

Title	Miss Rumphius				
Author (Text & Illustration)	Barbara Cooney				
Publication Year	1982	Publisher	Puffin Books		
Translated Versions	Japanese translation available				
Words	1,248	Pages	32	YL Level	3.3
Synopsis					
<p>Alice, a young girl living in a port town, spends time with her grandfather, a craftsman who came to America in a large boat. Alice’s grandfather paints pictures in his workshop and tells her stories about faraway lands. Alice tells her grandfather that when she grows up, she dreams of going to a faraway country and living by the sea. Grandpa says, “Won’t that be nice,” and tells Alice that he wants her to go and do something to make the world a more beautiful place.</p> <p>The girl grew up and became known as Miss Rumphius. She traveled to faraway lands, including tropical islands, snowy mountains, and jungles. However, one day she hurt her back while dismounting from her camel, and then decided to go live near the sea. While staying in her beautiful seaside home, she remembered her grandfather’s words, but she did not know what she could do. Again, when she was bedridden with a back injury, it was the beautiful flowering lupine that comforted her. Some people even started calling her “a crazy old woman” when she began to scatter lupine seeds and share them with people. The following spring, however, her flowers began blooming everywhere, and people started calling her “the Lupine Lady.”</p> <p>That woman was my great aunt. I said to her, “When I grew up, I will go to a faraway country and then live by the sea.” Then she would say to me, “And there is one more thing you must do. You must do something to make the world more beautiful.”</p>					
Introduction					
<p>Born in Brooklyn, New York, Barbara Cooney (1917–2000) was an illustrator and picture book author. She also illustrated the <i>Ox-Cart Man</i>, which won the Caldecott Award and which you can see on this website. Cooney also won the National Book Award for her work on <i>Miss Rumphius</i> and published 110 picture books before her death in 2000.</p> <p>The story takes place somewhere on the East Coast of the United States. Miss Rumphius’ dress is a bustle style with a narrow waist and bulging hips, reminiscent of the end of the 19th</p>					

Century. The port town, the house interior, and the seaside scene of lupines in bloom are so beautiful that even people in a faraway country such as Japan will somehow feel nostalgic about it.

When I read this story, the 19th Century English adventurer, Isabella Bird, came to mind. Though infirm, she took the opportunity to use geotechnical remedies to travel around the world, including the United States, Canada, Morocco, Persia, India, Tibet, Qing Dynasty China, Japan, Korea, and the Hawaiian Islands, and wrote travelogues such as *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1880). At that time, it was very rare for a woman to travel to such off-the-beaten-track locations, and it is easy to imagine the difficulties she faced. Her energy and accomplishments made her the first woman to be made a Distinguished Member of the Royal Geographical Society, and while I believe that she was respected, people also likely saw her as a bit “eccentric.”

Miss Rumphius, the protagonist of this story, also traveled around the world, just like Bird. Her “extraordinary energy,” so to speak, is evident not only in her journeys to distant lands, but also in the way she sowed lupine seeds wherever she went, an act that most people would never think of or actually do even if they had the idea. Miss Rumphius, who is often referred to as a “Crazy Lady,” does not seem to benefit from making lupine flowers bloom, but her passion for what she loves and believes in is abundantly clear. For those of us who have dreams and passions and know the difficulty of sticking it out no matter what when faced with a challenge, Miss Rumphius (or even the many Ms/Mr. Rumphius’ in the world) deserves our respect for having done so.

Miss Rumphius is an elegant and dainty looking woman, but the way she continues to plant lupines gives her a sense of resolve, as if she were fighting against the wind. In this sense, this is not only a beautifully illustrated picture book, but also a book that shows the loneliness, determination, and strength of a person with unshakable faith. Furthermore, because the main character is a woman, readers of this story, especially girls, will gain a courageous role model.

(Text: Yuka Kusanagi)