

3.

Lucia's Early Years

The date of Lucia's birth is universally given as March 22, 1907, but her mother says this is the wrong date. In an interview with Canon Formigao, Maria Rosa dos Santos stated:

"We say that it is on the 22nd of March, because she was registered as having been born on that day, but in fact this is not the case. She was born on the 28th of March 1907. It was Holy Thursday; in the morning I went to Holy Mass and received Holy Communion, thinking I would return in the afternoon to visit the Blessed Sacrament, but it was not to be, since on that afternoon she was born. As she is registered as being born on the 22nd, we continue to say that this is her birthday."¹

This was news to Lucia as well, although she took it in stride: "This is really not surprising, because in Fatima, at that time, no one attached any importance to one's birthday. It was not a feast, therefore, it was not something of which we spoke."²

After Lucia's birth on Holy Thursday, her father made arrangements for the Baptism. According to Maria Rosa, having the baptism the following week was not convenient because of Antonio's work, but

"as it was required that the parents bring the children for Baptism on the eighth day after birth — otherwise they would have to pay a fine — her father decided to give the date of her birth as the 22nd, so that the Parish Priest would baptize her on Holy Saturday, which was the 30th of the same month."³

Another oddity is how Lucia was named. Maria Rosa's goddaughter was asked to be Lucia's godparent. As was the custom, she asked her father's permission to fulfill this role. Her father asked what name she had chosen for the baby. The young girl had chosen the name Maria Rosa, in honor of the

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infant's mother. Her father replied, "No! You must name her Lucia! If that is not so, I will not permit you to be the godmother."⁴ Antonio and Maria Rosa were surprised at the father's firmness, but out of courtesy agreed their infant daughter would be named Lucia.

Lucia displayed a remarkable memory throughout her life, a memory that extended back even to her infancy.

"Our dear Lord deigned to favor me with the use of reason from my earliest childhood. I remember being conscious of my actions, even from my mother's arms. I remember being rocked, and falling asleep to the sound of lullabies. Our Lord blessed my parents with five girls and one boy, of whom I was the youngest, and I remember how they used to squabble, because they all wanted to hold me in their arms and play with me...

"The first thing I learned was the Hail Mary. While holding me in her arms, my mother taught it to my sister Carolina, the second youngest, and five years older than myself."⁵

Father de Marchi, who knew Lucia as a child, describes her like this:

"Lucia has never been exactly pretty, either as a child or as an adult, and scrubbed and posed and supplied with a halo, she could neither then nor now fulfill the holy picture concept of a flowering saint. As a child her features were blunt, her eyes alone being luminous and soft. Her lips were too thick and her nose was too flat. Her eyebrows, black as crepe, appeared to form one horizontal line. Yet Lucia was gay and bright and loved by other children."⁶

According to her uncle, Ti Marto, Lucia "was a chatterbox and never still for a minute. She was affectionate, too — even with me. She was very mischievous, and I often thought she will be very good or very bad."

"The world was beginning to smile on me, and above all, a passion for dancing was already sinking its roots into my poor heart," wrote Lucia of her early years, adding: "I must confess that the devil would have used this to bring about my ruin, had not the good Lord shown His special mercy towards me."⁸

This love for dancing was shared by Lucia's oldest sisters,

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Maria and Teresa, who according to Lucia, "were the leading lights among the young people. There was not a festival or a dance that they did not attend."⁸ Maria Rosa shrewdly insisted her two oldest daughters take Lucia to the dances with them: "My mother," Lucia said, "knowing that I repeated everything I heard like a parrot, wanted them to take me with them everywhere they went."⁹

So the three dos Santos girls socialized together, with Lucia being the unlikely chaperone. Maria and Teresa would put Lucia on a table to ensure she wasn't trampled by the dancers. "Once on my perch," Lucia wrote, "I had to sing a number of songs to the music of the guitar or the concertina. My sisters had already taught me to sing, as well as to dance a few waltzes when there was a partner missing. The latter I performed with rare skill, thus attracting the attention and applause of everyone present. Some of them even rewarded me with gifts, in the hope of pleasing my sisters."¹⁰

Her sisters didn't seem to mind taking Lucia to social occasions. According to Lucia, "they took as much trouble in dressing me up as they were wont to do for themselves. As one of them was a dressmaker, I was always decked out in a regional costume more elegant than that of any girl around. I wore a pleated skirt, a shiny belt, a cashmere kerchief with the corners hanging down behind, and a hat decorated with gold beads and bright colored feathers. You would have thought sometimes, that they were dressing a doll rather than a small child."¹¹ Even so, Lucia didn't seem to mind much.

Her oldest sister, Maria dos Anjos, later said of Lucia:

"We loved her because she was so intelligent and affectionate. Even when she had grown to the age of ten, and was believed old enough to be trusted with the flocks, she would run to my mother to sit on her lap and be cuddled and kissed. We who were older used to tease her and say, 'Here comes the cuddler,' and we would even be cross with her when we felt it was overdone. But it made no difference. It would be the same the next day.

"You should have seen her when my first baby was born (Maria continued). She came home from the

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fields and locked up the sheep and ran as fast as her legs would carry her to my house, which was just across the street from my mother's house. She clutched at the baby and covered it with kisses, not at all like the others around here who thought a baby was just a baby."¹²

Besides a pronounced affection for babies and children, little Lucia had a natural authority about her that the children in Aljustrel accepted. Maria dos Anjos recalls:

"Lucia loved children and they adored her. Sometimes a dozen or so of them would collect in our yard and Lucia would be perfectly happy just decorating these little ones with flowers and leaves. She would make little processions with make-believe saints, arranging flowers and thrones and singing hymns to Our Lady, just as if they were all in a church... I can still remember the one she liked the best:

*'To Heaven, to Heaven, to Heaven,
There shall I see my Mother again,
O pure Virgin, Thy tenderness
Comes to soothe my pain;
Day and night shall I sing
Of the beauty of Mary!'*

"She would finish the hymn by giving the 'blessing.' She knew so well how to look after children that the mothers used to leave their little ones at our house when they went out to work.

"No one could beat Lucia at games. She was always the organizer. The children used to hide under the fig trees and in the bushes or under the beds — anywhere, and when they were all tired from their games they would sit in the shade of the fig trees and listen to Lucia tell stories which never, never seemed to have an end."¹³

Lucia confirms her sister's account: "During the week I used to spend the day surrounded by a crowd of children from the neighborhood. Their mothers went out to work in the fields, so they used to ask my mother if they could leave

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the children with me...amid the warmth of such affectionate and tender caresses, I happily spent my first six years."¹⁴

Notes

1. As quoted in Fifth Memoir, p. 13.
2. Ibid., pp. 13-14.
3. Ibid., p. 14.
4. Ibid., p. 14.
5. Second Memoir, p. 52.
6. John de Marchi, I.M.C., *The Immaculate Heart*, Farrar, Straus and Young, New York, 1952, p. 22.
7. Second Memoir, p. 54.
8. Ibid., p. 52.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 53.
11. Ibid., pp. 52-53.
12. De Marchi, op. cit., p. 22.
13. Ibid., p. 23. See also TWTAF, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 43.
14. Second Memoir, p. 54.