

**Benvanida Piza**  
**Joshua Piza's second daughter (4<sup>th</sup> child)**

1822-1901

In contrast with the sad life of Moses, the drab existence of Judah, and the tragedy of Judith's mismating, the happy domesticity of Benvanida is especially pleasing. As the second daughter, she had Judith's loveless marriage before her as a horrible example. Determined to wed only for love, to her parents' disappointment she refused the offer of a wealthy relative of her father. Her heart was set on Handsome Jack Lindo, a young man of good character, and likable; but poor, and apparently without much business ability. Judith, two years her senior, encouraged her plucky sister to adhere to her selection, and with this backing she was able to persist in her choice for so long that finally she wore down her mother's objection. So in 1844, when 'Bem' was twenty-three, she married Jacob Jesurun Lindo, who was about the same age.

They kept a store that seems to have been the only known way of making a living in St. Thomas. But there were too many stores already and after their first child, Morris, was born, the Lindos went to seek their fortune in Barcelona, Venezuela. They never made much money, but were a contented loving couple. Children came fast. The first year they were in Barcelona, Joshua was born (1847). The twins, Emily and Anita, arrived in

1849. Clarita appeared in 1853, followed by Alfred in 1855, Julita in 1858 and Samuel in 1859.

Jack Lindo was known for his good nature. He wrote a beautiful hand and was always willing to oblige his friends by inscribing fine flourished invitations and announcements for them. His literary style was considered good and he was often required to compose important letters. An accurate accountant, he would obligingly straighten out muddled books. But he never received any recompense for these favors, much to his wife's disgust.

Benvanida was well liked. She was tall and fine looking. She had her mother's energy and her father's love of reading. She had 'admirers'. Once, at a ball, a Spaniard made love to her. Perhaps it tickled her vanity, for she allowed him to plead a while; then she turned a look of withering scorn on the dapper little man, bade him compare himself with her big handsome gray-eyed husband – and Begone!

Abraham Lindo, the brother of Jacob, also lived in Venezuela. He was tall and fair, and not unlike Samuel Piza in appearance. When Abram, who had no enemies, was shot down in the street, everyone said that he had been mistaken for Samuel, the Don Juan of the family, who had business connections – and connections of other sorts – in Venezuela.

Jacob and Benvanida remained in Barcelona for fifteen years, but in 1861 the country was in such a condition of political unrest that it was dangerous to be on the streets on account of the revolutionists' snippings. Bem persuaded her husband, for the sake of their children, if not for themselves, to leave this perilous country. She took the children with her and sailed back to St. Thomas, the old home, where Jacob soon joined them. Poor as they were, they were made welcome by the family. The lovely grandchildren were a great joy to old Hannah – "Grandma Piza", as she was called by the whole community – during the twenty years that they lived there. Emily was a born housewife, always doing something helpful. Anita, her twin, was entirely different in appearance and character – she was aristocratic, high-spirited and socially inclined. Clarita was pretty, with delicate features and soft brown eyes; but her real beauty was definitely marred by the traces a siege of small pox had left. Julita, dashing and sprightly, the third in the direct line to inherit Grandma Piza's verve and energy, was that old lady's especial favorite. The Lindo's youngest child, Herman, was born in St. Thomas.

Jacob Lindo secured a position as book-keeper-accountant to a large business house. In the congregational life he was prominent. As an excellent Hebraist, on occasions he was called upon to read the prayers. (We find no evidence of his having an official position until much later). Just as had been the case in

Curaçao fifty years earlier when Joshua Piza had left his pastorate because he was given no freedom; just as in 1844 Moses and Judah had fretted over trivial details of the ritual in St. Thomas, (whither they had migrated for freedom's sake), so still in 1867 did pettiness persist. Alas, Jacob's name appears in the synagogue records as a protestant against the laxity of the minister, the Reverend Mr. Nathan.

In 1869, when he was forty-five years old, Jacob was stricken with paralysis. Shortly before he had joined the staff of his wealthy brother in law, Herman Meyer, at a salary better than he had ever in his life received; but he had to give up the position because of his affliction. He lived for fifteen years after his first illness, but was naturally no longer to be counted upon as a breadwinner. However, the sons were grown or growing up. Morris was twenty-four and a partner in his uncle 'CoCo' Piza's business; Joshua was twenty-two and established with his uncle 'Sampi'. The parents never had to worry while these boys were getting on so well in Panama. Emily, Anita and Clarita were married; Emily, the only one of that prolific brood to produce no offspring, to Isaac Delvalle (a brother of her Aunt Achee's husband); Anita to Elias Maduro, with whom she went to live in Paris – which was appropriate indeed, for had it not always been said that she had the air of a *duchesse*? And Clarita to Isaac Maduro, of a family quite distinct from Elias's.

With the boom which attended the commencement of the "French Canal" (1879-1889), and which lasted from its inception until the work was stopped by the frightful mortality from yellow fever among the foreigners, the Lindos went to live in Panama. They and their connections, with a generation or two of tropical life in their blood, seemed to be immune from the plague. Whilst the Europeans died like flies, a little malaria now and then was the worst that the West Indians suffered. The household now consisted of Jacob and Benvanida, Morris, the vivacious young Julita, and Herman aged fifteen. Joshua had married his blue eyed cousin Esther Piza, the "Irish beauty" of the family in St. Thomas, and for more than ten years had had his own home in Panama. Clarita and Isaac were in San Domingo at that time. Morris, easy-going and good natured, was regarded as an old bachelor, and technically lived at home with his parents. Everyone knew that he was the head of a native "outside" family. It was not until some years after his mother's death that he married Maria Hiñojosa, the mother of his children in justice to their rights. In their youth Morris and Josh, with only two years difference in their ages, were separately identified as "LindoFeo" and "Lindo Lindo". The year '84 was eventful: after a trip to Europe with her brother Sam, Julita returned to Panama and married Isidore Cardoze. The same year Benvanida took Jacob, whose health was failing, to Jamaica for a trip. He died there on New Year's morning '85.

Returning to Panama, the widow went to live with her daughter Emily. She and Isaac Delvalle had adopted their niece Estelle (daughter of Rachel and Solomon Delvalle). Benvanida stayed with them until they departed for St. Thomas, when the old lady made her home with her daughter Julita. It was a large ménage, and the size was constantly being increased by visits of nephews and grandsons from all over the world. Jacob Piza, who had long been a resident of England, sent his sons down to the Isthmus to look after his interests. Young Lurias, a new generation, arrived from Hamburg. Wise in experience, but ever marvelously young in spirit, the old lady naturally took her place as matriarch of the tribe. She kept well posted on topics of the day, and so enjoyed reading her newspaper that it was often difficult to persuade her to come to meals. Once when some matter of public interest was being discussed at breakfast (the 11 o'clock meal), and 'Bem' knew more about the subject than anyone else, Joshua said to his mother, somewhat skeptically:

"Mamma, I can't imagine where you got that from! – I read the papers too!"

It developed that "Mamma" had read the French sheet of the trilingual Panama daily, while the younger people had been satisfied to peruse the Spanish and English pages. We must be impressed by this, for Benvanida (and Judith) had had almost no formal education, and all their considerable accomplishments were self acquired.

The Royal Families of Europe were always of especial interest to her, and Queen Victoria, who was about her age, was regarded as a sister. Bismark she particularly hated, for through him Schleswig-Holstein had been taken from Denmark, which Bem considered her Father-land. "Beast-Mark" she sneeringly called him. She was an ardent Zionist, and that was long before the movement became popular. She kept huge scrap-books in which she pasted clippings on all her favorite topics. The whole Dreyfus case was there; also poems that appealed to her. Byron with his zest for life was her favorite, and she was fond of quoting him at length.

As a match maker, she was just as assiduous as her mother had been. She declared she would like to see the boys marry at eighteen and the girls at sixteen. Her letters to relatives abroad always contained the wish that their children would soon find "worthy partners in Israel."

In December 30, 1901, the grand old lady was brought to her death by cancer. She lacked but one month to attain the eight full decades her mother had reached.

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