



The Lucy Bride

The centerpiece of the evening is, of course, the arrival of the Lucy Bride with her crown of blazing candles and her tray of *lussekatter*, “light cats.” These symbolize her gift of nourishment for both body and soul. Even those guests who know very little about the symbolism and history of St. Lucia are moved by the beauty of the procession. (See the Appendix on page 77 for details on why we call her the Lucy Bride, and why the pastries are called “light cats.”)

At Helen’s parties, the Lucy Bride and her train would start their procession outside. My friend Waverly writes in her account of the parties at Bright House: “We would see candles flickering outside the windows and hear the faint sound of female voices in song, then a rap on the door, and St. Lucia would burst in, a crown of candles flaming on her head. She would walk through the company, offering each guest one of the pastries on the tray she carried. Her female companions would sing ‘Santa Lucia’ and so would we all as we took our treats and thanked St. Lucia for bringing Light back to the world.”*



Anna, one of the first Lucy Brides at Helen’s Lucia Party, 1988

*Waverly Fitzgerald, *Celebrating Yule*, 2003, www.livinginseason.com/store/

This is the same pattern we have followed each year at our own parties, although we have not always had big picture windows where we could watch the ladies as they made their way toward the house. And, of course, some years it rained or snowed, and this made it harder for them to walk in procession outside. The year we rented the Victorian house, the Lucy Bride descended a beautifully carved wooden staircase, and that was lovely to see. But my favorite sight is still the candles flickering outside as Lucy and her train make their way to our door. I'm so glad we have picture windows at Rainbow Cottage, where we now have the parties.

Choosing the Lucy Bride

When I hosted my first Lucia Party in 1997, I asked my friend Deb to be the Lucy Bride. I knew she could sing, and I had wonderful memories of Anna and Sandi, who both played Lucia at Helen's parties, singing the "Santa Lucia" song as they distributed the *lussekatter* to the guests.

Then the role changed hands for a few years, moving from woman to woman in our circle. It seemed less important that the woman playing Lucia have a beautiful singing voice, and more important that she embody her otherworldly presence. Elaine made a beautiful gown the year it was her turn, and every Lucy Bride has worn it since (although we often need to alter it a bit, especially the hemline).



One year we realized that many of the young girls in our community were approaching adolescence. When one of them had her First Moon (her first menstrual period), it struck us that it would be a wonderful rite of passage to have her play the Lucy Bride. So a new tradition began: each year, Lucia is played by the girl in our community who started her moonflow since the previous Lucia Party. Of course, we don't announce this at the party. But it has become a meaningful rite of passage for them. Now the younger girls look forward to the day when they can also play the role of Lucia. If there isn't a "qualified" girl for a particular year, we ask for a volunteer among the girls and women. There's always someone who would like to portray the Lucy Bride.

Her Gown

St. Lucia is traditionally dressed in a white gown with red ribbons, but the skirt and vest we use is red, with a white blouse and petticoat underneath. The combination of red and white is important, as it symbolizes fire and light.

Elaine made the gown that we use without a pattern (she is trained in costume design). You can see it in the photo at right. It is loose enough that it can accommodate a number of different body shapes and sizes. If you do an Internet search for “lucia gown pattern” or “lucia dress pattern” you’ll find a few to choose from. (Some of them are for dolls, though, and some are for clothing to wear on the island of St. Lucia.) Many of the traditional St. Lucia dresses, designed for girls to wear in church pageants, are a bit (dare I say it) dowdy. I don’t think our Lucia needs to have a high neckline or a Peter Pan collar on her dress.



I love the gowns that HolyClothing.com sells, many of which would make a beautiful Lucia gown. Go to the site, click on Dresses, then search by Color: White. Choose your favorite, add a few red ribbons or a red sash and you’re all set. I think the Bella style dress in white would be especially nice, and it comes in many sizes, up to 5X.

The Lucy Bride will also need a good-sized tray to hold the *lussekatter*. I bought a wooden one some years ago that we usually use. The tray is an essential part of Lucia’s costume!

Her Crown

We always use real candles on the crown and fresh greenery. (The one notable exception was the year we rented the Victorian house and were not allowed to have burning candles.) If you go shopping in Scandinavian import stores for a crown of candles for Lucia to wear, you will find that all the crowns for sale have battery-operated candles. The reason for this is, of course, fire safety. But battery-lit Lucia crowns remind me of fireplaces with fake logs and “flames” that can be turned on with the flick of a switch. We pay a price when we value convenience and safety over the elemental nourishment of our souls. The warmth of glowing candlelight touches the human psyche in ways that electric lights never will.

Appointing two or three people to be “fire watchers” solves the issue of fire safety. Their job is to keep an eye on Lucia’s lit candles and to make sure that flames are put out if