

**Rebecca and Leah Piza**  
**Joshua Piza's 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> children**

Rebecca 1833-1911

Leah 1835-1868

The lives of the sisters Rebecca and Leah, the ninth and tenth children of Joshua Piza, are so interwoven and dependent on each other, that it seems as if the only way to tell their stories, is to treat them together in one chapter. For were it not for Leah, Rebecca might never have married; were it not for Rebecca, Leah's children might have been half-orphans; were it not for – but that is rushing ahead: let us first speak of Rebecca.

When she was eighteen, Rebecca was deeply fascinated by an attractive young man from Curaçao. The visitor was Elias de Sola; he constantly sought her out, lent her books, and showed great delight in her company. He was so extremely attentive that Rebecca and all the watchful neighbors were led to believe that he was in love with her and would ask her to marry him. But before he had made any declaration, he was sent for by his aristocratic father, proud of the deSola descent from one of the oldest Jewish families in Spain. Perhaps this practical man had heard of his son's affection for an undowered young woman – the daughter of a minister without a congregation; but perhaps he did *not* know that her grandfather Mozes Piza was famous in Holland as a writer of Jewish poems and hymns, or that her great-grandfather Juda Piza was well known during the middle

of the Eighteenth Century as preacher, publisher and poet. If he had known these things possibly he would not have been so eager to remove the young man. Elias left St. Thomas. Poor Rebecca broke down from disappointment and shame. Not only to have the bitterness of finding the man she loved to be so spineless, but also to have to bear the pity of those who saw it too! She became melancholy, ill. For a year she hardly left her bed. It so happened that her youngest sister Achy had also had an unfortunate love affair, so these two girls became partners in misogamy and made a compact never to marry. But when her retirement was lasting too long Rebecca's family forced her to face life again; but she was found by all to be greatly altered. She was quieter, self effacing – her old verve gone. Even her features had lost their former delicacy – her nose its fineness.

Leah was almost three years younger than Rebecca. Just before she was twenty-one, she married Benjamin Luria of Hamburg who was five years her senior, a trusted employee in the successful firm of Herman Meyer, her brother-in law. A homely fellow was Ben, with a club foot. Leah joined with the other young girls in making fun of him, but secretly she found his ugliness fascinating, and admired his true goodness and stability of character. Her choice proved wise for he made her an excellent husband.

They had not been married very long when Ben's brother Aaron Luria paid them a visit of some days as he was passing through St. Thomas on his way to Maricaibo, Venezuela, where he was a partner in the prominent firm of Blohm and Company. "Ah", thought the match makers of St. Thomas, "that would be a good chance for the elder, unmarried sister!" But Rebecca, although it was five years since her unhappy love affair, avoided meeting Aaron. As long as he was in town she visited no house where he might by any chance be. She kept away from Leah and Ben's until she heard the visitor had gone on board his ship. However, the evening of the day he had embarked she went to dine with them. In the middle of the meal there was a flurry of excitement. Aaron, considered safely disposed of on a sailing-vessel, had returned. The wind was unfavorable, and his ship could not leave the harbor. Rebecca, cold and embarrassed, was unable to avoid being introduced and Aaron promptly fell in love with her.

Once more it was the task of the mother Hannah Piza to induce an unwilling child to marry a worthy man. It was almost a habit now and her arguments flowed easily; she had coaxed so many of her daughters, and always – with one sad exception – with the happiest of results. At twenty-four years, Rebecca abjured her foolish vow and married Aaron Luria. She went with him to Venezuela, and there she lived quite happily and bore him three children: Anne, Essie and Joseph.

In 1865, Aaron died, and after eight years absence his widow returned to her native isle, with her children. Financially she was independent, as her husband had left her \$30,000.

In St. Thomas, Ben and Leah had also been raising a family. Joe, Albert, Ernest, Herman, Jacob, Sissy and Anita were born there. Then Benjamin Luria found himself in the position that he could retire to Hamburg where he could give his children the educational advantages of a large city. In doing this, he was following the German tradition by which the young men went pioneering to new countries, made their fortunes and then returned to the homeland to enjoy the fruits of their early labor in company with the wives they had married and the children that had been born to them in the younger land. The business was left in the hands of Ernest da Costa Meyer, a cousin of Herman Meyer. Rebecca and her brood of three accompanied the Ben Lurias and their seven. There was no reason why the widow's children should not also have the advantages of European culture, and be brought up in the traditions of their father. The sisters had separate households.

On his return to Hamburg, Ben was made a partner in the local firm of H. Meyer and Company. Leah became a mother for the eighth time in giving birth to Edward. But this time she contracted puerperal fever. Before she died, she begged her sister Rebecca to care for the infant and to bring up her children.

Soon she was established in her brother-in-law's household as foster-mother to his children. Naturally the addition of four people crowded their quarters, so Rebecca had a wing built on to the house for her family. She was adored by her nieces and nephews, the eldest of whom was only eleven when his mother died; and the cousins grew up as one big family. A great sorrow came to them when Rebecca's only son, Joseph, died from a blow on the appendix. He was struck by a boy on his way home from school when he was thirteen. His mother was greatly saddened, but bore her trouble bravely.

Her daughters Anna and Essie both married: Anna to Marcus Jaffe, and the sweet Essie to August Ascher. Of Ben's children, the eldest Joseph was mentally deficient; he died when he was thirty-one. The second son, Albert, did not survive his infancy. When the third son Ernest was thirty he married the beautiful Anita de Sola of Curaçao, daughter of the faithless suitor of his Aunt Rebecca's girlhood. Herman who went into business in Panama as a young lad, married a native, Candelaria Almueles. The sprightly Sissy did not wed until she was forty; then she became the wife of Sigmund Mautner, an Austrian widower with two daughters. Sissy completed his family with a son. Jacob married his cousin Lilla Maduro of Panama. Anita united with Edgar Pinto, an Englishman. Edward, the youngest, died at the age of thirty-six.

Heart disease carried off the head of this big household, Ben Luria, when he was sixty-five. Rebecca, unselfish and devoted, remained as the gentle ruler of the Hamburg family until her death sixteen years later. She died in 1911, also of heart disease, at the age of seventy-eight.

Reprinted from: *The Chronicle of Joshua Piza and His Descendants*, by Vida Lindo Guiterman, New York.

Copied with courtesy of Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus, Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion.