

The House of Ravenwood is a witch's abode that sits on a small wooded lot on Moreland Avenue south of Ponce De Leon Avenue in Atlanta. It is a dilapidated, eerie, slightly ominous structure; a strongly defined fear of the unknown wells up inside when you knock on the tattered front screen door that separates you from god-knows-what.

Even as you enter the dimly lit parlor on the left—the one with two female mannequins, a Yule tree, an incense-herb counter with "Dragon's Blood" in a jar, the scent of burning incense, and mellow gold music—visions of gurgling cauldrons, grey-haired crones, warlocks, and flesh-famished ghouls—enter your head.

Lady Santana, a witch and priestess of the Wiccan Religion—has auburn hair, looks to be in her late 30's or early 40's, and exudes a confident, casual, almost droll manner. She is no more frightening than a schoolmarm; when she says she wants to "disassociate some of the stigmas that are attached to the religion," you wonder what they could be.

"We cannot harm anyone physically, emotionally, or spiritually," she says.

Witches, members of the religion Wicca, which is much older than Christianity, are "total nature worshippers." They revere all things, and recognize all living matter as a source of creative energy. They believe there is a creative power in the universe and that it manifests itself through the duality of the masculine Father Sun and feminine Mother Earth forces. These forces, Lady Santana says, create a "universal balance of energies"; a "universal harmony." Witches seek a balance of positive and negative energies to reach Oneness.

Each initiate into the order practices self-disciplines daily—study ("knowledge is understanding"), meditation, incantations, "all sorts of divinations," and metaphysics (astrology, numerology, etc.).

Sex is considered a sacrament. It is, according to Lady Santana, "the highest essence of the procreative life force...and therefore a thing of beauty." Not to be constricted by church doctrine, even marriages are open-ended.

Sex should "hit on three levels": Spiritual, Mental, and Physical. "And no," she added, "we don't have orgies like a lot of people think. Sex is a very personal thing."

In order to become a witch one must—besides studying for a year and a day and passing "all kinds of psychological tests"—be secretive, because witches are persecuted. The House of Ravenwood has been threatened with firebombing several times since it opened in the fall of '76; and has been harassed by the Satanists and the KKK. Members have lost jobs when it was discovered they were witches.

"It is," says Lady Santana, "a very rewarding life....but a very demanding one as well."