

# Rainbow Family of Living Light

Three articles by A. Allen Butcher:

- Rainbow 2002 - Annual Multi-Faith Gathering in the Wilderness
  - Review of *People of the Rainbow: A Nomadic Utopia*
  - Benefits of Rainbow Gatherings

Lodge Circle,  
Wyoming, 1994



All photos except those of the Jerusalem Camp are by Allen Butcher

## Rainbow 2002 - Annual Multi-Faith Gathering in the Wilderness

A. Allen Butcher, Denver, Colorado, July 2002

July 2nd, Watersmeet, Ottawa National Forest,  
Upper Peninsula, Michigan.

It was overcast when we pulled into town and it had already been raining, yet it was warm and the rain was welcome as it meant that there'd no longer be concern for forest fire in this region of pine, birch and other mixed woodland.

When arriving in the locality of a Rainbow Gathering site I always check out the scene in town as a way to learn a little about how the Gathering is developing. At the store there was a constant line of Rainbow folk at the checkout counter, and apparently a Rainbow Family volunteer sitting with the cashier to help with any concerns the establishment might have with its influx of somewhat anti-establishment clientele. That is a good sign of a pro-active Shanti Scena or Rainbow peace-keeping crew.

Outside I asked around about conditions at the Gathering site. As usual the Forest Service was running interference while the Family was asserting its First Amendment right to peaceably assemble on Federal land without signing a Forest Service permit. I heard that earlier the Forest Service had torn down some collective kitchen shelters, confiscated personal tents and belongings, given out tickets and fines, and made several arrests. On the Internet I'd read that since the topsoil in the area was shallow with a clay subsoil, the water table was near the surface and there were no springs to tap for the usual Rainbow water system piping potable water to the major kitchens. So water had to be trucked in or filtered from the river. At the store I heard that the Forest Service had set up roadblocks, dumping some water deliveries on the ground.

With this initial information on conditions at the

Gathering we made some purchases at the store and headed on in to the Gathering site, as lightning lit the sky and rain poured down.

Unlike Gathering sites in the West, there were no large meadows in this area, either for the Gathering itself or for parking. Consequently, for maybe a mile in either direction from the trail head into the Gathering there were cars parked along each side of the road. For buses and motor homes there was a Bus Village, but it wasn't as large as usual. The further east the Gathering are held the smaller they are. I later heard an estimate that there were less than 20,000 people on July 4th at the Gathering this year, while last year in Idaho there were around 25,000 camped and as many as 40,000 to 50,000 at the highpoint on the 4th.

By the time we parked the rain had stopped. My daughter and I and our rider saddled up with our backpacks and hiked in the mile or less. The Gathering this year was spread out along one

long Main Path. Usually the design includes one central Main Meadow with trails and camps radiating out in all directions, based on the Native American Medicine Wheel design. At this site the Main Meadow was planned to be just across a large stream/ small river over which the Family had built a sturdy bridge of logs lashed together, with clay for the road bed. However, the Forest Service had run the 2,000 or so people off the "West Bank," preventing any camps west of the river, constraining the Gathering to the east side, resulting in a compact-linear rather than the preferred spread-out circular Gathering land use design.

As I present workshops on intentional community at Rainbow Gatherings I camp near the Information Center, which is always on the Main Path. I construct a small pavilion with three blue tarps for a roof, and about 18 large laminated, colorful posters presenting

information about community, strung between the eight pavilion posts. Locating this near the Main Path draws many people to read the posters, presenting information on phases of community development, definitions of terms, historical timelines, a political-economic comparative model, legal structures, values to teach children, the "darkside" of dis-utopias, and much more. I also set up a small tent to keep brochures and fliers on community for people to pick up safe from wind and rain, and I offer the facilities for other's use, complete with a laminated "white board" for people to schedule their events in the pavilion.

When we located the Information Center we walked around looking for good tent sites, set up, then

realized that we were closest to the Turtle Soup Kitchen, which was the name the Michigan Family traditionally uses. This being their home state, theirs was a large, well organized kitchen and camp. By chance we met a Michigan friend in camp, and found that our tent sites were very close. Such a coincidence! Between Turtle Soup and the Main Path



High Noon, Main Circle Peace Pole, July 4th, Missouri, 1996

was the Jesus Camp, evidently comprised of people from many different Christian denominations and non-denominational groups. I wondered if there were also Catholics or only Protestants at Jesus Camp, but never stopped to ask.

As we pitched our tents it looked as though the sun was coming out and the sky was clearing, but as we headed back out to the parking area to bring in the workshop pavilion and materials and our food the rain started again. It was a warm, pleasant rain, but now the path was muddy clay, with people walking to-and-fro in the dark with flashlights, with campfires and drumming circles on either side of the trail. The walk in the warm evening rain was just another Rainbow experience, wet and muddy but with lots of smiles and friendly greetings of "Welcome Home."

The next morning was hot and sunny, and I spent the

day cutting dead standing birch trees for the pavilion, dragging them out of the woods, digging post holes in the moist earth, lashing bracing and suspending tarps and posters. At one point a group of five or six clean-cut, middle-eastern-looking young men came up to me asking in a foreign accent where to find the Jerusalem Camp. I pointed to the Info Center and suggested checking the map as I hadn't yet explored the Gathering. They seemed out-of-place but I didn't think any more about them. Another time a woman introducing herself as Sasha, who also seemed to have a slight middle-eastern accent, explained that yesterday she'd led a belly-dancing workshop on this site and asked could she use the pavilion for another workshop this evening since it was so hot in the sun? Gee, that was a tough call to make.... "Sure!" said I, "I'd be happy to share. Just sign up on the schedule."

By mid afternoon my rider friend and others who had stopped to help, because that's the Rainbow thing to do, and I finished the pavilion, and I took off to explore further along the trail to the river. There were hundreds of people enjoying the sun on the gravel and grassy beach, drumming

around a fire pit, and swimming in the river. After working in the sun most of the day the river was wonderful! Overlooking this scene of enjoyment of simple pleasures was a small group of mounted Forest Service officers high on the West Bank.

When I returned to the workshop pavilion the belly-dancing workshop was underway. I sat down to fold brochures to be handed out and noted that a couple men had joined the workshop, making serious attempts to learn dance moves designed for the lower torso of the human female body. This reflected a wonderful aspect of the Gatherings. Basically, everyone is free to do anything they want, even to walking into any camp and joining any group, as long as it doesn't infringe upon other's freedoms. When there are exclusive groups, like women-only events, this need only be stated for others to respect the

desires of the group.

That evening after supper was served by all the kitchens bringing buckets and coolers filled with hot food to the high meadow on the West Bank, now deserted by the mounted Forest Service officers, I went to sleep early in my tent. Although the drum circles beckoned with their driving rhythms, I was too exhausted and sun-burnt to party all night.

The 4th of July is the high-point of the Gathering. Although from July 1st until the 7th is considered to be a time of celebration, the morning of the 4th is reserved for a spiritual observance. Silence is maintained through out the Gathering (except in Kid

Village) with the West Bank Main Meadow becoming the Meditation Meadow, with people silently gathering to meditate upon and pray for world peace and healing for the Earth. Meanwhile, in Kid Village a parade is assembling after breakfast, with costumes and face paint and everything



High Noon, Main Circle Peace Pole, July 4th, Missouri, 1996

bright and beautiful! When this parade reached the West Bank Meditation Meadow, the thousands of people began to chant the "om" as one sound, rising and falling, for a sustained period, until cheers broke out, first in one part of the throng, then spontaneously beginning the celebration! Drumming, dancing, sharing fruit and hugs, it's a wonderful, colorful event of music and smiles, flags, juggling and soap bubbles, and everything fun! And overlooking all of this were two groups of Forest Service officers mounted on horses and all terrain vehicles (ATVs).

With their digital video cameras running we took pictures of the Forest Service officers in return. At one point a group of people with guitars and drums, including Diego and others of the Rainbow Gypsies, went up to the line of mounted officers and serenaded them, singing about the beautiful rainbow of peace

and the beautiful horses and the beautiful day. Others offered the officers watermelon and petted their horses. Eventually the stone-faced ones had enough Rainbow love directed their way and turned their horses to walk around to another vantage point.

Six hours I spent that afternoon drumming in the sun with a Rainbow Family party of thousands. Several times during the day a rainbow halo appeared around the sun, greeted with cheers by the revelers. When I left the West Bank Meadow I found other parties and food at several different kitchen camps, and at one point I passed a group of men by the path conversing in what sounded like a middle-eastern language with those guttural sounds.

As there are many foreign nationals at Gatherings I thought nothing more of this at the time.

That evening supper was held in a meadow near the Info Center, with another circle of thousands holding hands and oming and cheering. We sat down in the tall grass in two concentric circles facing each other while the food servers walked down the middle and the solicitors for contributions to the Magic

Hat also circulated. The Magic Hat funds would be used to buy more food and other needed items, like water. Two things I noticed was first a woman walking around the circle giving a quiet blessing at ten foot intervals or so over the people as they ate, motioning the Catholic sign of the cross at each stop. The second thing I noticed was all the black dragonflies. Evidently they had just hatched in large numbers and were zooming around deftly avoiding people while eating every mosquito in the field, providing for us humans a pleasant supper in the tall grass, undisturbed by the insects with which we shared the meadow. Blessed be the dragon flies.

After supper I met with a friend who knew about an event planned to take place at the Indigenous Elders' Camp. By dark we arrived at a clearing that had been

can creation ritual called the Medicine Wheel Dance.

A group of two to three hundred people listened while a couple different people explained how last year in Idaho a Native American elder who attended the Gathering had a vision of the Rainbow Family as a new tribal nation. This was certainly nothing new as people have been having such visions since the first Rainbow Gathering 30 years before in 1972. Yet this person was part of a network of Native American tribal elders that travels around to various tribes to help them with rediscovering and reclaiming and renewing their tribal traditions and culture. It was never said what tribes the Elders present were from

nor what language was used for the prayer offered. Nor was it explained which culture the Medicine Wheel Dance was from, but it began with our filing out into the clearing clockwise around the path that had been made in a circle, then along the two lines bisecting the circle and marking the four directions. In the center was a fire pit, which was also encircled by a group of people.



Sufi Dancing, New Mexico, 1995

The goal of performing this Medicine Wheel Dance was to help the Rainbow Family to continue to build its own tradition of ritual. We were told that we were welcome to borrow from Native American Traditions what ever fit us, modifying what we find to meet our own unique history and culture. The Elders explained that this is how it is in the Native Nations, that they seek to remember and honor the old while making appropriate changes in their contemporary ceremonies. The Elders said that we were already close to Native American ways with our concern for ecological and social responsibility, yet that they noted areas for improvement being giving a stronger voice to women in the Family and to our own elders in our Rainbow Council meetings.

A core group of people had already practiced this

ceremony the evening before, and they were to begin a group to carry on the effort to develop rituals and events for the larger Gathering and the Rainbow Nation as a whole through the future. We may expect that in future years we'll see adaptations of Native American ritual and ceremony during the 4th of July Main Meadow event involving thousands of people! We'll probably also see other ceremonies at other times during the National and at Regional Gatherings.

For this evening our rendition of the Medicine Wheel Creation Ceremony Dance involved the outer circle moving in unison as though they were pulling something out of the earth, as pulling a rope with both hands up from left to right, as they took a step to the right, counter-clockwise. The people on the four lines signifying the four directions, and those in the center circle around the fire, raised both hands in unison in front of them, palms down, toward the sky, all facing one direction, then made a quarter turn counter-clockwise and raised their hands again, then made another quarter turn and so on. At the same time all two to

three hundred of us chanted a simple four-part chant, sustaining the movement and chant for some time, accompanied by drummers in two of the pie slices of the Medicine Wheel. The resulting configuration of people was like a peace sign but with the additions of the horizontal line and the center circle.

The symbolism of the Medicine Wheel Dance is rich with meaning. A few of the ideas that I understand are that the substance of our lives comes from the earth, and as a people we actively pull that substance into our being as we grow food out of the earth and extract from it minerals and water and everything we use. At the same time we also share the consciousness of the heavens and as a people we send our thoughts and prayers to the spiritual force of the universe. The circles represent all the cycles of birth and death, and

the drum is the earth itself while its music is the heartbeat of life. Our chant is the knowing and acknowledgement of both our place in the space and time of human society, and in the omnipresence and timelessness of spiritual awareness.

July 5th, 2002 was a day of workshops on intentional community. I started in the morning offering coffee made on a backpacking stove to those who came to the workshop pavilion. I spent about seven hours talking with about fifty people in all. There were people from various communities including the Federation of Egalitarian Communities who helped with presentations, others starting to build community, and others seeking or just interested in community. We talked about interpersonal process and

decision-making in community, the types of communities and finding information about them, visiting community, our experiences in community, theory values and history of intentional community, legal structures, property codes and labor systems, children in community,



Kid Village, 1995, New Mexico

women in community and more. By late afternoon I had collected many new contacts and renewed some old contacts, and had gained a few new insights on community and how to better present the topic in the future. Almost all of my 500 brochures had been picked up by this time. Being talked out it was time to wander, exploring more of the Gathering I hadn't yet seen.

I knew a friend working at CALM, or Center for A Living Medicine, which is the Gathering's health care and emergency center, so I headed in that direction. It was nearly dark when I arrived and as I started looking around for my friend I gradually became aware of a sound, as one gradually notices the white noise of a window fan or a refrigerator when one steps into a room. Of course there are constant sounds

at Rainbow Gatherings. Even during the July 4th morning silence there are bird songs and wind in the trees. At nearly all other times there are drum circles and voices and dogs barking and wood chopping near and far, but this sound was different, definitely not like the drums I could also hear. I knew the sound of drums well, and could find my way in the dark to a drum circle! Yet among all the familiar sounds I could faintly distinguish something else. The sound was actually reminiscent of waves on the shore. I had to find out what it was!

I turned in the general direction of the sound and listened, then began to walk toward it. The path in the direction of the sound was surprisingly wide and obviously well traveled, and now I could tell what was the sound. It was chanting! It was a kind of

vigorous, whole-hearted chanting that I had never before heard at a Rainbow Gathering! I hurried along the path, passing a couple people as it wound along, and I hoped I'd arrive before the chanting ended. Too late. There were about a hundred people in the camp, many ordinary Rainbow people (if Rainbows are ordinary), but also many

other people, most of them dressed in white. I saw a friend and asked what I'd missed and learned that there'd been dancing along with the chanting. Now a couple men with long white beards and white robes and head coverings in the middle of the throng were explaining that what they'd presented was an ancient ritual. They thanked people for their participation and welcomed us to share with them the food their camp had prepared. They also invited anyone interested to pray with them in the separate prayer tent, designed like and about the size of two horse stalls, each with pictures at the end facing the entrance. The men faced the pictures of the Holy Land in one stall and the women in the other while they all read in a chanting manner from small books. I had discovered the Jerusalem Camp.



Jerusalem Camp, 2002, Upper Michigan

This was definitely something new at Rainbow. I walked around a little and sat down near a couple dressed in white and introduced myself and began asking questions. They were from San Diego and explained that about four years ago this Jewish camp had started at Rainbow (I hadn't attended a Gathering in four years). They explained that the ritual I'd just missed marked the eve of their Sabbath kept the next day (Saturday), and that there was another at the end of the Sabbath. The men leading the ritual and dressed in white robes were obviously rabbis, but I didn't ask about their actual rank. There were also men wearing solid black with black hats and their curious hair styles, evidently of some orthodox Jewish tradition. Also, among those in the prayer stalls most of the women and men had some kind of head covering, yet others probably of some reformed

Jewish tradition were in street clothes with no head covering. I thanked my new acquaintances and explained that I had to go since I planned to leave the Gathering the next morning. We shared hugs and they expressed regret that after having just met I was departing so soon. I would have liked to have stayed longer with

such open and friendly people.

Someone or group put a lot of coordination into the Jerusalem Camp. Evidently someone fairly high up in their hierarchy decided that it would be a good thing to have a Jewish presence at Rainbow Gatherings, and must have put the word out to Jewish organizations nationwide and among all their traditions to travel to the Gathering. I wondered about the reasoning for that. These were not just Jewish hippies, they were from all levels of Jewish culture, and they were obviously not there simply to have a campout in the wilderness, they were there to share their culture with non-Jews, and perhaps to partake in turn of other cultures and spiritual traditions, however unlikely that might be.

When I first began attending Rainbow Gatherings in the late '70s the largest groups of people attending were from communal societies like The Love Family and I think the Hog Farm and The Farm. The Rainbow was thought of as a "Gathering of Tribes," these being New Age "tribes," gathering for a spiritual observance. Today the earlier communal groups are no longer communal, and those that are still communal are much smaller. The largest groups now making camps at Gatherings, besides the various regional Rainbow Families, are the camps comprised of people of specific religions. These are the Christians at the Jesus Camp and the Jews at the Jerusalem Camp, and of course the Hindus at the Hara Krishna Camp who have come for years with small groups of people yet with food enough to feed thousands, and the various other Yoga camps scattered around the Gatherings. The only Islamic-related presence I've seen has been the very common Sufi Dance events. There have also been Pagan/Wiccan camps at some Gatherings, and there must have been some this year but I didn't notice them. And of course there is the Native American spirituality presence noted earlier.



Rainbow Havdalah, Jerusalem Camp, 2002, Upper Michigan

This gradual increase in emphasis of spirituality at Rainbow Gatherings is surprising. Of course it is exactly what was always wanted, since the Gatherings were always billed as spiritual observances in the "cathedral of nature," yet the fact that this is exactly what is successfully attracting people remains astonishing. Perhaps it is the multi-faith nature of the event, where every spiritual tradition is welcome, that encourages the participation of many different spiritual and religious groups. Being able to freely practice and proselytize must be as attractive to groups as is the freedom enjoyed by individuals open to learning about different traditions to enter any camp and ask about their religion.

Of course the vast majority of people attending Rainbow Gatherings are young adults out to party, most of whom are oblivious to any of the spiritual

events going on around them. Yet those spiritual traditions are available, forming another kind of market place somewhat like the Trading Circle where people endlessly barter one thing for another. In the spiritual market place of the Gatherings people share their beliefs, learning about different traditions and in some cases actually giving and receiving ideas, concepts and practices. One is left wondering how unfortunate it is that so few people see this happening. As far as the Forest Service and the press is concerned, there is nothing redeeming about the Rainbow Gatherings.

I left the Jerusalem Camp and resumed my search for my friend at CALM. I found her sitting in a small circle around a fire, with her wireless phone and short wave radio keeping her in touch with people all

around the Gathering. Runeje (if I spelled her name correctly) was the main Focalizer or coordinator at CALM this year, and so was the center of communication for the CALM collective, and thus their primary contact person for the Gathering's Council. She explained that she'd been working 17 hour

days, dealing with everything from supplies to medical emergencies to public relations concerns at the local town meetings to negotiating with the local hospital and state health agencies.

Water was a particular problem this year as I'd learned even before I'd arrived. With the Forest Service dumping water deliveries early on people had become very concerned about the safety of the Gathering's water supply. People were afraid that their children would get sick if a potable water supply could not be assured. The Family was considering suing the Forest Service for dumping their water deliveries as denying water to people is against certain human rights code.

Runeje explained that she had attended the special

local town council meeting that had been set up for the Family and the Forest Service to speak to townspeople. As usual the Forest Service had spread all kinds of disinformation about the Rainbow Gathering, trying to instill fear and mistrust of the Family among the locals. As a result CALM had a difficult time getting basic working arrangements with the local hospital.

Malcolm Jowles, the Incident Commander usually sent to head the Forest Service's Incident Response Team for Rainbow Gatherings, had used the existence of an old town site on the Gathering sites' "West Bank" to claim that the Family would destroy this "archeological site," and to justify the police action that ran people off the West Bank. Presumably the Forest Service's oppressive tactics toward the Family is due to the Family's refusal to sign Forest Service permits.

Permits as a point of contention between the Forest Service and the Family is important to understand since it is this issue that connects the Gatherings to other popular struggles around the world. As with the trend toward privatization of many governmental services, the Forest Service has given up the management of most national forests and monuments to private companies as "concessions." With the "Fee Demo" program the Forest Service now has a pilot program requiring in some areas and situations that people pay a fee to enter and use national forests. The Rainbow Family and many other organizations mobilizing to resist the Fee Demo program realize that the ultimate goal is to permit the concession holding private companies to charge use fees. What was considered to be our national heritage, to be freely enjoyed by every American citizen, is now planned to become another commodity controlled by corporate interests. Similar efforts exist to privatize public water systems, which has been cause

for riots in third world countries where such privatization has already happened, and in some cases reversed.

For years the Rainbow Family has been on the front line of resistance against the Forest Service's permit requirement, which is the first step toward charging fees and eventual privatization. And it is at the Ocala Regional Gatherings in the Ocala National Forest in Florida that the battles have been the most fierce, with governmental repression recently being severe enough that individuals have signed permits to avoid heavy fines and jail terms. Yet the Family stands by its First Amendment right to freely assemble peacefully on National Forest lands.



Rainbow Sisters, Jerusalem Camp, 2002, Upper Michigan

Runeje explained that this year Malcolm had invited the Family to a meeting to discuss the "archeological site" issue. Of course the Family explained that it could easily cordon off the sensitive area, in response to the Forest Service's concern, but while the negotiations were taking place Malcolm's men were raiding the West Bank camps. Forest Service officers were tearing down the collective kitchens and confiscating personal tents and packs. Rainbow men who tried to intercede were

assaulted, as the officers tried to get the men to fight so that they could arrest them. They wouldn't touch the Rainbow women however who tried to keep them apart. The officers essentially tried to incite a riot, pushing people around with their horses and ATVs. Of the 2,000 or so people that had earlier been camped on the West Bank, all were removed and 15 were arrested and fined. Its unclear to me whether their fines were \$1,000 or \$100, and whether or not the confiscated tents and packs were returned.

At the town council meeting Malcolm Jowles presented the archeological site as a "critical" area that had to be protected from the Rainbows. Runeje said



that she asked Malcolm to define “critical” and when he couldn’t offer one he abruptly ended the meeting. Whereupon the local school principal loudly complained to Malcolm that he’d promised to answer all of their questions, leading other townspeople to roundly criticize the Forest Service, saying that if they’d dump someone’s water deliveries how could they trust the Forest Service to care about their rights? Evidently the townspeople had other issues with the Forest Service and the meeting degenerated from that point with regard to the local’s respect for the Forest Service.

The Forest Service’s Incident Response Command Centers for Rainbow Gatherings typically try to arrange funding for their police actions from as many state and local sources as possible, often spending more than a million dollars. This year, however, someone complained to the Michigan Governor about the roadblocks and the denial of water deliveries by the Forest Service, and the Governor decided to not grant the Incident Response Command any state funds. It is unclear whether this

conservative Republican governor actually took to heart the Family’s right to peacefully assemble in the state of Michigan, or whether he was simply trying to protect his state treasury from withdrawals by a Federal agency. In any event, after the initial West Bank police action, the Forest Service couldn’t muster enough personnel to do anything more than simply observe from horseback the activities of the Rainbow Family of Living Light.

The next morning was July 6th, the day of the Rainbow Pageant, where groups traditionally form a parade through the Gathering, ending in a meadow where presentations of various kinds are made. I had

to dismantle the workshop pavilion I’d built and backpack out of the Gathering that morning, yet I can guess that this year’s Pageant must have included some of the various religious groups as well as probably some of the regional camps and other groups. I wonder what if anything was presented regarding the mission of the Indigenous Elder’s Camp, and what else I might have missed. July 7th is the day of the Vision Council where discussions are held about where the next Annual Rainbow Family Gathering of the Tribes will happen. I’ll find out what was decided eventually.

From July 8th on people would be cleaning up the camps, “naturalizing” the area, removing everything not natural to the Gathering site and scattering the

poles used for shelters and the bridge, and the stones used for the fire rings and ovens. Grass seed would be planted and attempts made to aerate the packed soil of the paths. In a year’s time it will be very difficult to find any



Kid’s Parade to the Main Meadow to break the meditation, 2005, WV a

trace of the 2002 Rainbow Gathering. All the joys and discoveries, all the music and dancing will be memories, waiting to be experienced again in a new setting in yet another beautiful wild land.

## People of the Rainbow: A Nomadic Utopia

Michael I. Niman, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1997  
ISBN 0-87049-988-2 Reviewed by A. Allen Butcher, 1999

The Rainbow Gatherings represent an expression of two primary goals or ideals that are characteristic of many utopian societies. The first is the desire of diverse yet like-minded people to celebrate their unity. The second is the community's demonstration to the larger world of the positive values held by the society; of individual responsibility for self, society and nature through caring, sharing and nurturing. Although these goals and ideals are not unique to the Rainbow Family, what is most valuable about their expression in the Gatherings is that they have fostered a set of practical systems and processes that has enabled the Rainbow tradition to survive more than twenty-five years, and to spread around the world. It is this continuity and growth that earns for the Family the distinction of being a successful utopian society. Explaining how this success has come to be is the value of the work by Michael Niman: *People of the Rainbow: A Nomadic Utopia*.

The Rainbow Family is a fascinating amalgam of people of different social, political, spiritual, cultural and economic back grounds, all finding the point of commonality or agreement that makes it possible for otherwise conflicting world-views to co-exist for short term, yet periodic celebrations of unity. As such, participating in a Rainbow Gathering is a wonderful experience of the incredible potential of the human imagination to create and evolve new forms of being together. What is working for the Rainbow Family is the primitive, tribal ethos of mutual aid practiced in locations as disparate as the wild beauty of the American National forests, and the cultural wilderness of American suburbia, involving a range of people from those who are most disenfranchised by modern society to those who are successfully enjoying the benefits of a highly mobile, technological culture. Michael Niman points out the inherent contradictions in such an organization, and how the Family has worked to resolve them, including the dynamic of planned dissolution and reformation in a new setting with a different set of people and circumstances. One of many insights that Niman presents in this book is that the Rainbow Family is unlikely to ever "fail," the worst it can do is have a bad Gathering.

Rainbow Gatherings can be as small as a few people meeting in a living room, often called a "Local Council," to the estimated record of twenty-five to thirty thousand people in California for the Annual Gathering in 1984. 1997 was the twenty-fifth year of Rainbow Gatherings, and they are now happening in various countries around the world, to where as Niman claims, somewhere there is always a Rainbow Gathering in progress.

The Rainbow Family is a great story, and finally we have a great telling of it, by someone who has been a participant since at least 1986, as implied in the author's preface. Niman provides the best collection of information about the Rainbow Family currently available. He points out all of the basics of Family structure, history and beliefs, including the point that anyone can consider themselves a Rainbow Family member simply through their participation. One of the most helpful aspects of Niman's writing about the Rainbow Family is his efforts to explain the nature of the Family's organization. Throughout the book the author refers to other utopian societies, quoting many of the better known utopian researchers and scholars. The author compares and contrasts elements of Rainbow Gathering structure and Rainbow Family beliefs and ideals with those of groups as diverse as the Hutterites and Twin Oaks Community, with a particular comparative emphasis upon The Farm. He also notes, however, that the Rainbow Family is in a different class than the historical and contemporary intentional communities to which he compares them. He notes that the family is more similar to nomadic traditions such as gypsies, and notes a curious correlation with Alcoholics Anonymous, focusing on their similarity in the dynamic of the periodic dissolution and reforming of a mutual-aid society. Michael Niman suggests that the anarchist theorist Hakim Bey has the best working concept through which to explain the Family. The form of intentional community which the Rainbow Family represents is best described by Bey's theory of the temporary autonomous zone (TAZ), where the community forms for a time, then dissolves into the larger society (called "Babylon" by Rainbows), only to temporarily reform at another place and time.

Niman points out that because of its continual reforming and dissolving, the Rainbow Family can have a significant impact upon the larger society, as members express their communitarian values through other aspects of their lives. The trends toward alternative medicine, whole foods, non-violent conflict resolution and mediation, homeschooling and charter schools, community supported agriculture, and various social movements toward forms of intentional community, such as cohousing, ecovillages and communal community, and many other social innovations, are all supported by Rainbow members. This can be verified by reading the listings in the Rainbow Guide, a directory of participants including self-descriptions, occupations and interests, a sampling of which is included in Niman's appendices.

A range of material about the Rainbow Family is presented in the appendices, including samples of Rainbow orientation materials and statements, a list of all of the Annual Gathering locations, a glossary of Rainbow terms, extensive notes and references and an index.

Twenty-four photographs from various Gatherings around the country are also included, giving a wonderful view of many aspects of Rainbow Gatherings. The one thing lacking is any address through which to seek current information about Gatherings. Other than writing to the publisher, there is only reference to information available on the World Wide Web, buried in the 215 pages of text.

Michael Niman's relation of the Rainbow story begins with a chapter on a typical day-in-the-life of a typical long term, Rainbow Family member. The events of the character's day are assembled from a number of different experiences the author has had or learned of at different Gatherings. I found most of

these experiences to be believable, except some of those in reference to human-bear interactions. Although this literary convention serves well to present many aspects of the Gathering experience, I feel that expanding this narration to cover more of a progression of events involved in attending a Rainbow Gathering would have presented a more complete perspective for readers unfamiliar with the experience.

As a long term Rainbow Family participant and member, I felt that the author, in his day-at-the-Gathering presentation, did succeed in his intention, as expressed in the preface, "to bring life to (the Gathering's) sights, sounds and smells." Yet stretching that narrative to include the whole Gathering experience from set-up with the "Seed Camp" to

clean-up, would have provided a feeling for the emotional experience of the Gatherings as well.

Joining with a small group of a few hundred "brothers and sisters," and seeing your Family



Barter Lane, 1995, New Mexico

grow to thousands, all bringing skills, activities and supplies to share, is very energizing. Gathering again with many of the same people year after year builds many cherished friendships, annually renewed. Then, just exploring the entire Gathering site results in many wonderful experiences and life-long memories, a sentiment that Niman does capture in his day-in-the-life chapter. Yet in his telling the reader does not feel the magically enheartening experience of the guitar circle of a hundred people singing around the Aloha Camp fire until dawn, nor the sometimes fantastically uninhibiting drumming and ecstatic dancing after midnight at the Main Circle. The author could have continued the chronology with a presentation of the thoughts and feelings engendered by the morning-

long quiet on the 4th of July, observed by the entire Gathering. Whether the individual's focus is deeply introspective or expansively inclusive, this time of meditation is an important personal and group event at the Gatherings that the author only glancingly mentions. The experience of a thousand people meditating for world peace in the breezy sunlight of the Main Meadow, while thousands more Rainbows form a giant circle of sometimes a mile in circumference around you, engenders a powerful sense of unity and purposefulness. Then the Children's Parade at noon to the Main Meadow reminds us of why we consider ourselves a Family. The silence is broken with a great shout of welcome, of praise and of joy in the life we share, raising and releasing the energy and beginning the celebration depicted in the full-color photo on the book's cover.

Although Niman mentions them in various chapters, and covers some of them in depth, he could have put into better context the events of the seven-day celebration the first week of July, including the "Hipstory" or Rainbow oral history, the Rainbow Pageant comprising the various groups in attendance marching through the Gathering, the Rainbow Gypsies' and other groups' evening skits and plays, and the Vision Council process of setting next year's Gathering location. Then the long dwindling in numbers, the many good-byes, the clean up, and the loving "naturalization" or removal of all signs of human presence that nature could not quickly erase on its own. Too often people writing about the Rainbow Gatherings fail to capture the full richness of this powerful experience. The days or weeks spent discovering and savoring these aspects of communitarian life at the Gatherings probably explains better than anything else why it is that the North American Annual Rainbow Gatherings inspire people to organize local Rainbow Gatherings, and how it is that the Family is continually brought back, year after year, to recreate this nomadic utopia.

Although Michael Niman's writing fails to engender as complete an understanding of or feeling for the Gatherings as would be possible, it does serve to present many essential and quite fascinating details about the Rainbow Gatherings and the Family; covering various topics, one chapter at a time. Some important insights into the Gatherings that the author provides are in the second chapter, covering the roots of the Rainbow tradition, explained as being among activists in the countercultural, ecological, spiritual

and peace movements, along with Vietnam War veterans. The latter contributed the designs for much of the Gathering's infrastructure, such as medical units, field kitchens and latrines.

Other chapters cover Rainbow Council consensus government, culture and communications. Niman's presentation of the importance of "Heart Songs" to Rainbow culture is essential to the understanding of the Family. Rainbow Council's are more than decision-making bodies, as they provide forums for the "personal passions and poetics of individual participants" (p. 40), they provide a therapeutic effect and a healing space for members of the tribe, a feature common to traditional societies, but lost by Western civilization. When people "speak from the heart" about their concerns, fears and joys, a sense of empathic caring is engendered among all, and commitment to the group is nurtured. As Niman writes, "People talk as if Council decisions are divinely inspired; in any case, some magic is necessary for hundreds of people to be of one mind." (p. 44)

The "Violence and Peace" chapter includes a number of insights into the "A Camp" problem of anarchist alcoholics who routinely misrepresent their solicitations for donations. Niman doesn't explain, but the best response to these solicitations is to state in a friendly but firm manner that you only give donations to the "Main Circle Magic Hat," and continue on your way. A Camp usually sets up near the parking area and trail head into the Gathering, so most people have to pass through them. Niman explains that A Campers benefit the Gatherings by being on the front lines when locals or authorities come to harass the Gatherings, and they provide a means of absorbing local bikers and party seekers who arrive with cases or kegs of beer, which is unwelcome in the Gathering proper. Niman continues to say that A Camp represents both the worst of the larger society and of Rainbow culture, but can be seen as a half-way camp for many who are new to or distrust the concept of non-violence and of spiritual reverence. It is partly due to A Camp violence that the Family can claim that all people really are welcome at Gatherings. If the violence is too disruptive, either from outside or within, the Family can always disperse and regroup elsewhere at another time. Niman also presents an excellent discussion of the Family's concept and practice of a non-violent security system, called "Shanti Sena." Effectively, all Family members are

responsible for keeping the peace, and problems are met by everyone in the area stopping what they are doing and confronting the perpetrators to talk out a compromise or resolution, regardless of how long it takes. Major issues are taken to the whole Family Council, which takes place every afternoon involving thousands of people, as it happens just before the supper circle.

Other insights into the Family are found in the chapter called “Fakelore,” covering Rainbow spirituality. Gatherings are considered to be spiritual affairs held in the “cathedral of nature,” and there are many religions represented: Eastern, Western and Native American. It is a general romanticism with the latter, however, that is most evident at Rainbow Gatherings, sometimes to the point of appropriating aspects of Native American culture. Michael Niman presents the negative aspects of this ethnocide, and alternatively the positive aspects of learning from traditional cultures, as well as the fact that Rainbow culture in its own right is similar to that of native cultures. He also explains the origins of the “Warriors of the Rainbow,” and other new age myths about Native American prophecies and spirituality that are often found at Rainbow Gatherings.

The following chapters on media representation of the Rainbow Family, relations with locals and relations with the government, all cover both positive and negative aspects. For example, although drug use is open and common at Gatherings, the Family also supports successful drug, alcohol and tobacco detoxification and rehabilitation programs. The media, of course, has a fascination with use of these substances at Gatherings, but virtually never reports on the cessation support efforts. On the topic of local relations, Niman includes a short discussion of the potential for positive or for negative interactions with

the growing right wing rural militias, the turf of which a future Gathering could unknowingly invade. Niman does not mention it, except to show a picture of the Rainbow bucket brigade set up to fight it, but the forest fire at the 1994 Gathering in Wyoming was only the largest of several of suspicious nature.

Relations with the Forest Service have also been both positive and negative. Some government personnel are very supportive, while others like the notorious Special Agent Billy Ball are openly hostile, and seem to see only the anti-establishment Rainbow values. Niman relates that after a site was chosen for the 1988 Gathering in Texas, a Forest Service work crew actually bull-dozed a road into the proposed site, destroying trees, bringing in electricity and building a concrete structure. The Gathering had to be re-

located. Niman also relates that at the North Carolina Gathering in 1987, the Forest Service harassed the clean up crew so much that they left the job unfinished. The Forest Service subsequently included the abandoned trash in their defaming video, used as misinformation at later Gatherings. Police road blocks of access routes to the Gathering sites routinely

result in more locals getting tickets than Rainbows, and subsequent local complaints about police harassment and the public expense of the excessive law enforcement presence. Niman notes that Forest Service attempts to write regulations designed to prevent Rainbow Gatherings, thus far successfully challenged by the Family in court, serve more to unite the Family and earn popular sympathy than to have any serious negative impact upon the Gatherings.

When together, the Family provides a media spectacle, as we often constitute one of the largest settlements in the states in which we gather: third largest in Vermont in 1991, sixth largest in Wyoming in 1994. Although many attending Gatherings are destitute,



Bus Village, 1994, Wyoming

being street people and others living at subsistence level, many more fly in and rent cars, arriving with high tech camping gear. Their donations (and labor) sustain the Gathering as much as the dedicated labor of their poorer

Family members. Since all food and medical supplies and all shelter but the smaller tents are shared, the Gatherings admirably honor the concept of “from each according to their abilities and to each according to their needs.”

And for the residents of the area where the Gathering is held, benefits include a site left cleaner of trash than when found (better than the Boy Scouts, as Niman quotes the *Duluth News Tribune*, 1990), plantings of grass and other ground cover, and many thousands of dollars spent at local businesses.

Locals are sometimes fearful of and hostile toward Rainbow Family members, with the worst case involving two women hitchhikers (Rainbow sisters) being murdered in West Virginia in 1980. At other Gatherings locals aided Rainbows in out-flanking Forest Service road

blocks, and helped in many different ways, even becoming participants at future Gatherings. Back in West Virginia, Niman relates that a hundred locals turned out for a slide show about the Family. Initially

hostile, they ended up joining hands with Family members, singing the old hymn “Will the Circle be Unbroken?”



Family Supper Main Circle, 1995, New Mexico, The Circle Forms

chased with “Magic Hat” collection funds, for delivering spring water to Rainbow kitchens, but this piping may or may not arrive again at the next Gathering. Niman’s very appropriate insight is that it



Family Supper Main Circle, Food and Servers to the Center

is this lack of assets, particularly land, that saves the Family from many of the contentious issues that plague some residential intentional communities. This lack of assets enables the informal, nonhierarchical structure of the Rainbow Family, sometimes presented as a non-organization due to its anarchist, voluntary nature.

Niman does point out that Rainbow Gatherings are completely non-commercial, which is essential to the Family’s claim to the right to gather on public land. He explains that money is not used within Gatherings and that necessities are offered free

A discussion that I felt that Michael Niman failed to develop in this book is more of a speculation on the future of the Rainbow Family. In his comparisons between the Family and residential intentional communities, Niman correctly notes that the Family has no collective assets. What ever is purchased with donations is usually consumed. The most common nonconsumable asset acquired is miles of plastic tubing, often pur-

chased with “Magic Hat” collection funds, for delivering spring water to Rainbow kitchens, but this piping may or may not arrive again at the next Gathering. Niman’s very appropriate insight is that it is this lack of assets, particularly land, that saves the Family from many of the contentious issues that plague some residential intentional communities. This lack of assets enables the informal, nonhierarchical structure of the Rainbow Family, sometimes presented as a non-organization due to its anarchist, voluntary nature.

Niman does point out that Rainbow Gather-

according to their availability. He also provides several insightful anecdotes about the irony of the festive but anathema barter centers trading private property at ostensibly communal Gatherings. However, he expresses in the “Endless Summer” section of his conclusion, the hope that the Rainbow tradition might evolve into some form of permanent community. This suggests a failing, on the author’s part, to develop his own insight about the Family’s lack of assets. If the Family ever did acquire land, it could no longer welcome everyone, would have to identify representatives and go through other changes, and therefore would no longer be “Rainbow,” but some other form of intentional community.

Due to its basic nature, the Family may never be more than a network dedicated to the hosting of “Gatherings of the Tribes,” or gatherings of various communities which, along with individuals, comprise the “Rainbow Nation.” Some collective houses and farms involving Rainbow Family members have been formed, and there is always talk of forming “Peace Villages,” and recently of finding a “Rainbow

Homeland,” but the fact that these would necessarily involve the accumulation of assets, membership restrictions and legal representatives would result in someone claiming that these communities are not true to the Rainbow ideal, and therefore should not use the name “Rainbow.” Therefore, the Rainbow Family is likely to remain a network of separate individuals and communities, inspiring members and others to live Rainbow ideals, but not providing the organizational structure for permanent settlements.

The Rainbow Family has established a new utopian strategy of temporary autonomous zones, sometimes strictly for Family celebrations, sometimes in support of political actions and objectives, but never itself to be a permanent settlement. Certainly, however, the Rainbow Family is here to stay, and some time or some where there might be a Local Council in your city or neighborhood, or a Regional or Annual Gathering in your state. Fortunately, Michael Niman has given all of us the first comprehensive resource through which to begin to understand the Rainbow Family.



Rainbow Family Supper at the Main Circle. Announcements are made followed by a period of silence and/or chanting the "Om." People then are seated in concentric circles, back-to-back, facing a walkway between, through which the servers circulate dispensing food from the various kitchens. Servers are followed by groups of people taking "Magic Hat" donations, and perhaps more people circulating with other announcements. As twilight settles over the Rainbow Gathering Main Circle a fire is lit in the center and the evening of drumming and dancing begins!

## Benefits of Rainbow Gatherings

Following are anecdotes from various sources. Those ending with “(Niman 1997, p.#)” are found in *People of the Rainbow: A Nomadic Utopia* by Michael Niman, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville: 1997.

### Economic Benefits of Rainbow Gatherings and Remedies for Business Problems

Chuck Hayes. 1986. “Missouri Sheriff Remembers ‘Leftover Hippies.’” “Warren Times Observer,” (PA) June 20. One storeowner (Viburnum, MO) told the newspaper that he logged \$35,000 to \$40,000 in additional sales during the one month the Rainbow People were in camp. A grocery storeowner said there had been some shoplifting in his store, but a representative of the Rainbow People gave him a check to cover most of his losses. (Niman 1997, p.177)

John Myers. 1990. “Store Booms with Rainbow Business.” “Duluth News-Tribune,” (MN) July 2. “I hate to sound like the Rainbow Chamber of Commerce, but they really have been great,” (storeowner) Barb Puch said. “We haven’t had any problems.” (Niman 1997, p.177)



Richwood, West Virginia, 2005

Marie O’Holloran. 1993. “Somewhere Under the Rainbow.” “Irish Times” (Ireland). The 1993 European Gathering in Ireland “has amazed and intrigued the local community, who have heaped praise on the (G)athering which has brought much needed business to the area.” Officials hoped to use the Gathering as a magnet for developing tourism. (Niman 1997, p.177)

Jack Becklund. 1990. “Uffda.” “Cook County News-Herald,” (MN) May 28. A lot of media attention will be focused on Cook County and Grand Marias. How we as hosts behave under the glare will determine in large part whether we gain a long range benefit in tourism. It doesn’t pay to go around telling visiting reporters that you hope the mosquitoes and flies will

carry off the entire encampment. “ Call ‘em neo-hippies or counter-culturalists, they have at least one thing in common with most of us who live in Cook County. They enjoy the woods and have determined, after considerable study, that Cook County’s the best place to go camping and spend a summer vacation in all of Minnesota. (Niman 1997, p.157)

Modoc National Forest. 1984. “Reports” (government document). Rainbows volunteered to wait tables at the Most Likely Café in Likely (CA), easing the workload on overburdened waitresses. One Rainbow sister stayed after the Gathering, having landed a job as waitress there. (Niman 1997, p.176)

“Modoc County Record.” 1984. “On the Rainbow Family “,” June 21. At the 1984 Gathering (CA), Rainbows gave form letters to the department of social services, directing any Family members who might wander that way over to the Gathering, where they would receive food and shelter. (Magic Hat money often finances

the departure of destitute stragglers at the end of cleanup, assuring that they can leave the community and not stay as a burden.) (Niman 1997, p.175-6)

Michael P. Lee. 1984. “Rainbow Family Gathering 1984.” Modoc National Forest. (Government document.) Forest Service survey of local business people. Jerry’s Restaurant - Volume of business definitely increased. According to Johnson (manager), “Our restaurant made good money while the Rainbows were here”. All three shifts were up. Johnson said the Rainbows were well mannered, well educated, very patient, and good tippers”. Beacon Coffee Shop - “They were nice, well behaved and good tippers” The restaurant had no regular customer



complaint about their presence. Texaco (station) - Hunter (attendant) felt the station had little problem with the Rainbows, they were generally nice people. Early on they used the restrooms to bathe, and the station was “constantly cleaning” them “(and) “Dumpster Divers” “(were) objectionable to his patrons “ The station chose to lock the garbage bins, and post “Customer Use Only” signs on the restroom doors. Rainbows honored the signs. (Niman 1997, p.176)

Michael P. Lee. 1984. “Rainbow Family Gathering 1984.” Modoc National Forest. (Government document.) We told the Rainbow’s law enforcement organization, the Shanti-seena (sic), to either control the shoplifters or the store would prosecute. The Shanti-seena posted one person outside the store and monitored the numbers. Another local businessperson recommended that colleagues “utilize the Rainbow security force, the Shanti-seena. They’re very helpful.” (Niman 1997, p.121-2)

Grey Bear. 1990. Interview by Michael Niman. Grey Bear spent two days performing Shanti Sena duties (including) directing parking and traffic at the Clearview General Store during the 1990 North American Gathering (MN). He never referred to himself as a member of “the Shanti Sena,” but as “a friend of Jeff,” the store’s owner. (Niman 1997, p.122)

### **Environmental Benefits of Rainbow Gatherings**

Andrew Colaninno and Dale Dunshie. 1988. “Report of Regional Rainbow Gathering - Allegheny National Forest August 20-28, 1988. (PA) Sept.” The District obtained 300 Chinese Chestnut seedlings and fence material. The trees and fence were delivered to the trailhead where they were brought down to the site by Family members. Over the next few days, all 300 seedlings were planted and fenced throughout the Gathering area, along the Queen Creek valley, and along the FR 552 parking area”. assisted by several Family members who had planted trees professionally on F.S. contracts. The quality of the work was very high and the care taken with the trees was exceptional. In general, this proved to be a very enjoyable experience for the Family members who participated and a unique way of accomplishing beneficial wildlife habitat work for the District. Similar cooperative

projects have taken place at Gatherings in Vermont and New York in 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1995. (Niman 1997, p.173-4)

Michael Hallinan. 1978. “Family Members ‘Healing’ Umpqua Forest.” “Roseburg News-Review,” (OR) July 13. Forest Service wildlife biologist Gertsch said, “Family members taught the Forest Service a new trick, burying ‘willow waddles’ (wattles) in wet areas of the meadow.” Gertsch explained, “The bundles of willow branches soaked in water would sprout, providing vegetation to stabilize the soil.” (Niman 1997, p.173)

Umpqua National Forest (OR). 1978. “1978 Rainbow Family Gathering Environmental Analysis Report.” It is likely that some of the rehabilitation work planned in terms of grass seeding and de-compaction will improve portions of the area within the Big Camas parking area that have been previously over-used. (Niman 1997, p.172)

“Great Falls Tribune.” (MT) 1976. Editorial - “Rainbow’s Promises Kept.” Lloyd Swager, Forest Service district ranger, who, describing the cleanup after the 1976 North American Gathering in Montana, said: “It’s still amazing to me. We searched that area with a fine tooth comb, including the parking lot and we couldn’t come up with anything. Not even a scrap of paper.” (Niman 1997, p.172)

Don Teter. 1980. “Two Days of Rainbows.” “Tygart Valley Press,” Elkins, WV, July 9. Refuse from the gathering was carefully collected at several stations, separate containers being used for compostable garbage (which was later buried), recyclable metal, glass, and burnables. The metal and glass were carried out to be recycled, although much of it did not come from the Rainbow Gathering, but had been left by previous campers. The Rainbow Family will leave the campsite much cleaner than they found it.” (Niman 1997, p.172)

Steve Bishop. 1985. “Flower Children May Bloom on ANF.” “Ridgeway Record.” (PA) Oct. 30. Bruce Platt of the Mark Twain National Forest in Missouri, host of the 1985 North American Gathering, said, “It looks better, quite frankly, than it did when they arrived.” (Niman 1997, p.173)

“Duluth News-Tribune.” (MN) 1990. “Officer Fights

Rainbow Family Fears,” June 5. Lake County undersheriff Harold Paulseth admitted to a local community meeting that Rainbows leave the forest in better shape than the Boy Scouts. (Niman 1997, p.173) Note: When bears later unearthed buried compost and trash at the site of the Minnesota National Gathering, the Minnesota Rainbow Family called a Counsel the following spring to return to the site and again clean the area. (See Niman 1997, p.172)

Rick Holloway. 1984. “The Rainbow Fades,” “Modoc Record,” (CA) July 12. And Danielle Toussaint. 1984. “In the Aftermath of the Rainbow Gathering.” “Chico News and Review.” (CA) July 26. After the 1984 North American Gathering the local press reported Rainbows were removing trash dating back to the 1950s. (Niman 1997, p.173)  
Bob Clever. 1986. “Only Footsteps and Money.” “Tionesta Forest Press.” (PA) July 9. Forest ranger James Schuler stated that the Rainbow Family members “are the most environmental(ly) conscious people I have ever dealt with.” A local game officer and a deputy sheriff stated they were, “very much impressed by the neatness of the entire area,” noting that “cigarette smokers stripped their butts of paper and filter for proper disposal before recycling the remaining tobacco to the ground.” (Niman 1997, p.173)

David J. Wright. 1988. Letter to Richard Hernan, District Attorney, (PA) August 15. (In response to the planned 1988 Regional Gathering on the site of the 1986 National Gathering.) Our experience with the Rainbow people during their Gathering on the Allegheny National Forest in 1986 demonstrated to us that they do care for the land. In 1986 they faithfully carried out all stipulations to protect the environment as listed in the operating plan that had been agreed to by both parties. No significant or adverse environmental damage occurred to the Gathering site. I personally visited the site two weeks ago and found it to be in very good condition. (Niman 1997, p.176)

Bruce L. Slover, District Ranger, Brownstown Ranger District, 608 W. Commerce Street, Brownstown, IN 47220. September 16, 1991. Reply to 2300 USDA, Forest Service, Wayne-Hoosier National Forest. Letter to Allen Butcher (Focalizer). “Water, Singing on the Rocks requested a letter about the recent Gathering. As we have already reported internally, we

were quite pleased with the attitudes and actions of the participants in general. At no time did we perceive any significant problems. The Family was clearly aware of the possibilities of environmental degradation and made obvious efforts to protect the site.

The major item to improve is that of giving the local ranger district advance notice of the impending Gathering. Such notice allows us to conduct surveys for threatened and endangered species of plants and animals as well as cultural resources. In this case, we conducted a plant survey with tents already in the area.

Advance notice allows us to schedule Forest Service personnel. In this case, we scheduled personnel from two other units. Such rapid scheduling disrupts the lives of our employees and their families.

We enjoyed the opportunity to talk with many of the people at the Gathering and we very much appreciated the cooperation we received throughout. We hope you consider this particular Gathering a success story; we do."

Note: The situation in North Carolina at the end of the 1987 North American Gathering involved state and federal government harassment of the cleanup crew, as part of attempts to prevent Gatherings in following years. With site cleanup prevented, the Forest Service created a video of the trash and unnaturalized campsites for presentation at later background briefings of Forest Service personnel and local elected and law enforcement officials. (Niman 1997, p.174)

### **Spiritual Benefits of Rainbow Gatherings**

Michael P. Lee. 1984. “Rainbow Family Gathering 1984” (Forest Service document.) Modoc National Forest (CA). They (Rainbows) have strong ethics.” They respect the earth, nature, Native American(s), and opinions of individuals. (Niman 1997, p. 196)

Gatherings expose otherwise isolated populations to diverse lifestyles, offering a crash course in cultural pluralism, anarchy, and a congeries of alternative lifestyles and spiritual beliefs. (Niman 1997, p.174)

Each new Gathering, taking place in a different geographic region, brings the Rainbow message of peaceful coexistence to a new audience. (Niman 1997, p.183)

(I)n 1990, Quebec Rainbows discouraged nudity at their regional Gathering in the belief that such nudity offended area Indians (although the local Tribe never actually complained). On other occasions Rainbows avoided Gathering in areas that were cherished by locals, detoured traffic away from residential roads, and so on. (Niman 1997, p.182 and 236)

“New York Times.” July 7, 1980. More than 100 local residents turned out “in Richwood (WV), to see a Rainbow Family slide show, which was followed by questions and answers. While some were a little stunned by such Rainbow exotica as a young man who introduced himself as ‘Water Singing on the Rocks,’ the meeting ended with Rainbows and Richwood

residents alike joining hands and singing the old hymn “Will the Circle Be Unbroken?” Later, upon the execution style killing of two young women hitch-hiking their way to the West Virginia Gathering, thousands of Rainbows and locals came together on July

4th, with local citizens stating, ‘We love you, we are not those people.’ (Niman 1997, p.179) (Note: The killers were later found, convicted and imprisoned until their recent release.)

### Health Benefits of Rainbow Gatherings

Jarbidge Ranger District. 1989. “Reports and Publications.” (Government Document.) (T)he Family does not advocate the use of hard drugs or alcohol and supports the rehabilitation of anyone addicted. (Niman 1997, p. 190)

(R)eporting of Rainbow Gatherings ignores their successful detoxification and drug/alcohol rehabilitation programs. In a media environment habitually producing stories of innocents going to Rainbow

Gatherings and getting turned on to dangerous drugs, stories of addicted persons going to Rainbow Gatherings to get off drugs just don’t fit. (Niman 1997, p. 167) Note: Members of A Camp (‘A’ for alcohol or anarchy) sometimes seek drug and alcohol cessation help from CALM health staff.

Since Rainbow children are encouraged to speak their minds, the Council discusses and acts upon issues like child molestation instead of sweeping them under the carpet. Rainbows teach children that they are important, and they know that adults will listen to them. There is a healthy dialogue between generations. (Niman 1997, p. 204)



Camp in the Forest, Monongehela National Forest, WV, 2005

Michael P. Lee. 1984. “Rainbow Family Gathering 1984” (Forest Service document.) Modoc National Forest (CA) State government officials in California looked toward the Rainbow infrastructure as a model for the possible resettlement of San Francisco residents to the countryside in the event of an emergency. (Niman 1997, p. 204)

Joseph Wetmore. 1990. Letter to Heatsong, Sept. 17. The 1990 North American Gathering Council (MN), with about two hundred people present, consented to a policy stating that nobody could be turned over to law enforcement or mental hygiene officials without Council approval. “We the Tribal Council of the Rainbow Family do declare that as a sanctuary, we will not turn people over to the authorities, police, or mental health system regardless of how abstract their behavior may be. We hereby establish a “well being center” to deal with crisis situation beyond CALM and Shanti Sena capabilities. “..” (Niman 1997, p. 123) Note: As the “Well Being Center” planned was never created at any Gathering, consensus on this issue has been lost. See Niman page 125.

## Law Enforcement Benefits of Rainbow Gatherings

Hannah Miller. "The Arizona Republic." July 9, 1998. "Rainbow Family Nabs Suspect: Florida Police Alert Group via Website." Hannah Miller 444-8222 or hannah.miller@pni.com <http://home.earthlink.net/~kzirk/scroll/Arizona/0709rainbow.html> " (I)n the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, " the Rainbows' unarmed peacekeepers captured a suspect wanted in a brutal Florida murder case. "In my long law-enforcement career, this is something I have never seen happen," said Sgt. Jim Morse of the Apache County Sheriff's Department. " Rainbows called in sheriff's deputies, who arrived to find 25 members of the Rainbows' security team, the Shanti-Sena, standing in a ring around Joseph Giebel, who was bound in a blanket. "After they learned that Giebel had attended past Rainbow Family Gatherings, Key West police made a shot in the dark. They sent a description of the suspect and information to the Rainbow Family's home page on the Internet, and apparently their warning was heeded." Local police aren't guessing as to how the Shanti-Sena, an unstructured organization that carries no weapons, captured Giebel. "The entire operation was very coordinated," Morse said. "They had already in effect handled this when we arrived." The Shanti-Sena "which includes many military veterans, has policed past gatherings successfully." In recent years, the group captured a rapist at the campground, binding him with duct tape and turning him over to police.

William Schmidt. 1982. "Holdover Hippies Meet for Their Annual Fling." "New York Times." One officer stated, "Back in the '60s, people like these used to call you 'pig,' " " But these people here come up to you and say, 'I love you, officer,' or 'Officer, have you been hugged today?'" (Niman 1997, p.198)

Candy Laflam. 1989. Message Scan. (Government document.) June 16. Rainbow Gatherings have become popular with some Forest Service employees. For the NERF Gathering in Vermont 1989, all the law enforcement slots were filled, with local Forest Service compiling stand-by list for law enforcement personnel volunteering for the popular assignment. (Niman 1997, p.199)

Don Hopey, Staff Writer, "Post-Gazette." Pittsburg, PA. Sunday, July 4, 1999. "The Rainbow Family's annual be-in features thousands of people, music and

light in the forest" <http://www.post-gazette.com/regionstate/19990704rrainbow1.asp> Checkpoints and roadblocks used at the Rainbow's 1996 gathering in Missouri brought the government agency a federal lawsuit that was decided in the Rainbows' favor last week. Noting that the gauntlet of checkpoints at the gathering of 15,000 uncovered only four felony drug cases worth pursuing, Senior U.S. District Judge Russell Clark said targeting the group was unacceptable and ordered it stopped. "Subjecting Rainbow Family members to a 'shakedown' to achieve ignominious results," Clark wrote in his opinion, "should strike fear into any citizen who values ... personal liberty." Rose Davis, a Forest Service spokeswoman with the National Incident Management team, said checkpoints hadn't been used since 1996. She said police patrols through Friday had issued 147 violation notices, the majority for traffic violations." She knew of no felony reports.