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“A Concert of Contemporary Fantasy and Impressionism” H. Burdetta Juliani

CONSTANCE FULENWIDER **writer**



“when i paint,” H. Burdetta Juliani explains, “I’m H. Burdetta. When I bake, I’m Hazel B. I reinvent myself every seven years.” From the moment this diminutive blond grandmother, who looks ten years younger than her age, opens her door, you sense a generous woman with a million ideas, and a million friends. Five generations have lived in her Wellesley house, where her family and friends drop in at a moment’s notice. Her desk, full of notes for her latest baking project and her real estate business, dominates her living room. Bright impressionistic landscapes and flower paintings sit on easels and line the walls of her front hall, which doubles as her studio.

At 16 Burdetta and her sister were asked by their mother to draw a picture of a crabapple tree. Her sister, an art student, drew the whole tree. Burdetta drew a close-up of one branch

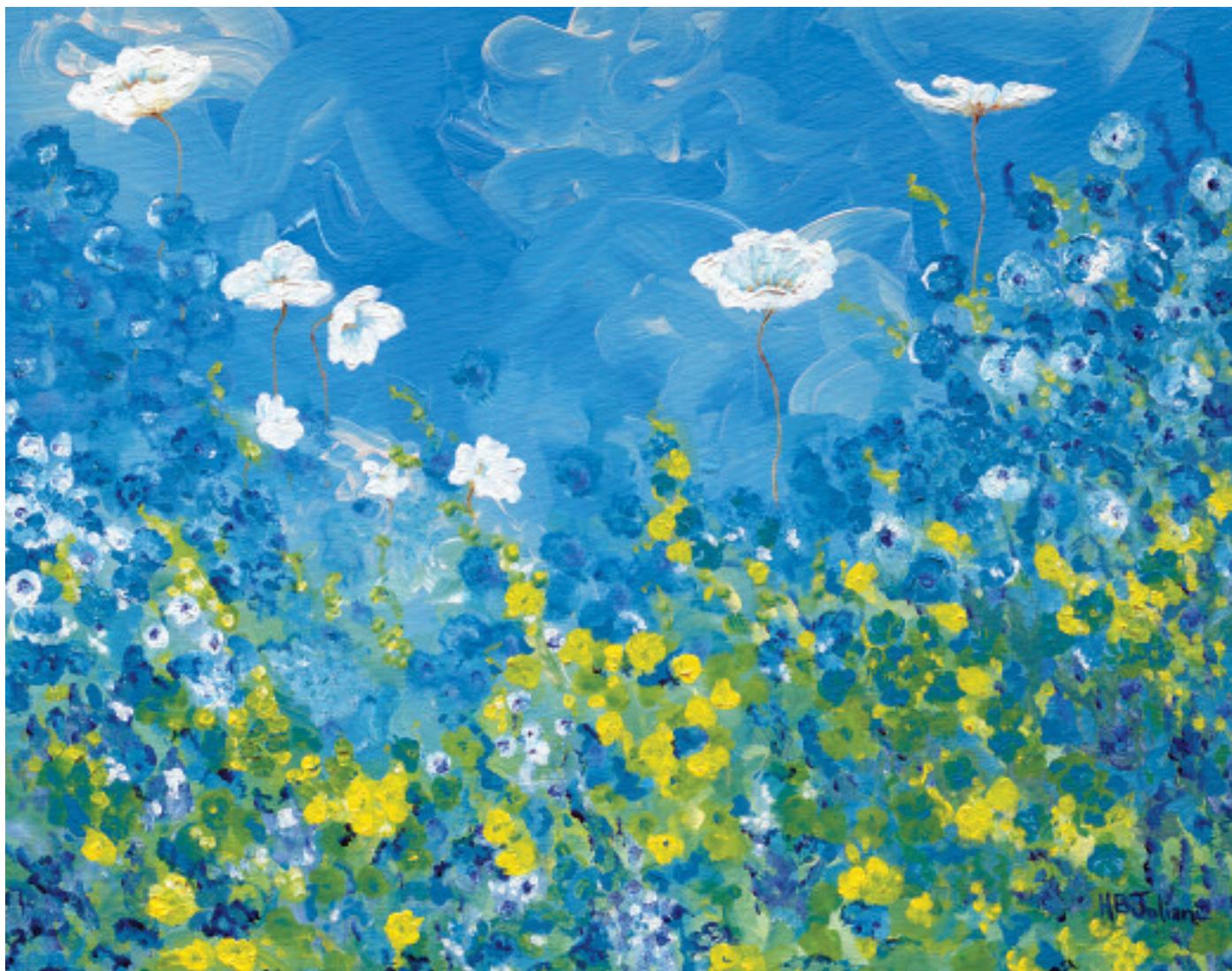
*H. Burdetta Juliani’s first painting:
Poppies, Acrylic on Canvas,
36" x 48"*

artist profile “a concert of contemporary fantasy and impressionism”

and then kept turning the branch, repeating the shape, ending up with a dramatic design on the page. That drawing hangs in her living room today. In 1990 Burdetta decided to take up painting after she was widowed as a young mother of three. She bought a huge canvas, an easel, some acrylic paints, drove to her sister’s house on Long Island, and asked her how to paint. Her sister, an art school graduate, encouraged Burdetta to go to a class. “No,” Burdetta said firmly, “I just want to express myself. I don’t want to learn oils or watercolors. I want to learn something easy and fun, like acrylics.” She went straight home and painted *My Poppies*, which hangs over her kitchen table. But the painting took her three years. “I didn’t know how to finish it,” Burdetta tells me. One day her daughter came home from college with two diplomas and told her, “Mom, your painting’s finished,” gathered all three items, and took them to be framed.

In 1997 Burdetta was told she might lose her eyesight if she had an operation to fix a head injury. Instead of fretting, she decided to travel to Southern France and Tuscany with a friend to look at landscapes she’d been longing to see all her life. In 2004 when Burdetta finally had the operation, not only did she *not* lose her eyesight, but all colors came more alive. The world suddenly looked brand new—she couldn’t wait to start painting vivid, bright-colored flowers and landscapes, working from memory. Speaking of her own free impressionist style, she notes, “I go into space—no clue what I’m going to paint, but turquoise is my signature color. Every painting has turquoise in it.” As she says in her Artist Statement, she starts with a few colors and strokes and soon a painting emerges. She describes her paintings as “a concert

White Cosmos, Original Acrylic on Canvas, 20"x24"





artist profile

“baking is my legacy”

left: Flowers on Dunes

bottom: The Vines, Acrylic on Canvas, 30" x 40"

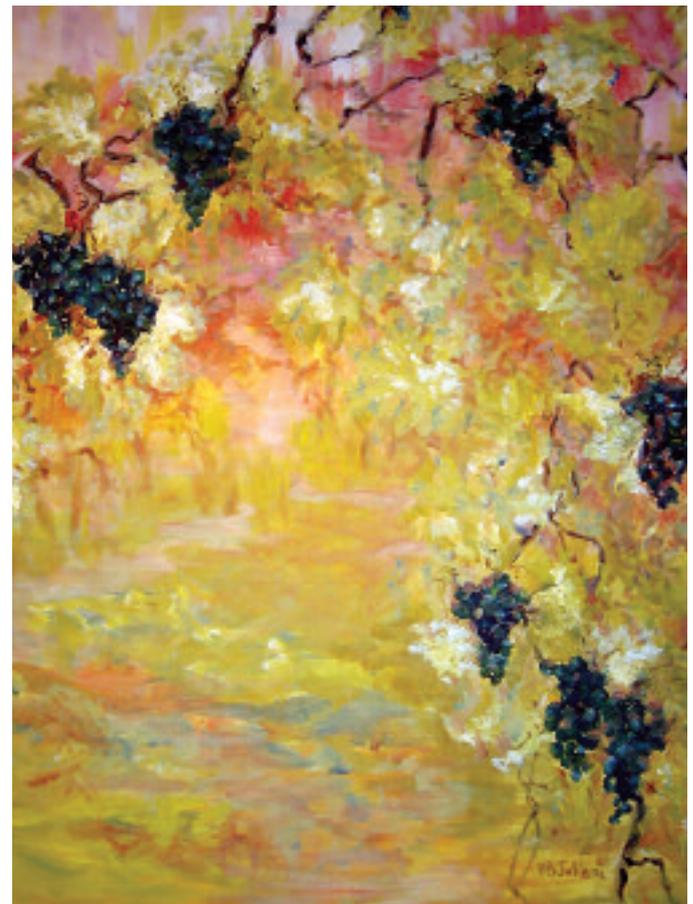
of contemporary fantasy and impressionism.” Rather like that crabapple branch, she positions and repositions the flower, the field, or the scene she is painting. “When I first started,” she told me, “I showed one of my paintings to my sister. She looked at it from all angles and finally turned it up side down. ‘There,’ she said, ‘now you have a painting!’”

Several years ago one of her daughters arrived in Burdetta’s sunny kitchen, telling her mother to talk to a woman at Quebrada Baking Company in Arlington and Wellesley Hills who shows paintings by local artists in her stores. The owner, Que Wiggin, snapped up Burdetta’s paintings and, like everyone Burdetta meets, became a good friend. Burdetta’s paintings can be seen in Arlington and Wellesley, January through April, and one month a year at Starbucks in Wellesley. She sells paintings, embellished giclée copies, and cards out of her house. All money from her paintings goes to a fund for her grandsons’ piano lessons, in honor of her late husband Ricky Juliani who was an excellent pianist. She also donates her paintings to charities, the Wellesley Visiting Nurse Association, the Faulkner Hospital’s benefit for the Faulkner-Sagoff Center, The Jimmy Fund, or any place her friends ask for her help.

The irony is that although Burdetta has been offered gallery space many times, she has chosen to show her paintings in a bakery. “I’ve

always baked. Baking is my legacy,” she tells me. “I bake with my grandsons; when people bake together they bond. I love that.”

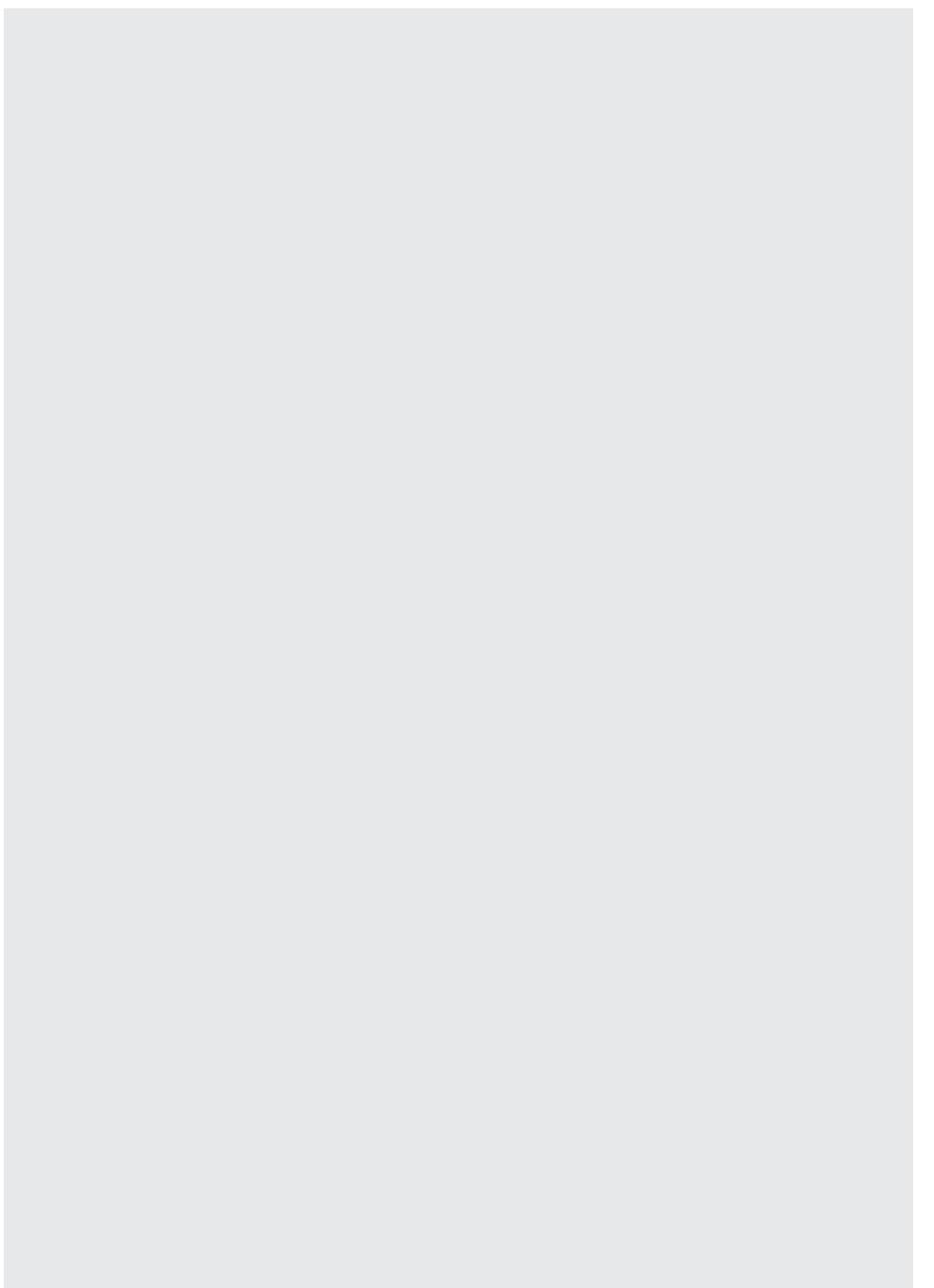
In 2010, almost seven years after she started selling paintings, it was time once again for Burdetta to reinvent herself. As she sat on a Cape Cod beach drinking wine with a friend, Burdetta wished she had



artist profile “it was my way of making a commitment”

something to nibble with her glass of wine. “Not something salty, not something sweet, but something subtle which wouldn’t compete with the taste of the wine.”

That night she woke up at 4:30 am with the idea of a *palate cleanser* cookie she could sell to wine stores. The next day Burdetta/Hazel, fearless, went into a wine store to test the waters. “I sell a cookie that enhances the taste of wine to wine stores for tastings,” she told them, and in doing so Burdetta/Hazel prophesied her fledgling company, Hazel B. Baking LLC, into existence.



“I knew once I *told* someone I had a cookie company, I’d have to do it. It was my way of making a commitment.” A month later *The Original and Authentic Wine Tasting Cookie™* was born.

Thinking about the packaging design, Burdetta’s daughter mentioned a painting her mother had given her called *Vines* because of its lush hanging grapes and vines. They both had an aha moment: they could use *that* painting for a label. Now you’ll see *Vines* in the background on every package of wine tasting cookies.

Where would Burdetta bake them? Her son told her to call his friend, Jack Rush, who offered his Mazarrelli Bakery in Milford. After a few telephone calls, Burdetta, her daughter, and two friends found themselves in green hairnets and rubber gloves baking *six hundred dozen* cookies for the 2011 Boston Wine Expo at the Seaport World Trade Center in Boston. Another set of friends helped her pack them. Her business has taken on a kind of enviable problem: now even she and her family and friends can’t keep up with the enormous demand. She’s currently sending out an alert for a professional co-packer to bake and package her wine cookies.

Her next reinvention, she says, might be writing a blog about starting a business. She’ll call it *The Wonderful Web We Weave*. A perfect motto for Burdetta. “The biggest luck of my life is my family and friends being so good to me,” she smiles. 