

Augustana Lutheran Church's Traditional Santa Lucia Festival **Original: written then read by Marion Moline at the 100th anniversary, in 1975**

Like many a good story begins "Once Upon a Time" ... Our story begins with Sweden, Swedish, and Swedes.

The Swedish immigrants of 1870 built the red brick church in 1890 at the corner of Sixth and court Street, naming it "Swedish Evangelical Augustana Lutheran Church of the United States of America." That was the beginning of our Swedish heritage.

"Once Upon a Time" ... It's 300 A.D. in Syracuse on the Island of Sicily. A beautiful girl was born in a marble palace, and while in her childhood she became a Christian. She was engaged to marry a man who was not a Christian, who betrayed his future young bride to the Romans, causing her suffering and persecution, and eventually her death. Why? In an act of charity, she gave her rich dowry to those in need. Because of her undying faith and steadfast courage, she was burnt at the stake on December 13, 304. She was, according to the story, transfigured by such an inner intense light that she was symbolized as the Bear[?] of Light to the darkness on that, the shortest day of the year, December 13. Thus, the name "Santa Lucia" means "Light." Time passes and again...

"Once Upon a Time" ... The winter solstice occurred in the dead of the dark Scandinavian winter and thereafter, the days begin to grow longer. There is an old Swedish legend that Lucia appeared sometime later on a winter night along the shores of Sweden's largest lake, "Lake Vänern. She brought food and clothing to the Swedes who were starving because of the great famine there. Here I must mention "Potatis Korv." It developed as a necessity because of the famine, to stretch the meat supply by grinding the meat, combining it with ground potatoes, of which they had a good supply, adding spices, stuffing the mixture in casings. After all, they lived on farms and casing were available. They boiled it, making it a potato sausage – thus Potatis Korv. I hope you enjoyed the sausage you found in our smorgasbord tonight. A staple of all smorgasbords.

Back to Lucia ... She was seen clothed in white with a crown of lights each December 13, between 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning, moving across the icy lake and snow-covered hills of Swedish parishes carrying food for the starving. Years later, a custom evolved in which the eldest daughter of the family, dressed in a white gown belted with a red sash, a necklace of red berries, and a crown of lighted candles, served Lucia buns and coffee to her parents while in bed at the break of day. This was the beginning of the Swedish Christmas.

Once Upon a Time ... The Augustana sons of the 1870 Swedish immigrants were now marrying and bringing their young brides to Augustana, BUT! there was one immediate problem – they didn't speak Swedish nor did they understand Swedish. Seeing the problem, Mrs. O.N. Olson, our pastor's wife, fathered these young married women into an organization she named "The Miriam Society". It was intended to be a purely social group, but it wasn't long that these members saw the church needed additional money. They started serving luncheons and suppers, selling towels, cookbooks, aprons, hot pads, flavorings, spices and Rick Rack earrings. The most popular and profitable was the "Chore Boys." They were scouring pads.

The membership dues were \$10.00 a year. Their monies helped to pay for the altar upstairs that we see every Sunday Morning. The Society grew so swiftly that they organized "Circles" of about 15 Miriam Society members and named them after the women of the Bible. In fact, at one time, there were 12 circles. This made it possible for all the membership to be involved – sometimes it also created a competition among them. The Miriam Society met the first Friday of the month at 2:00 here in the church and the Circles met the third Friday of the month also at 2:00 in the homes of the members. It was at one of these December meetings of the Miriam Society that they served a 12:00 luncheon for the downtown business women of Sioux City with tickets being 75 cents. At 2:00 they had their regular business meeting followed by the program and as usual the Vice President (I happened to be that person) was in charge of the program. As you know there is always the difficulty of finding something new and interesting. So, after much research of Swedish traditions, I found the story of "Santa Lucia," the Swedish Legend. So, for that program we sang the "Lucia Song." (I asked by it is set to the tune of the "Neapolitan Boat Song"; well, the first Lucia was from Sicily). We told the Santa Lucia Story and the Miriam Society program committee selected our very first Lucia. She had to be a member of Augustana, and the Miriam Society and one who gave service to the church and the Society. They chose Bethel Forsling Nettleton, as she met all the requirements for our first Lucia, and we crowned her on Friday, December 6, 1954 at that meeting.

The Augustana Lucia Festival has been celebrated with luncheons, teas, evening programs, brunches, and suppers for the Miria Society membership. some were held at 10:00 in the morning, at 11:00, 12:00, 1:00, 2:00, 4:00, and 8:00 in the evening. As it grew in attendance, the Santa Lucia Program was opened for all the women and men of the congregation to attend and then as this evening it became later a Swedish Potluck Smorgasbord for the whole family and their friends. Cookies served tonight by the Lucia and her court took the place of the Lucia buns served so long ago at the break of day in Sweden. There were 3 years when there wasn't an Augustana Lucia. Tickets were sold for 75 cents to \$1.25 and sometimes reservations were needed. The Lucia Crown...This brass one with lighted candles, was purchased by Mrs. J.E. Johnson in 1953 for \$8.00 on her trip to Sweden. This wired crown was purchased by Tom and Margaret Ericson in 1978 on their trip to Sweden, and one with batteries which the Lucia is wearing tonight was purchased by Audrey Mook in 1990. The Lucia chair was made by my Don and I painted it in 1982. The Lucia Cabinet on the landing to the Sanctuary was built in 1954. In 1977 "Star boys" robed in 2white with cone-shaped hats topped with a star and star wands were introduced to escort the Lucia and her procession.

Each year the girls of the confirmation Class are eligible to become "Santa Lucia" ... by the way, she is not a queen. She is "Santa Lucia," a "Saint of Light". Originally chosen by the Vice President and the Program committee of the Miriam society and then after the merger of all women's organizations into one society, the "WELCA" Vice Pres. and Program Committee made the selection. Now the Lucia is selected among the girls themselves.

That is the story of 50 years of Augustana's beautiful Swedish tradition of crowning a Lucia and enjoying a Swedish Smorgasbord with Potatis Korv. Just one more thing...it all began as "Once upon a time" and now it concludes with "And they lived happily ever after."