

# FREEDOM

by Theresa Racine

*"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceable to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."*

I thought maybe it was time we took a look at the First Amendment to the Constitution. It wasn't that long ago that we fought hard to express ourselves as outlined in this Amendment. Yet, we are one of the first groups of people that lash out against what we fail to understand or for fear of the unknown.

Recently, in South DeKalb, a self-professed witch was subject to a modern day witch-hunt due to fear of her religion.

I was appalled at the number of people who came out to a zoning hearing, or witch hunt, to see her ousted from the neighborhood. It was estimated that over 600 people were in attendance at the Manuel Maloof Auditorium in mid-day to protest her conducting religious services on her property. The majority of the people there

thought they won a victory over Lady Santana. However, she still has the right and freedom to practice her religion in the privacy of her home. She was only denied a variance license to operate a religious facility because she is in a residentially zoned area.

Senator John Parrish, who spoke out against Lady Santana, condemned her without knowing the facts. He looked less than a politician as he rambled on about Lady Santana's religion. He said she belonged to the humane society. She does not. If he had taken the time to research the situation, he would have found she has a license from the state of Georgia to rehabilitate wildlife. He looked ridiculous condemning her religion, when the real issue was not her religion, but whether or not she should be granted a variance. But, he gave the media what it wanted. And that's really the bottom line here, isn't it?

One church brought a bus load of Christians to the meeting. Where are these Christians when our youth are killing each other every day across the county, or when the educational system is blamed for "not teaching" our children, or when that undesirable hotel/motel goes up in our

neighborhoods? Where are they!? Are we missing the real issues?

The majority of the people at last Wednesday's meeting had not even heard of Lady Santana until a few local politicians turned it into a media circus. They came to the meeting to hang a witch, not to deny her a variance. The commission made it clear, they denied her a variance on residential zoning laws ONLY. Not her right to practice her religion. Rev. Harry Smith, of Parents Against Crack, in favor of Lady Santana's right to practice her religion said, "It's not John Parrish's business what Lady Santana does in her home." I agree.

I was ashamed to see us come out in such numbers for an issue of this nature. If you can come out for this...Come out for our children! Start hunting down the real witches in our communities; drugs, teen pregnancy, crime, lack of education, and the loss of lives!

Before we start throwing stones at one other, let's try to understand and respect each others "right to freedom" according to the First Amendment.