

(An excerpt from Chapter 26, RENA-Turning Loose of Time).

Though she couldn't tell me the whole story, Rena gave me a map to follow the trail. At first glance, she was a little elderly woman getting pizza. But then she smiled at me and I smiled back and she decided to tell me some things. She was right to tell me I would see her again, because I saw a hundred little glimpses of her the next day in the writings about her husband—and more over the next weeks as I watched documentary after documentary about their lives. Though she was only mentioned a few times by name, she was there in every adventure of the whole story. Those stories were still very much alive in her mind and for some wonderful reason, they spilled out to me in a pizza joint one day. Those thirty minutes were some of the best I've ever unhandled.

New York is a million stories. Your town and my town are millions more. They are everywhere. For a few days, we sauntered our way in and out of them—until bits and pieces of one of them was told to us in the last precious hours in a big city.

I often wrap my hands around my time and guard it close. But you know what? It passes anyway. It doesn't keep. The minutes tick away and are gone, often with little to show for them. When I turn loose of my time and lay it on the table for the taking, sometimes in a pizza joint in Manhattan, an old woman named Rena will wander in and accept the gift of it. Stories that have been locked up in her mind will suddenly be remembered and she'll tell them to a stranger who reminds her of someone. She'll do it because of one thing.

Because there was time—the place where the best stories live.