

## II. The Children of Fatima



Jacinta Marto (age seven), Lucia dos Santos (age ten) and Francisco Marto (age nine), the three seers to whom Our Lady appeared at Fatima in 1917.

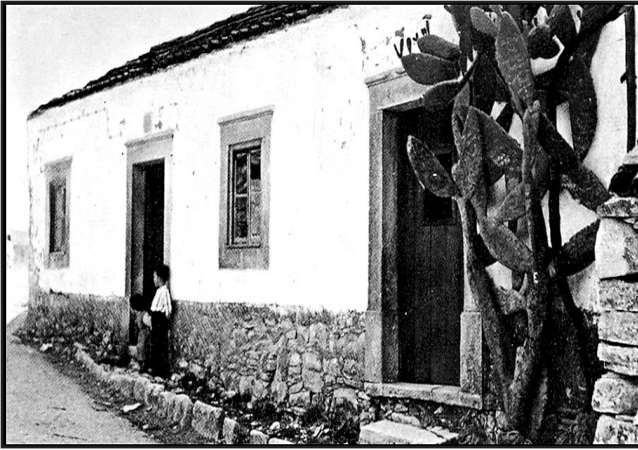
The eldest of the three children to whom Our Lady was to appear at Fatima was Lucia de Jesus dos Santos. Born on March 28, 1907, she was the youngest of the seven children of Senhor Ant3nio dos Santos and his wife, Maria Rosa. They lived in the hamlet of Aljustrel which is situated as an oasis among the rocky hills of Aire, forming a part of the village of Fatima. Senhor dos Santos was a farmer whose small holdings were scattered about the hills of the vicinity.

Lucia was always healthy and strong. Although her features, a rather flat nose and a heavy mouth, suggested a frown, her sweet disposition and keen mind were reflected in a pair of dark, beautiful eyes which glistened under their heavy lids, making her most attractive. She was particularly affectionate toward children and very early began to prove herself a help to mothers in minding their young ones. She was singularly gifted in holding the attention of the other children by her affection and resourcefulness. She is remembered also as being fond of dressing up. At the numerous religious festivals she was always among the most colorfully dressed of the girls. Moreover she loved these occasions for their gaiety, and especially for the dancing.

Lucia's father was like many a man of his class. He did his work, performed his religious duties, and spent his free time among his friends at the tavern, leaving the children completely in the care of his wife. And she was in every way equal to the task, even if perhaps a little strict in her discipline.

Devoutly religious, Senhora Maria Rosa was possessed of more than average common sense, and, unlike most of her neighbors, she could read. Thus she was able to instruct not only her own but her neighbors' children in the catechism. Evenings she would read to the children from the Bible or other pious books, and sedulously she reminded them of their prayers, urging them particularly to remember the Rosary, traditionally the favorite devotion of the people of Portugal. It should not be surprising, therefore, that Lucia was able to receive her First Holy Communion at the age of six instead of ten, as the custom then dictated.

Francisco and Jacinta, the other two principals, were Lucia's first cousins, the eighth and ninth children, respectively, born of the marriage of Senhor Manuel Marto and Senhora Olimpia Jesus dos Santos. This marriage was the second for Olimpia, her first husband having died after giving her two children. Olimpia was the sister of Senhor dos Santos, Lucia's father.



**Outside and inside of the home where Francisco and Jacinta were born.**



**Home where Lucia was born.**

Francisco, their youngest boy, was born June 11, 1908. He grew to be a fine looking lad, in disposition much like his father, Ti Marto, as the parent was usually called. Lucia recalls particularly how calm and condescending Francisco was in contrast to the whimsical and light-hearted Jacinta. Though he loved to play games, it mattered little to him whether he won or lost. In fact there were times when Lucia shunned his company because his apparent lack of temperament irritated her. At these times she would exert her will over him making him sit still by himself for a period of time; then feeling sorry for him she would bring him into the game they might be playing, and Francisco would remain apparently unaffected by the treatment.

“Yet for all this,” his father recalls, “he was sometimes wilder and more active than his sister Jacinta. He could lose his patience and fuss like a young calf. He was absolutely fearless. He could go anywhere in the dark. He would play with lizards, and when he found a small snake he made it coil itself around his staff and he filled the holes in the rocks with ewe’s milk for the snakes to drink...”

Ti Marto, though illiterate, was a man of real wisdom and prudence. He had a remarkable sense of values, and he must have instilled into the mind and heart of Francisco a deep appreciation of the natural beauties of life. Young as the boy was he loved to contemplate the world around him: the vastness of the skies, the wonder of the stars, and the myriad beauties of nature at sunrise and sunset. Francisco loved music too. He used to carry a reed flute with which he would accompany the singing and dancing of his companions, his sister Jacinta and his cousin Lucia.

Jacinta, born March 11, 1910, was nearly two years younger than her brother. She resembled Francisco in features, but differed sharply in temperament. Her round face was smooth-skinned, and she had bright, clear eyes and a small mouth with thin lips,

but a somewhat chubby chin. She was well proportioned, but not as robust as Francisco. A quiet untroublesome infant, she grew to be a lovable child, though not without an early tendency to selfishness. She took easily to a sense of piety, but was equally given to play. In fact it seems to have been her idea sometime before the apparitions to reduce their daily Rosary to a repetition of only the first two words of the *Hail Mary*, a practice which, of course, they hastily abandoned in due time.

Jacinta had a strong devotion to Lucia, and when it became the latter's chore to take the sheep to the hills to graze, Jacinta pestered her mother until she was given a few sheep of her own so that she could accompany her cousin to the hills.

Each morning before sunrise Senhora Olimpia would awaken Francisco and Jacinta. They would bless themselves as they got up and say a little prayer. Their mother, having prepared breakfast, usually a bowl of soup and some bread, would go to the barn to release the sheep, and then returning to the house, would prepare a lunch with whatever was at hand, probably bread with olives, codfish or sardines. By the time she had finished this, the children were ready to go to meet Lucia with her flock of sheep. Before the apparitions they used to meet with other children, but after the apparitions of the Angel these three stayed more or less by themselves.

Lucia would select the place for the day's pasturing. Usually they went to the hill country, where Senhor dos Santos owned some property. Sometimes she took them out to the open country around Fatima. A favorite place in the summer, however, was the Cabeço, a grassy hill that also offered the shade of trees — olive, pine, and holm oak — as well as the Cave. It was much closer to home than the other pasturelands, and the children found it best for playing.

One of Lucia's earlier companions recalls, "Lucia was a lot of fun and we loved to be with her because she was always so pleasant. We did whatever she told us to do. She was very wise, and she could sing and dance very well; and with her we could spend our whole day singing and dancing ..."

And Lucia remembers, even today, all their beautiful, simple songs. When they heard the sound of the church bells, or when the height of the sun told them it was noon, they stopped their playing and dancing to recite the Angelus. After eating their lunch they would say their Rosary and then go on with their playing. They would return home in the evening in time for supper, and after their night prayers they would go to bed.



**Ti and Olimpia Marto, parents  
of Francisco and Jacinta.**



The house of Arturo Santos, Administrator of the Municipality of Ourém, where the children were brought after their kidnapping on August 13, 1917. (See Chapter VII starting on [page 34](#).)



João Marto, brother of Francisco and Jacinta, is shown in this 1966 photo in Aljustrel. Lucia's house is in the background.