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# In Memory of Enikő Farkas (1941–2022)

Enikő Farkas, longtime friend of New York Folklore and one of the United States' most admired Hungarian craftspeople, passed away April 18, 2022.

Enikő was born in 1941, in Vác, a small city on the banks of the Danube, north of Budapest. Desperate to go to a prestigious school but lacking the social currency required to gain admission, Enikő received a special permit to work underage at a canning factory, then at a sewing cooperative in Budapest. She rode the train 20 miles there and back every day until her aunt invited her to move into her apartment in the city's Eighth District. Soon, this pocket of the city became the epicenter of the 1956 Revolution against the Hungarian People's Republic and its Soviet-imposed policies.

"I had no future ahead of me," Enikő shared in a reflection published in *Voices* [Spring-Summer 2016, 42 (1–2): 38–40]. "There were intense periods of fighting when [Soviet] tanks were shooting at the tenement houses. We couldn't leave the apartment for days and could have died in any minute." Enikő learned how to embroider in that apartment, while terrified, hungry, and bored. "We didn't die, so I continued to embroider," she said. Embroidery was considered a *petit bourgeois* activity, not looked upon favorably by the Communist Party. Picking up a needle and thread was an act of rebellion.

After the Revolution, Enikő gained admission to the Geologist Technician High School, graduating in 1961, and then working in the field, following a company's drilling rig around the country, identifying deposits in drilling cores, and writing reports at company headquarters. Eager to learn English, she took advantage of an invitation to visit Ithaca, New York, where her aunt had fled after the Revolution. There, Enikő met her future husband, Louis Farkas, who worked as a "greenhouse man" for Cornell. They married in 1965, and had one son, Leslie.



Enikő proudly displays her handiwork at a New York Folklore event held at The History Center in Tompkins County in 2017. Photo by Gary Hodges.

Not yet fluent in English and virtually unemployable, Enikő found embroidery a bittersweet creative outlet during bouts of homesickness. "I enjoyed doing the embroidery so much and seeing the colors and the designs emerge," Enikő remembered, "that at one point it was no longer painful... It was not only for enjoyment; it was also for disappointments. When there were problems, I would sit down and embroider..." [NYF Newsletter 19 (3), Summer 1998, 4–5, 18].

Enikő learned the patterns, coloring, and symbolic motifs from every corner of Hungary. She gained recognition as an expert on regional styles, eventually returning to Hungary to meet and learn from other traditional artists, collecting samples of their work. She also picked up other skills: lacemaking, tatting, beading, and Székely-style painting. She excelled at these, too, and continued her study of regional traditions and variations. Her reputation grew; she shared her knowledge with others. She conducted a series of oral history interviews, and in 1987, she self-published excerpts in a booklet, *They Were Not*

*Well-To-Do People, but Having a Piano Was Important*. In 1997, she published a collection of recipes and related stories: *Hungarian Cuisine and Personal Memories from the 1950s to Present*. She published articles on the 1956 Revolution, concepts related to authenticity and kitsch, and coding in textiles as acts of political resistance. Her work regularly appeared in *Voices*, *PieceWork Magazine*, and *Needle Arts Magazine*. She was nominated twice for NEA's National Heritage Fellowship.

Enikő's accomplishments are too numerous to fully include all here. She regularly lectured, lead workshops, staged exhibitions, demonstrated, and consulted for the Embroidery Guild of America (EGA); the National Czech and Slovak Museum; the American Folklore Society; the Lowell Folk Festival; New York Folklore; and museums, arts councils, activities centers, historical societies, and Hungarian organizations across the country. In 2002, she was named an "Educator of Excellence" by EGA. A year later, she received the Árpád Academy Award from the Hungarian Immigrant Congress for her lifelong commitment to sharing Hungarian cultural heritage.

Enikő's embroidery demands respect all on its own. Her tidy, well-crafted, and clever pieces are beautiful. Enikő knew what color combinations were traditional and which were traditionally in poor taste, but she also knew what was pleasing to the eye.

Perhaps, more than anything else, Enikő's many friends and colleagues will miss her sharp sense of humor and kind heart. While I was working for NYF, Enikő and I often gathered at her dining room table over plates of apricot linzer to chat about her neighbors, research, and latest creative endeavors. She patiently taught me the basics of various embroidery styles and tatting. May we all cherish the stories and skills she shared.

—Hannah Davis

Founding Director, Flower City Folk

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