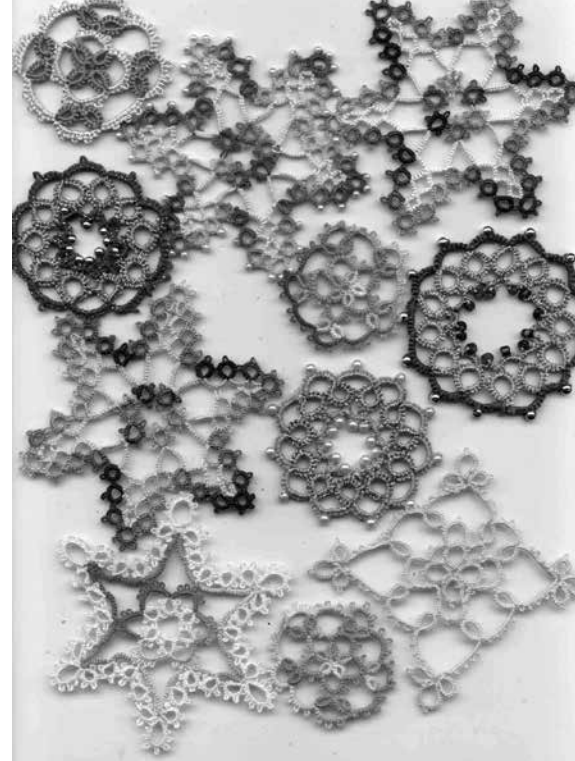
Enikő at the Lowell, Massachusetts Folk Art Fair, July 2012. Photo by folklorist Zsuzsanna Cselényi.



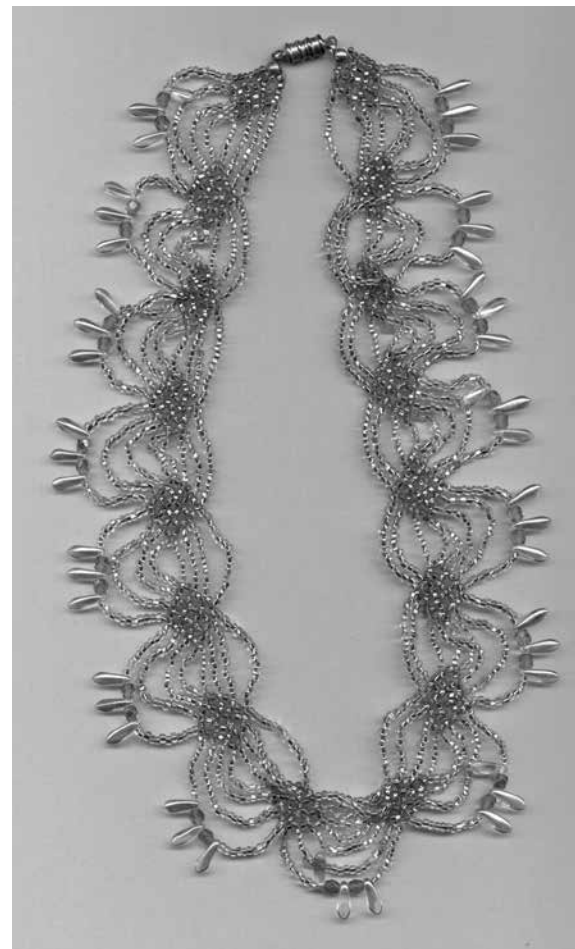
Matyo pillow case. Photo by Enikő Farkas



Matyo Style Tree of Life, embroidery designed by Enikő Farkas. Photo courtesy of the author.



Tatted snowflakes. Design enhanced by Enikő Farkas. Photo courtesy of the author.



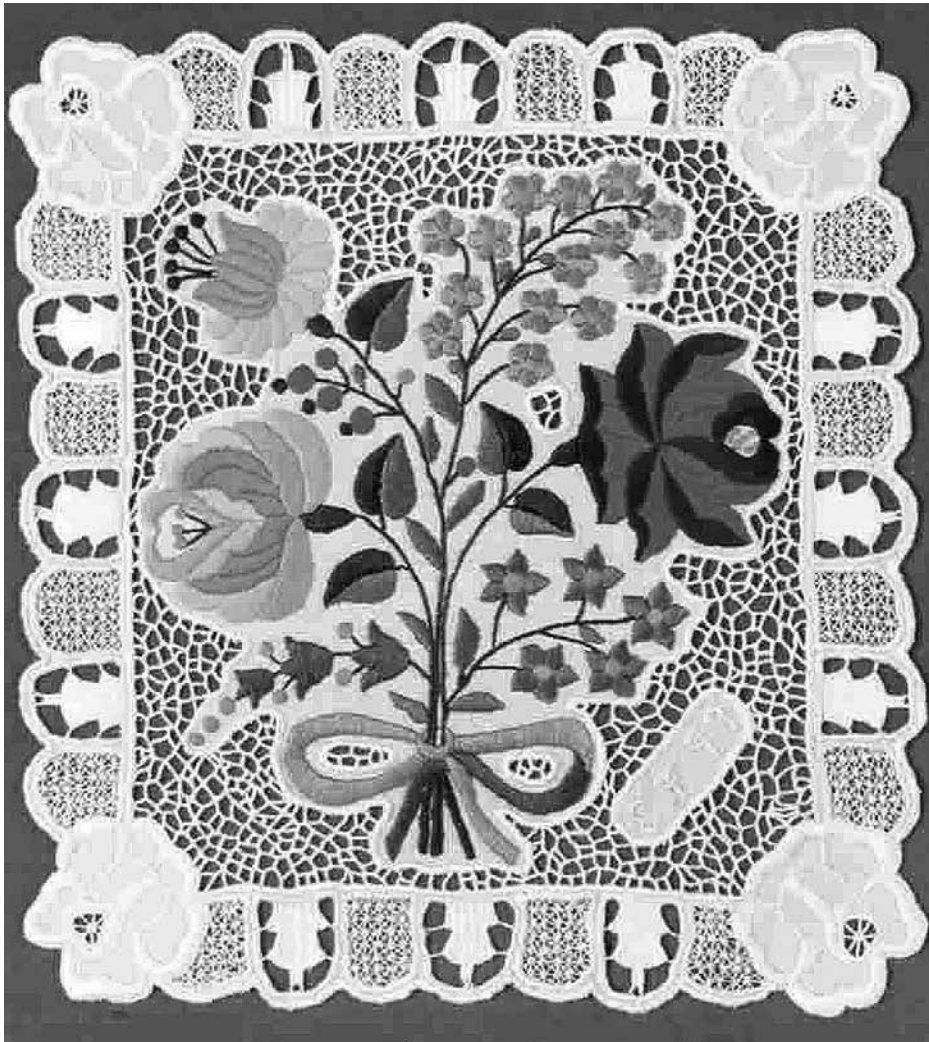
Hungarian folk art seed bead necklace created by Enikő Farkas. Photo courtesy of the author.

a geologist technician until I got an invitation from my aunt to come to visit in the US. It was a welcome opportunity to learn to speak English and to strengthen my work situation. We had visiting businessmen who didn't speak Russian or Hungarian and wanted the company to drill for them, and getting a translator was a major problem.

My interest in embroidery turned to passion after I got married and made my home in the US. For lack of language skills, I couldn't get a job when I arrived, and

embroidery became my creative outlet. Relatives and friends kept me supplied with printed patterns from Hungary. I continued to gather information about embroidering from other Hungarians and enlarge my knowledge. Getting a job as a scientific illustrator enhanced my drawing skills, and I also became interested in folk art painting. I started painting wooden objects in the Hungarian Székely style.

In the 1980s, the Hungarian American Club of Syracuse asked me to exhibit my



Hungarian Kalocsa Needle Lace. Designed and worked by Enikő Farkas. Made for the EGA (Embroidery Guild of America) Individual Correspondence Course. Photo by Gary Hodges, Jon Reis Studio, courtesy of the author.

embroideries at the Festival of Nations in Syracuse. There I met an embroiderer, Connie Root, who invited me to join the local chapter of the American Guild of Embroideries. That led to many invitations to teach at chapter events. I became an Individual Correspondence Course teacher for Embroidery Guild of America from 1993 to 2012, teaching a course in Kalocsa embroidery and another one on how to make handmade Kalocsa lace. I took folk art tours of Hungary to study with master folk artists.

I was asked to participate in numerous museum exhibits, giving talks and teaching needlework and decorating arts workshops. My invitations ranged throughout upstate New York (Roberson Center for the Arts, DeWitt Museum, Chemung County Historical Society, Schweinfurth Memorial Art

Center, Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University). One of my embroideries is in the permanent collection of the Roberson Center for the Arts and Sciences in Binghamton. I was one of the “Master Embroiderers” featured in the video *Threads*, made by WSKG Public TV. I published several articles on the history and technique of Hungarian embroideries and laces, as well as a Hungarian cookbook, *Hungarian Cuisine and Personal Memories*, (available at www.nyfolklore.org/gallery/store/books.htm#hungarian).

My special interest is the coded communication by which Hungarian women expressed political sentiment in textile decorations and clothing. I gave a presentation on this subject for the American Folklore Society’s Annual meeting in 2002 and published an article on it in *Voices*. I received several

awards for my embroidery teaching and the Árpád Award in 2003 from the Árpád Academy of Cleveland, OH.

I was able to get my much coveted higher education here in the US. I have an Associate Degree from Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3). While working at Cornell University’s Mann Library in book conservation, I earned a BA in History of Arts through the employee degree program in 1997. One of my TC3 professors, Carol Kamen connected me to the New York Folklore Society. This connection gave me many opportunities and expanded my areas of interest. I served on the NYFS Board of Directors from 2002–2006.

I still teach workshops as a volunteer. I taught one in April on beaded necklaces, and taught another one recently on Easter egg painting here, locally, in my adopted hometown of Ithaca, NY. ▼

Read more about and by Enikő:

“Enikő Farkas: Community Scholar,” by Karen Taussig-Lux and Deborah Clover. NYFS Newsletter, Summer 1998 <www.nyfolklore.org/pubs/news/nlsu98/farkas.html>

“Crossing the Border: Stories of the 56ers,” by Enikő Farkas. NYFS Newsletter, Summer 1998 <www.nyfolklore.org/pubs/news/nlsu98/border.html>

“Hungarian Goulash,” by Enikő Farkas. NYFS Newsletter, Summer 1998 <www.nyfolklore.org/pubs/news/nlsu98/goulash.html>

“Political Resistance in Hungarian Dress,” by Enikő Farkas. *VOICES* Spring-Summer 2004 (30:1–2). <www.nyfolklore.org/pubs/voic30-1-2/resist.html>

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