

## **Judah Piza**

**Joshua Piza's second son (2st child) from his first wife**

1815-1892

Judah was the only full brother of Moses, and about four years his junior. Their youthful experiences were similar, but the hardships of the lean years of their boyhood reacted differently on their natures, Moses remaining kindly and gentle as long as he had his mental health, and Judah becoming bad-tempered and fretful. He was homely of face, short and stocky of figure, and he had a reputation for irascibility so well established that, when at the age of thirty-two, he wished to marry the lovely Leah Lopez-Fonseca, Moses' sister-in-law, no one was more against the match than Moses.

Opposition was unavailing, for in 1845 he married the gentle 'Loche', tall and svelte twenty-three years old. They had three children, named unoriginally Benvenida (1846), Rachel (1847) and Joshua (1848). As he grew older Judah's health declined and his irritability increased. About the time that Joshua was *Bar-mitsvah*, he began to be a real sufferer from stone, an illness which caused painful paroxysms that so tortured him, that he shut himself in his room and became practically a hermit. When his periodic agonies shook him, his voice could be heard for blocks. Loche cared for him tenderly.

In 1867 his son left St. Thomas for Panama where he and another nephew, Joshua Lindo, were taken into business by their successful uncle, Samuel Piza. 'Josh Piza' married Hannah ('Anita') Brandon in 1871, and a year later brought her and their infant son to St. Thomas to meet his suffering old father and his patient mother. That was a gala day for Judah. The invalid left his room – indeed he walked even to the foot of the hill to bless the young bridegroom and his twenty-year-old, sprightly bride. It gave him especial joy that the names of the young couple echoed those of his venerated father and his energetic stepmother.

Loche died in 1873, when only forty-nine years old. Her illness, undiagnosed at the time, from description seems to have been cancer. Joshua came on to be with his mother at the end. When he returned to Panama, he brought his sister 'Nida with him to be one of his household. Rachel had married her cousin, David Piza, eleven years before, and was living in New York.

For the rest of his life Judah was faithfully tended by a colored nurse, Ruth. She and the barber who came weekly to shave him were almost the only people he saw, but they kept him lively with the news and gossip of the town. He had the fascination of mystery for the children of the family who loved to peek at the queer old man hunched up over his prayer-books, but who ran away if he turned and looked in their direction.

In 1892, at the age of seventy-seven, he died. 'Nida, living in New York with the David Pizas had preceded him by nine years. She died unmarried but secretly engaged to one David Lindo, her brother's book-keeper, whose circumstances were such that he could not afford to marry. Her death may be attributed to worry. She was a delicate graceful woman, affectionate and extremely sensitive. Besides the strain of a love affair, of which the consummation seemed hopeless, her tender heart was rent by the feud which separated her brother Josh from his sister and brother-in-law, the D.M. Pizas, a feud which spread to other branches of the Piza family tree, and even parted foster-sisters.

We must go back some years to give the story of this quarrel.

The first five children of Joshua and Anita Piza, three boys and two girls, were born in Panama. In 1878 the couple had the misfortune to lose, within the space of four months, their three sons, Arturo, Adrian and an unnamed infant. The twenty-six year old mother was beside herself, and became dangerously ill. Josh decided to take her to New York in the hope of saving her life which was hanging by a thread. She survived the voyage, and began to improve in the new surroundings. He would never take her back to the scene of her terrible bereavement, her husband declared. So they settled in New York with their two surviving children, Leah and Aimée, and Josh's sister 'Nida. But soon the head of the house had to go back to Panama to take his

share in the responsibility in Sam'l Piza & Co. He divided his time between his family in New York and his business in Panama. However, it was three months for the family and nine for the business, and after three or four years, Josh, who was essentially domestic, decided he could no longer live that way, and determined to quit the business. He talked over his plans with his uncle Sam, the senior and controlling partner, and it was projected instead to open a branch of the business in New York with Josh Piza in charge. Previous to this arrangement, David M. Piza had had the agency for his uncle-brother-in-law's affairs in New York. Although he was allowed to retain for himself all the customers he had, he was furious at the new arrangement, and declared that Josh Piza was taking the very bread from the mouths of his own sister's children. He severed all social relations with his uncle Sam, and his cousins, Josh Piza and Josh Lindo – who were also his brothers-in-law – and would not allow his wife Rachel to see her brother. 'Nida, who was living with the Josh Pizas in twenty-third street was forbidden his house by David, as long as she came there from the home of one of those who, David felt, had used him so badly.

Poor sensitive 'Nida was nearly distracted, torn between her love for her brother Josh's family and her sister Rachel's. She decided finally that if she went to reside with David and Rachel she could still visit Josh and Anita; so that was her next move.

But when her ill-used brother-in-law became aware that she still kept up with that family, he forbade it. The unhappy young woman became hysterical and weak and soon faded away.

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

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