

BOWDOIN COLLEGE

COMMENCEMENT 1996

BARBARA COONEY PORTER, in your book *Miss Rumphius*, written as you have said in reference to your work, for everyone, and appealing to the child in all of us, your heroine, joyfully and alone, pursues three goals: when she grows up, she travels to far away places; when she grows old, she lives beside the sea; and throughout her life, she searches for a way to make the world more beautiful. Arriving at that understanding near the end of her life, every summer she scatters lupine seeds to bloom each spring, lavender and pink, purple and blue.

Miss Rumphius, which you have described as one of the books you "hold closest to [your] heart," is metaphor for your great gift of beauty to all of us: the pictures you painted for 109 books, 14 of which you wrote, over a career that has spanned more than 50 years. Quality of line and light, knowledge of color and composition, understanding of the narrative of art, and scholarly concern for truth of detail in dress, settings, and landscape, characterize your style which you adapt to the content of each book you undertake. In *Miss Rumphius* you also juxtapose ways of life and values more common to an earlier time with the contemporary values of a woman's independence and fearless pursuit of goals, as your own life has combined the traditional and modern.

Born in Brooklyn, you grew up on Long Island and summered in Maine. At Smith College, you studied art history and studio art and then continued your training at the Art Students League in New York City. Later, when married and living in Massachusetts, you pursued a career in book illustration and raised four children. When your husband, Dr. Charles Talbot Porter, whom you have described as an old fashioned country doctor, retired in the late 1980s, you both moved to the coast of Maine where you now reside year round.

Miss Rumphius is one of three books you have said are as close as you will ever come to an autobiography, the others being *Island Boy* and *Hattie and the Wild Waves*. With extraordinary generosity, you have placed on permanent loan to the Bowdoin College Museum of Art the original paintings for this group of three and have forged a special relationship between yourself and the community of Bowdoin College and Brunswick. In celebration of the occasion of your honorary degree, selected works of art from your loan are currently on view in the Museum.

Winner of two Caldecott medals, for the best illustrated children's book of the year, recipient of numerous other awards, translated in languages from across the world, known and beloved internationally, artist of images of our most ideal selves.

President Edwards, I am honored to present to you **BARBARA COONEY PORTER**, for the degree of **DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS**, honoris causa.

Presented by Katharine J. Watson