

Samuel Piza
Joshua Piza's 6th child, Hannah's second son

1827-1885

Decidedly the most interesting of all the Piza's sons and daughters was Samuel. He had good looks, charm and ability, combined with a positive genius for making friends. Laws that were made for others did not seem to be meant for him: he broke them and was forgiven because he was "Sampi".

Sampi it was who started the business that at one time or another took in most of the young men of the family; Sampi who had the enterprise to branch out from Panama to Maricaibo, Barcelona, San José, Alajuela, Paris and New York; Sampi who, hailed as a conqueror when he returned to St. Thomas on visits, unerringly selected the brightest of the young lads, and took away from the decaying town to send as his lieutenants on his scattered commercial ventures.

Born on May 1, 1827, he was the fourth child of Hannah and the sixth of Joshua, two-and-a-half years the junior of his brother Jacob. He was much more the fine gentleman than Coco. He enjoyed and cultivated the arts. Once as a young man in St. Thomas, while walking in the moonlight, he heard a beautiful female voice singing gloriously. He halted in front of the mansion of the wealthy Morrones, and listened entranced. The

garden gate was locked, so Sampi scaled the high wall that surrounded the residence – one of the finest in St. Thomas – and soon found himself in the midst of a party that was being given for the fourteen year old Adelina Patti, who chanced to be passing through with her father.

Wherever Samuel went he was popular. Panama was his headquarters for years after he left St. Thomas at the age of twenty-two. The natives, some of aristocratic old Spanish families, liked and welcomed him. He fell deeply in love with one Amalia Diaz, but the thought of a marriage into this Catholic family so horrified all the Pizas, that he put it aside once and for all. The charm of the lovely Amalia was too strong to be resisted, and he formed a connection with her that resulted in the birth of a son Benjamin in 1856, and of Alberto a couple of years later. This is the matter to which we refer when we say that laws were made for others, and not for Samuel. Everyone knew of his love-affair, yet everyone accepted the situation. He was as popular as before, and Amalia and the children, though not *publicly* recognized, were frequent visitors at the homes of his sisters, who were very fond of the graceful, gentle fawn-eyed creature, whose modest demeanor, and faithfulness to their brother, were never questioned.

This was the situation when Samuel went back to St. Thomas on one of his business trips. The hero was home, and there was

general rejoicing. The affair of Amalia was known of course, but the family, absolutely accustomed to the casual armours of the men in the tropics, refused to believe this one of any unusual importance. If they could only get him to marry some fine Jewish girl he would soon forget the Spanish woman. He was regarded as a great catch – financially successful, physically attractive, and of a fascinating personality – there was not a young lady who would not be proud to marry him. When he was about to set out on his travels again, he was requested by his mother to look out for an eligible husband for his niece Rachel Piza, second daughter of Moses and Rebecca. She was twenty-three years old and fairly attractive, but suitable mates were not easily found in that little island, which all the promising young men deserted as soon as they found an opportunity. So Sampi, who in his various enterprises came in contact with many successful men, was given Rachel's picture to show that she was pleasant to look upon. He could himself report on her pious affectionate nature.

The plan would doubtless have worked had not Samuel discovered just before he sailed that Rachel was in love with *him*. (Bear in mind that uncle-and-niece marriages were not frowned upon by synagogue or society). He discovered in a book left carelessly about, a letter which she had written only for her own spiritual relief, but which she had failed to destroy. It was addressed to "My Lover-Uncle", and showed that her

whole heart and mind were devoted to Samuel. He was soft hearted and emotional; he could not bear to be unkind to anyone. She loved him! The family, particularly his sisters Leah and Rebecca, urged and encouraged him, already thirty-five years old, to enter into a respectable married life with this eminently suitable young woman of the same religious and social stock as himself. They became engaged just before he sailed.

He suffered pangs of remorse, but being a man of his word, would not break the engagement, though his sister Achy, with a deeper understanding than others of his attachment for Amalia, advised him to do so. The rest of the family was sure it was for the happiness of all concerned. He married Rachel in 1862 with the clear understanding that she must receive his sons, Benja and Alberto, whom he had legally acknowledged in the courts of Panama. And Sam promised to break off relations with Amalia Diaz.

They both misjudged their strength. The pitiful interview the man had with his faithful mistress when he told her the situation resulted in the total breakdown of all his virtuous resolutions. Another child, Julio, was born to them about the same time that his wife gave birth to their daughter Annie.

Poor little Annie was a cripple from birth, and a thorn in the flesh of her father, who loved beauty and grace above

everything. The balance of happiness must have weighed heavily on the side of Sampi's "outside" ménage, with his three sons and the faithful Amalia, but in 1865 a fine son, Joshua Samuel, arrived to comfort Rachel, and in 1868 , while the family was sojourning for a while in Hamburg, a little black-eyed daughter, Rebecca Rosalie was born. "My little guava-berry", her father affectionately called her.

Samuel's interests were as much in Europe as in the New World. He spent a great deal of his time abroad attending to his affairs. So when in 1872, the double domestic situation became acute, he entrusted the Panama business to the care of his nephews Josh Lindo and Josh Piza, and took Rachel and the children over to Paris to live. This would surely have cleared up a quite impossible tangle, only unfortunately, he also brought along the other woman's children to be educated. To Rachel they were most unwelcome, and she made no effort to hide her very natural feelings. She did not now consider herself bound by her agreement to receive them: for had not Sam quite flagrantly repudiated his side of the bargain when he failed to give up their mother? He prided himself on treating all his children impartially; but to poor Rachel this 'fairness' seemed most unfair. The best medical care, and unstinted means were devoted to the alleviation of Annie's condition. Later she was sent to New York for treatment, and she was for some years a member

of the D.M. Piza's household. But she always remained a cripple.

While the Samuel Pizas were living in Paris and traveling about Europe, they 'discovered' a family of Pizas in London. The father, the Reverend David Piza, was *hazan* of the old Bevis Marks Synagogue, and the son Judah was secretary. The given names of this family repeated the names of old Joshua Piza's children and grand-children – David, Rachel, Rebecca and Judah. Though they could not quite trace their relationship, these traditional first names convinced them of a near common ancestry, and they regarded each other as cousins. The daughter Rachel used to come and stay with them in Paris – for nothing delighted Sampi more than to play fairy godfather to those less fortunate than himself. When the Paris family visited London, they enjoyed the lavish hospitality of the boarding house that Mrs. David Piza ran. Though they were not in good circumstances these London Pizas bore the marks of Aristocratic breeding: indeed the son Judah was frequently mistaken for Albert Edward, Prince of Wales. Mrs. Piza presided like a duchess over a platter of beautifully fried sole – cooked by herself – and the most distinguished Jews, such as Sir Moses Montefiore and Sir Samuel Sassoon would stay at their house for the holidays to be near the synagogue.

In 1878 Rachel paid a visit to New York with her children. Jossy celebrated his thirteenth birthday there and a fine affair was given at their home on East Thirty-third Street to do honor to his *bar-mitsvah*. His father came on to be with them for the occasion. They returned to Paris some months later, but in a few years Rachel and the children settled in New York for good. Her brother David and two of her three sisters were living there. She bought a house on West Forty-fifth Street and took the two unmarried sisters Bienvenida and Hannah to live with them. Florence Lindo, whose parents did not come to New York until 1885, joined the household for a time – and that was the beginning of an admiration between her and Jossy that resulted in their marriage years later. Including the servants and Mrs. Kingsley, Annie's kind attendant, they were a large and feminine household. On the buffalo-horn hat-rack in the hall a silk hat (seldom dusted) was kept, to show the sneak, who might enter with harmful intent, that they were not without masculine protection. They lived well: Rosalie went to finishing school, and Jossy, after he had finished his education abroad, kept horses. Both these young people adored their handsome father, whose charm and generosity were realized by them as they were by strangers.

Samuel continued to travel about a great deal. He was likely to appear at any moment in Panama, Costa Rica, Hamburg or London. In 1882 he was in San Francisco, and he escorted his

niece Hannah Delvalle, Achie's daughter, to her first ball. He made himself thoroughly at home in any house that he graced with his presence. Once while visiting acquaintances, he chanced to sit on a chair that creaked ominously under him. Now Sam had kept his youthful slenderness, and he did not like that sound; so he looked at the chair in rather a hurt manner. Then he examined the workmanship and found it strong. "I'll fix it!:" he cried, "just get me some sweet oil". He lubricated the jarring parts, and the chair was thereafter decently silent. How his hosts enjoyed the easy friendliness of this traveled man-of-the-world who was their guest! And he always seemed to be enjoying *himself* so much. Each of his nieces knew that she could count on her generous uncle for a check of five hundred dollars when she married.

He died of heart-disease in the year '85, when he was fifty-eight. He provided for Benja and Julio in his will by leaving them the Costa Rica business and the coffee plantation. Alberto had died when only sixteen. Amalia, too, had predeceased him by many many years. The residue of his fortune went to his wife and children.

In 1890, greatly to the delight of her pious mother, Rosalie married the Reverend H. Pereira Mendes, minister of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation in New York, and a

descendant of one of the oldest families of Sephardic Jews. Joshua married his cousin Florence Lindo in 1894.

By a coincidence, Rachel died in the same city as her husband, Paris, and of the same illness, heart trouble, seven years later.

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

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