

It Isn't Easy Being a Witch Nowadays

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*With Candles, Cauldron, Chants,
'Queen' Prepares for Fall Fest*

By RON TAYLOR

There is a certain harried look about the pretty red-haired woman. The strain is understandable.

She has a 4-year-old grandson to tend to, lectures to prepare, candles to make, chants to memorize, a cauldron to heat up and a security force to deploy for keeping away the rock throwers and arsonists.

It's not easy being a witch, particularly on Halloween.

But Lady Sinstana, unofficial "witch queen" of the Brotherhood and Sisterhood of Wicca in Atlanta, takes time to sit by the crackling fire, sip a little wine and talk about the holiday most frequently associated with her craft.

There will be much singing and dancing around the cauldron at the House of Ravenwood on Moreland Avenue Monday night. For the witches there plan to combine the holiday with their annual initiation of new members into the Wiccan ways.

The witches will lay to rest the "great mother" of earthly gifts and pay homage to the coming of the "land of death."

But that is about as close as the witches of Ravenwood will get to matters of ghosts and goblins.

Lady Sinstana contends they are good witches, devoted to the "old religion" of paganism rather than black magic and devil worship.

Indeed, All Hallows' Eve, as Halloween was called in medieval times, had its origin as a Celtic festival called Samhain, one of the ancient five festivals in a kind of seasonal new year in recognition of harvested crops and the coming of winter.

According to Lady Sinstana, a 46-year-old granddaughter of a Baptist minister, the word witch was derived from the Gaelic word "Wicha," meaning wise.

Wise or not, witches fell into considerable disfavor over the centuries, and the witches of Ravenwood have had their detractors since arriving here just over a year ago.

Lady Sinstana says their house has been attacked by rock throwers and even set upon by modern-day witch burners toting gasoline cans.

"It's pretty bad when you wake up and see smoke coming in your window, especially when you have a 4-year-old grandchild sleeping in the next room," she says.

Hence Monday night's ceremony will be a carefully guarded affair.

On this eve of the Christian All Saints' Day, the witches will observe their own version of Halloween.

Lady Sinstana insists that many of the trappings associated with fortune-telling and spell-casting actually are religious symbols, a point the witches argued successfully in court after Lady Sinstana was carted off to jail on a charge of operating a business without a license last year.

The bubbling black pot, the Cauldron of Ceridwen, represents the earth from which all things come, says Lady Sinstana, explaining that Wicca witches are actually environment worshippers.

The long black robes they wear, she said, are symbols of silence. They wear black hoods instead of pointed hats, but Lady Sinstana says the hats had religious significance, standing for "the cone of power."

During their Hallowmas, Balefire, with nine symbolic woods, will burn. Candles, which the witches make, will also be lit, representing the archangels, according to Lady Sinstana.

If it all sounds a bit like a Roman Catholic Mass, Lady Sinstana says that's because witchcraft and Christianity coexisted peacefully for a long time and that Christianity took over some of the witches' symbols.

In the heart of the Bible Belt, that is not a very popular observation, Lady Sinstana concedes.

Which is one reason for their recent trouble, believes Lord Senhior, a burly blond witch who keeps a regular vigil over the Ravenwood household.



LADY SINSTANA IS UNOFFICIAL 'QUEEN' OF THE WICCA WITCHES HERE
She Says They Are Good Witches, Devoted to Paganism, Not Black Magic

Staff Photo—Charles Fugh