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00:06

And us Poet Laureate Tracy k Smith. And this is the slow down.

00:21

I remember one night many years ago, when I just didn't know if I could go on being an adult. It was a cold, wet night, rain lashed at the windows. Or maybe that's just how I felt on the inside, weathered, battered, drenched. It must have been 2001. I was 29 years old. The night I'm remembering I hit a wall. I didn't know if I could keep on keeping on indefinitely. Why couldn't someone just help me? Why couldn't someone just take care of me the way I'd been taken care of as a child, I realized, possibly for the first time, how lucky I'd been all those years before being cared for by parents who did their job so thoroughly. I didn't even notice that what they were doing was work. I was overcome by an immense shame. What had it cost them to love me the way that they had? And had I ever really said, Thank you. It was one or 2am in New York. When I phoned my dad in California, there was worry in his voice, when he heard me choked up and struggling for words on the other end of the line. Thank you. I told him, and I love you. And I'm sorry if raising me was a sacrifice. Even then, he did his job well, assuring me that he knew that he and my mother had always known that I'd love them, telling me that raising us kids had not been work but pleasure. That of all the things he done all that he'd accomplished. It was taking care of his children that had been his life's joy. I have kids of my own now. And I think I may finally understand what my father was saying that night on the phone. loving and caring for my children, has given me a target for my most passionate and powerful feelings. And it's freed me from the aimless pursuits, one set in motion by the vanity or self cherishing of youth. It's a gift I can't imagine that I deserve. Today's poem by Kentucky based poet ada limone is a poem of thanksgiving and realization. It's about coming to understand what it means to have been loved by a parent.

03:08

The raincoat by Ada Lehman.

03:13

When the doctor suggested surgery, and a brace for all my youngest years, my parents scrambled to take me to massage therapy, deep tissue work, osteopathy, and soon, my crooked spine unspooled a bit. I could breathe again, and move more in a body unclouded by pain. My mom would tell me to sing songs to her the whole 45 minute drive to middle to rock road, and 45 minutes back from physical therapy. She'd say that even my voice sounded unfettered by my spine afterward. So I saying and saying, because I thought she liked it. I never asked her what she gave up to drive me, or how her day was before this chore. Today, at her age, I was driving myself home from yet another spine appointment, singing along to some Modlin but solid song on the radio. And I saw a mom take her raincoat off and give it to her young daughter when a storm took over the afternoon. Oh, my God. I thought my whole life. I've been under her raincoat, thinking it was somehow a marvel that I never got wet. The slowdown is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation.