

## 2. Lucia's Family

Fatima is a village about eighty miles north of Lisbon. Its parish church (St. Anthony's) made Fatima the religious and social hub for the twenty hamlets that (not by accident) surrounded it, swelling the parish to some 2500 souls. Church and hamlets were all located on a plateau hidden away in the recesses of a mountain called the *Serra de Aire*.

The plain below the Serra was more populous and modern, but the plain dwellers seldom visited, for Fatima was only accessible from below by half hidden paths or neglected roads.<sup>1</sup> A dirt road out of Fatima leads, in a mile or less, to the hamlet of Aljustrel. Here the road is paved in cobblestone, and lined by small one story whitewashed houses with flat, red tiled roofs.

The children of Aljustrel, according to William Thomas Walsh, "have fine eyes and gleaming teeth." Their bare feet are "dusty but shapely, seem not to feel the sharp stones, nor are their laughing faces annoyed by the flies, fleas and other insects that buzz, in hot weather, over the patios and the sheds where animals are kept.

"A burro brays, a dog barks, a rooster crows, a yoke of oxen lumber heavily along the road. The air is seasoned with many odors, among which can be distinguished those of pines and evergreen shrubs, wild mint and onions, sheep, goats, and chickens; above all, the distinctive musty and acrid though not exactly disagreeable smell that the soil of Portugal seems to have everywhere."<sup>2</sup>

There is no electricity, running water, or plumbing. There are wells, if they can be called so. There are very few underground springs, so the inhabitants of Aljustrel dig cisterns out of the rocks to collect rain water, which is then carefully shaded.

In the summer cisterns would dry up, and neighbors would come to Lucia's house asking for water. Lucia remembers:

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“My mother, and my father, if he happened to be at home, would always say yes, giving them the key to the cover of the well (my parents always kept the well closed with an iron padlock, so that no insects, animals, or children, who were playing there, would fall in), saying: ‘Go there and fill your pitchers.’

“And God blessed it, because the water of our well never failed,” Lucia concluded.<sup>3</sup>

By modern standards the peasants of Fatima and Aljustrel lived in abject poverty. Yet the inhabitants were unaware of this. Life was paced by the agricultural seasons and the Church calendar, and rolled on rather seamlessly until 1917. As for poverty, when Lucia was asked if there were any rich people in Aljustrel, she answered:

“Yes, there was the Family ‘Santos’. It was a large, Christian, practicing Catholic family. They lived near the Family Ferreira Rosa, to whom the houses belonged and from whom the (Fatima) Sanctuary recently purchased, for a museum, the one which was my parents – comprising the house, patio and kitchen garden beyond the well.

“From there onwards, this family owned a great extension of properties in the direction of Montelo, Our Lady of Ortiga, Fatima, Valinhos, Cabeco, Charneca and Cova da Iria. My father was a member of this family...”<sup>4</sup>

Lucia’s father was Antonio dos Santos, sometimes known as Antonio ‘Abobora’, which is Portuguese for pumpkin. Abobora was not Antonio’s real name, it was a nickname; not for his physique, but for the pumpkins he grew.

There were several marriages between the dos Santos and Ferreira Rosa families. Antonio dos Santos married Maria (Ferreira) Rosa; Lucia was the last of their seven children. Antonio’s sister, Olympia, married Maria Rosa’s brother, Jose Ferreira Rosa. They had two children before Jose died. Olympia then remarried. Her second husband was Emanuelo (Ti) Marto. This marriage produced nine more children; the last two were Francisco and Jacinta, who were Lucia’s first cousins.

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Lucia described the dos Santos clan as “being of a peaceable nature,” and the Ferreira Rosa family as “being of a more expansive type, playing the harmonium and the guitar, arranging *festas* and dances.”<sup>5</sup> The dos Santos’ were known by the property they owned; the Ferreira Rosas by their charity, and the fact that some of them could read, a talent that was passed along to Maria Rosa (dos Santos).

Another claim to notoriety for the Ferreira Rosa family occurred when the French invaded Portugal in 1807. French soldiers made an encampment in Fatima, a rather unlikely bivouac that was chosen perhaps for its view of the surrounding country. General Junot of the French Army made his headquarters in one of the homes of the dos Santos family. There he met Maria Isabel Ferreira Rosa, who was very beautiful. Junot tried to take her back to France. “Seeing the great danger,” Lucia recounted, “her (Maria Isabel’s) mother had hidden her in an old chest in the storehouse with lots of sacks on top.”<sup>6</sup> The French left without Maria Isabel, who much later died unmarried in the same house. This house, the last house on the left of the descending road through Aljustrel, was the house Lucia was born and raised in.

Later her parents bequeathed their home to Sister Lucia, who writes that she “had the pleasure of donating it to Our Lady for Her Sanctuary of Fatima, in the hope that it may be for the glory of God, of Our Lady, and the spiritual happiness of our pilgrim brothers and sisters who go there and enjoy seeing things as they were in former times.”<sup>7</sup>

Antonio and Maria Rosa dos Santos are often attributed with having six children: Maria dos Anjos, Teresa, Manuel, Gloria, Carolina, and Lucia; but Maria Rosa, who surely was the one to know, maintained she bore seven. In the official enquiry into Fatima in 1923 Lucia’s mother declared: “I had seven children, one having died at birth.”<sup>8</sup> Lucia said the stillborn infant was a girl named Maria Rosa; Lucia’s brother Manuel said it was a boy.<sup>9</sup> Although Lucia’s birth is not a matter of dispute, the date of her birth is.

### Notes

1. So things were at the time of Lucia’s birth, anyway.

2. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

3. Father Louis Kondor, SVD, Editor, *Fatima in Lucia’s Own Words, Sister Lucia’s Memoirs, Volume II, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Memoirs*, Secretariado dos Pastorinhos, Fatima,

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Portugal, 1999, p. 17. Volume I of Sister Lucia's Memoirs, also edited by Father Kondor, contains Memoirs 1-4. From here on I will simply cite the particular Memoir and page number.

4. Fifth Memoir, p. 9.

5. Fifth Memoir, p. 11.

6. Fifth Memoir, p. 12.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

8. Episcopal Archives of Leiria, Documentos de Fatima, 1-6, fl. 10, as quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 14.

9. In the Sanctuary of Fatima archives there is a note from Father Alonso regarding a conversation he had with Manuel dos Santos. In 1963 Manuel told Father Alonso that his parents were traveling in a cart that turned over. Maria Rosa, who was pregnant, returned home immediately and gave birth to a stillborn child. This apparently occurred between 1903 and 1906. There are no baptismal records for the infant, but it may have been baptized at home, or baptized conditionally. *Ibid.*, fn 14, p. 14.