

# MY GRANDFATHER, AN EPICUREAN SPY

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# FAMILY DECLASSIFIED:

UNCOVERING MY GRANDFATHER'S JOURNEY  
FROM SPY TO CHILDREN'S BOOK AUTHOR



**TOP SECRET**

Photo provided by Katherine Fennelly

Member Submission by *Katherine Fennelly*

If my Hungarian-American grandfather were alive today and living in Brooklyn, I have no doubt he would be a member of the Park Slope Food Coop. Francis Kalnay, or “Ferko” as we called him, was many things: a linguist, a spy for the Allies in World War II, an award-winning children’s book author and a designer of houses in Valle de Bravo, Mexico.



Francis “Ferko” Kalna making a loaf of bread in California, 1980s. Photo provided by Katherine Fennelly.

Ferko was also a superb chef who roasted his own coffee beans, milled his own flour, harvested honey from bee hives, cured meats in an underground smokehouse and grew fruits and vegetables on his properties in Mexico, and then in California. Late in his life he invented and marketed a bread plate (below) and built bread ovens for neighbors.

VIRGINIA SAFFORD'S BOOK WAS ABOUT THE BEST MEALS SHE HAD EVER EATEN. ONE OF THE CHAPTERS FEATURED A REPAST PREPARED BY FERKO AT HIS B&B IN VALLE DE BRAVO.



The Greatful Bread Plate, invented by Francis “Ferko” Kalna. Photo provided by Katherine Fennelly.

My grandfather’s skill as a chef was highlighted in the book *Friends and Their Food* written by Minneapolis food writer Virginia Safford,[1] who visited him in Mexico, where he lived for 20 years after the war. Safford’s book was about the best meals she had ever eaten. One of the chapters featured a repast prepared by Ferko at his B&B in Valle de Bravo. She writes:

*I saw a load of various beans drying in the sun on his terrace, and the smell of the freshly brewed coffee was almost as tantalizing as the bread. Everything we ate at the simple wooden table in his little kitchen, with the cooking going on in full view, was delicious. We started out with what might be called country antipasto. In the middle of a table were crisp radishes and small green onions garnishing a platter of sliced, home-smoked turkey breast [from an underground smokehouse] to be eaten on fresh buttered rye bread. Then came the soup...and authentic Hungarian stuffed cabbage rolls. Last was Hungarian rum cake with wild strawberry jam and home-roasted coffee.*

In addition to preparing delectable meals, Ferko wrote about cooking and published a series of articles for the magazine *House Beautiful*. An example shown below featured recipes for cooking with fresh flowers. Others highlighted smoked meats and Hungarian dishes, such as stuffed cabbage.

# Flowers in Cooking?

*And why not? Flowers are sugar and spice and other things nice. They can broaden your palette of flavors in several piquant directions. This summer give them a whirl in your kitchen*

By FRANCIS KALNAY

1971, 4, 10



An article Ferko wrote for *House Beautiful*, April 1960. Photo provided by Katherine Fennelly.

You can read more about my grandfather's life as a spy, linguist, children's book author and an epicure in my book: *Family Declassified* (Sunbury Press, 2023).

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[1] *Friends and Their Food* by Virginia [Safford, Virginia. *Friends and Their Food*. Dillon Press, New York, 1969.] Safford, 1968