

# 20190701\_theslowdown\_20190701\_128

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

poetry, poet, life, great american poet, poem, unimpeded, reach, word, permitted, howard johnson, lucille clifton, chattering, slow, hotel room, runs, mind, waiting, american public, feel, long

00:06

I'm Tracy k Smith. And this is the slow down.

00:22

I sometimes think of poetry as the place where I go to find my best self. poetry, to me, is like a room in my mind at the top of a long, narrow staircase, I climb up to reach it, closing the door behind me. And from there I have an unimpeded view of the great distances. I grow bold, I can almost taste truth, or the cold mist that surrounds it. It's a miracle poetry, a thing which takes me both into myself, and far, far away from the me. I know. If I could live there, I'd be so happy. Maybe happy is not precisely the word but I'd live with a clarity I can't otherwise reach fearless egoless able to be firm with myself to chase in an urge and kind, patient, compassionate, awake to forgiveness and love. I stay there all day sometimes feeling unworthy, but lucky. Then I descend again into my life. My children are waiting. Are they always this beautiful? Quickly one runs to me radiant, he seems or No, those are tears, he is crying, make that screaming. And ouch my foot is pierced by the smallest toy in existence, a weapon practically there in the middle of the rug. And what has the dog gotten into, and on and on there is more, always more waiting to reclaim me. But I was there once I've been to poetry. It was just as real as anything else. I'll get back there eventually. And when I do, poetry will be there waiting to help me make sense of this other world I belong to. I know I'm not special. I know we all live double or multiple lives, tapping into the versions of ourselves that are called for or permitted depending on where we are. When I'm moving through the world, as a public poet, talking about the art form that I practice with others who love it as much as I do. I feel absolutely purposeful. There are questions, urgent questions about language and life. And miraculously, I have ideas, my mind leaps into action ready to be useful. This condition lasts 40 minutes an hour maybe. Then I'm driven to a hotel room that will be mine until morning. I'm hungry, empty. I can feel my life in the distance. Like a city, I can almost

make out the shape of shrouded by low clouds. I've made many references on the slowdown to the great American poet Lucille Clifton who died in 2010, but whose work continues to inspire and console. Today, I'd like to share her poem after the reading, which speaks with wisdom and humor to the dual state I'm describing. After the reading by Lucille Clifton tired from being a poet, I throw myself on to Howard Johnson's bad and long for home. That sad, mysterious country where nobody notices a word I say. Nobody thinks more of me or less than they would think of any chattering thing. Mice running toward the dark leaves rubbing against one another words tumbling together up the long stare home. My own cheap lamp, I can switch off pretending I'm at peace there in the dark home. I think at last into the poet's short and fitful sleep. The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily go to [slowdownshow.org](https://slowdownshow.org)