Sharing their culinary journey

After discovering food culture of Southeast Asia, Vancouver natives compile books, offer tips at a Sept. 22 reading in Portland

By MAEVE ANN ABBRETT

Columnist and writer

Kim Fay learned two things by going to Vietnam to teach English. One, she teaching isn't for her; and two, that food and travel writing are.

Fay, a former Vancouver resident who now lives in Los Angeles, spent four years in Ho Chi Minh City from the mid- to late-1990s. While there, she fell in love with Vietnamese cuisine and the culture surrounding it.

"In Vietnam, it's very much an eating culture," said Fay, 44. "That's how you're welcomed, sitting down at someone's table."

Fay's new book, "Communion: A Culinary Journey Through Vietnam," explores the country through its food. The book features photography by her sister, Julie Fay Ashburn, also a former Vancouver resident who now lives in Los Angeles.

On Sept. 22, Fay and Ashburn will be at Breadway Books in Portland for a reading and slide show. They'll also share travel anecdotes, and offer cooking tips, wine and sparkling water to those who attend the event.

The love affair begins

Fay's love affair with Asian cuisine and food began in her early 20s during a backpacking trip through Thailand. The following year, she returned to Asia for a month, visiting Singapore, Batu and Borneo.

"I was hooked," she said.

Fay moved to Vietnam in the mid-1990s to teach English. She quit after six months and started writing for local English-language magazines, one of which later became the publishing house, ThingsAsian Press.


"To Asia with Love" became a series, which Fay

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Recipes: Chef Huang's Dusted Raivg. Kim's Caramelized Clay Pot Fish

If you go


• Where: Broadway Books, 1124 N.E. Broadway, Portland.

• Cost: Free

Information: http://www.theadv.net
Journey:

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to cut them into even smaller

from the garden."

so far, titles include "To
Myanmar with Love," "To Viet-
am with Love" and "To Japan
with Love." Books about North
India, Cambodia, Thailand,
Nepal and Shanghai are on the
horizon.

Fay's first book outside the
series came out in the spring
and recounts a 2005 trip she
and Ashborn took through
Vietnam. The sisters traveled
with Fay's best Vietnamese
girlfriend, Huong Nguyen,
from as far north as Hanoi to as far
south as Ho Chi Minh City, also
known as Saigon. Stories and
photos from that adventure con-
stitute "Communion: A Culinary
Journey Through Vietnam."

The trio met with restaur-
teurs, chefs, fishermen and
farmers throughout the country
to better understand Vietnam's
past and present through food.

Many people think of rice
as the heart of Asian food, but
for Fay, Vietnamese cuisine
is defined by fresh greens.

"Dishes are served with
herbs and lettuces," she said.
"Even fried food, you wrap it in
greens. Your food tastes like it's
from the garden."

Fay, who attended Gaiser
Middle School, Columbia River
High School and Clark Col-
lege, said she enjoyed revisit-
ing favorite dishes during her
return to Vietnam. Even more
fun, she said, was trying new
specialties of the cities where
she traveled.

"I became obsessed with a
dish I'd never heard of when I
lived (in Vietnam)." Fay said.
"I encountered it in the Imperial
City of Hue. It's called clam rice."

The dish combines tiny clams
from the Perfume River with
rice, red Thai chili peppers and
star fruit.

"The first time I had it, it just
wove me," she said.

Another special treat, she
said, was a Vietnamese take
on ragout, a French dish. Fay
said she discovered this stew in
Dalat, which maintains strong
European influences from the
French colonization of Vietnam,
which lasted from the 1800s
through the middle of the 20th
century. Fish sauce gives the
ragout a distinctly Asian flair and
combines with the tomatoes to
create a rich, buttery flavor, Fay
said.

Fay shares 10 recipes, includ-
ing the Vietnamese take
on ragout, in "Communion." Here
are a couple to try at home.

Chef Huong's Dalat Ragu

**Chef Huong's Dalat Ragu**

**YIELD:** 4 SERVINGS AS A MAIN DISH. **ACTIVE TIME:** 45 MINUTES TO 1 HOUR. **COOKING TIME:** 15 HOURS.

Feel free to substitute different kinds of beans and mushrooms or add white pearl onions depending on what is in season. The one ingredient that is essential is tomatoes.

1 pound pork shoulder,
cut into 1-inch cubes
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon
fish sauce
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 small shallot, minced
1 clove garlic, minced

Cut pork into cubes, and
marinate with 1 tablespoon
fish sauce and pepper for 30
minutes. Do not marinate in
the fridge.

In a medium frying pan,
brown pork in 1 tablespoon
oil. Sauté for

As you fry the vegetables, you
might need to add a little oil
and even a bit of fish sauce.
You can also add the juices
draining from the pork in the
bowl for moisture.

While simmering tomatoes
and frying vegetables,

1 pound firm white fish such as
halibut, cut into 1-inch chunks (can
substitute chicken or shrimp)
4 tablespoons fish sauce

Julie Fay Ashborn

Chef Huong's Dalat Ragu is an Asian take on the French dish.