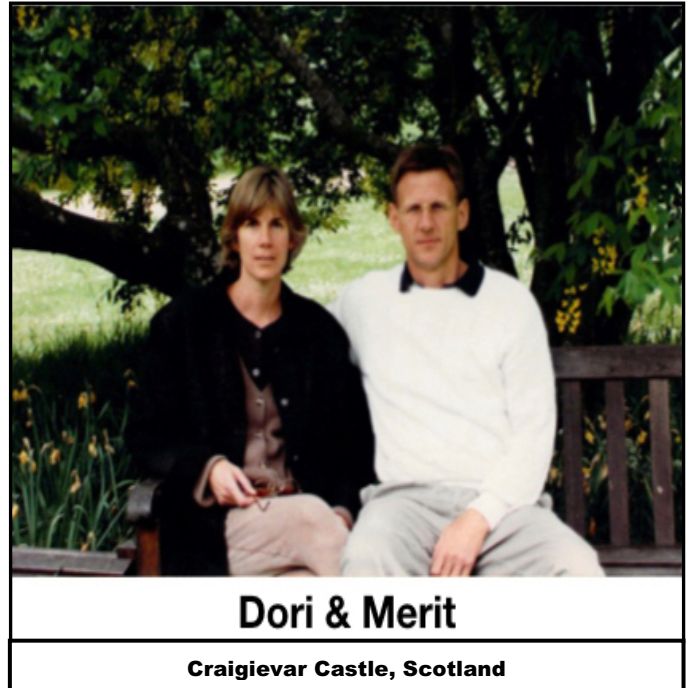




Merit Bennett

Early Years:

Merit was born in Spokane, Washington, on September 8, 1947, to an Air Force family. His father enlisted in the Army Air Corps in WWII, served in Burma as a private in the Army Air Corps, became an officer and advanced to the rank of Colonel over the span of his career, with his last assignment as Commander of Tinker AFB in Oklahoma. Merit moved whenever his father was reassigned (including when his father went to the Korean War), and, growing up, Merit lived in Maine, Mississippi, the Philippines, Kansas, Alabama, Turkey and Northern Virginia. While in the fifth and sixth grades when living in Ankara, Turkey, Merit learned to speak conversational Turkish, and his parents took him to Athens to view the Acropolis. He also attended a summer camp outside of Istanbul.



While growing up, during summer school vacations, Merit’s family would often go to where his grandparents lived – to the home of his mother’s parents in Parsons, Kansas, or to the farm of his father’s parents in central Mississippi.

It was during one summer while at his grandparents’ farm in Mississippi when Merit was 13 years old that Merit awakened to the reality of racism for the first time. His grandparents had modern-day “slaves.” On their farm lived a black family, then called “tenant farmers” (code for “slaves”), who tended and harvested the crops on the farm to “pay” for their lodging, keeping a small portion to eat – just enough to enable them to survive in a small wooden cabin in the fields out of sight of Merit’s grandparents’ home.

It was when Merit was berated by his grandfather for speaking to “Uncle Joe” (the slave “tenant farmer”) when Uncle Joe was unloading bushels of corn at Merit’s grandparents’ house that Merit was abruptly introduced to “racism.” Because Merit had by then traveled to other countries, experiencing many different races and colors as “equals,” he was naturally shocked to learn that such a thing as “racism” even existed, much less that it was rigidly and viscerally lodged in the mind of his beloved granddad and other otherwise “good” people.

Ever since that moment, Merit would never tolerate racism, either in his personal life or in his work life, and he found it to be especially disgusting, and dangerous, when espoused by someone who claimed to be “educated” and/or “religious.”

To this day, Merit is still opposing, and exposing, the two most imminent threats to our democratic way of life that he, as a cadet and as a military officer, swore to protect against – the



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threats of institutional racism and cultural misogyny, which, when they manifest in combination, always portend the decline of a free society and the rise of authoritarianism.

High School:

In 1965, Merit graduated from Mt. Vernon High School in Alexandria, Virginia, where he lettered in varsity football, wrestling and baseball. Merit played banjo in high school with a student band and taught himself how to play 12-string guitar.

Air Force Academy:

Merit was awarded appointments to attend both USAFA and West Point, and, because of his father's service in the Air Force (his father was then stationed at the Pentagon), Merit chose the AFA.

Merit lettered in Varsity Wrestling and Varsity Rugby and was on the Dean's List and the Superintendent's List. (In the match against the Cranwell (Royal Air Force College) rugby team in the Spring of 1969, Merit scored a try in AFA's 14-0 win after receiving a perfect pass from Roy Coppinger who had broken behind Cranwell's line.)

During the summer, Merit earned Army Airborne Jump Wings (5 battlefield parachuting jumps in full battle gear) at Ft. Benning, Georgia. (Most of Merit's training mates were Army enlisted soldiers training for, and on their way to, the ongoing war in Viet Nam.) Merit also did his "Third Lieutenant" (officer training) tour at Tyndall Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida.

Academically, Merit was initially a math and science major, but became enamored with European languages, history and culture and switched majors after his sophomore year to seek a degree in "Western European Studies."

During the summer between his sophomore and junior years, Merit was assigned to the Deutsche Luftwaffe Schule (German Air Force Academy) in Neubiberg, Germany, to immerse in German language, history and culture, and, as a part of that experience, was, along with a small group of American and German academy students, taken by German officers on an unforgettable tour of Dachau, the first (opened in 1933) Nazi concentration camp. The shame of the officers leading the tour was palpable, but they felt it was their duty to show the AFA cadets this dark aspect of their country's past. See <https://www.history.com/.amp/topics/world-war-ii/dachau>.

During the summer between his junior and senior years, Merit and '69 classmate Mike Klindt got a "hop" (flight on a military transport plane) to Wiesbaden, Germany, where Merit's father was then stationed, and they drove his dad's VW Beetle from Wiesbaden to Paris. After returning to Wiesbaden, Merit and Mike took another "hop" to Berlin (when the city was still divided between East and West). While in Berlin, one night after dark, Merit and Mike walked to the Berlin Wall and threw rocks at an East German guard tower – a feeble – and not very wise – symbolic protest against totalitarianism. The brief "protest" went unnoticed - and no shots were fired.



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Merit learned how to downhill ski at the Academy as part of the curriculum. (After graduation, he also learned to cross-country ski and served on the Ouray County, Colorado, Ski Patrol during the record-snow 100-year winter of 1983-84.)

[\(See Merit Bennett's post graduation photo from the US Air Force Academy\)](#)

While at the Academy, Merit became proficient in French, German and Spanish and was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship for post-graduate study at the University of Europe in Bruges, Belgium. Unfortunately, the Nixon Administration slashed funding for the program, and Merit's scholarship was withdrawn.

In 1969, Merit graduated from the Academy on the Dean's List with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Western European Area Studies.

Post-AFA Military Service:

The summer after graduation, Merit and '69 classmate Vic Martin flew to London, purchased used motorcycles and set off. They crossed the English Channel, traveled down through Paris and then south over the Pyrenees into Spain to Madrid and back up through the Alps to Germany. The escapade lasted a month.

Merit then reported to a detachment of the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) in Boston, Massachusetts, and then went on to the OSI School in Washington, D.C. (While at the OSI School in D.C., Merit scored the highest score in the language aptitude test that had ever been achieved in the history of the school up until that time, and the plan was for him to become an international spy.)

While Merit was training to be a spy, he was becoming deeply conflicted about our country's participation in the Viet Nam War. Merit joined in the Moratorium Peace Marches against the war which were held on the Washington Monument Mall in October and November of 1969. The day following the November demonstration, Merit attended class at the OSI School with a small "peace symbol" (a white dove on a circular blue background) pinned to his uniform tie. At the end of the first class of the morning, Merit was directed to come to the office of the OSI Commandant, Brigadier General Joseph Cappucci, who angrily ordered Merit, "Take that f...in' thing off of your tie." The "meeting" was over, and Merit returned to class.

Because of the internal conflict about the legitimacy of the war that Merit was beginning to experience and because of the ultra-conservative view held by the OSI during the Viet Nam War era (the OSI was tasked with surveilling public anti-war gatherings on college campuses and in local communities, creating dossiers on enlisted military personnel who were participating in anti-war demonstrations when off-duty), Merit requested to be reassigned out of the OSI, and out of what he had thought was to be his career path. His request was granted, and Merit enrolled in the Air Force Supply School in Denver, Colorado.

Upon graduation from the Supply School, Merit was promoted to serve as the Chief Satellite Supply Officer for the NORAD Command Center in Cheyenne Mountain, south of Colorado Springs, Colorado.



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While serving in Cheyenne Mountain, Merit received boxing training from Air Force Sergeant Fred “Preacher” Lewis, who was then running the gym facility used by the multi-force personnel who were assigned to perform the top secret work in the Mountain in preparation for intercontinental ballistic missile warfare and the survival of a nuclear attack.

Preacher had an extensive amateur boxing career with the Air Force and had been the Air Force Boxing Champion. In the 1960 Olympic Trials, Preacher knocked down Muhammed Ali (then Cassius Clay) but eventually lost the fight by a single point. He went on to win the Gold Medal at the 1963 Pan Am Games in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Merit ring-boxed with Preacher at the Peterson Field Air Force Base gym on the outskirts of Colorado Springs, and Preacher wanted to sponsor and coach Merit to box on the amateur circuit, but Merit wisely declined and stuck with a much less dangerous sport - rugby. (Merit could never manage to stop Preacher from ending each round with a punch to Merit’s solar plexus.)

Merit transferred from Cheyenne Mountain to Peterson Field, where he continued to serve as a Supply Officer.

While at Peterson Field, Merit resigned his commission in the fall of 1971 as a conscientious objector to the war in Viet Nam (the second AFA grad to do so) and was honorably discharged in the spring of 1972. At the time, Merit’s father (then Colonel George W. Bennett) was the Commander of Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City. Merit and his father later reconciled when the illegality of the war and the lying to the American people by the Johnson and Nixon Administrations was finally exposed during the Nixon era and after Nixon’s resignation.

Post-Graduate Rugby:

For sixteen years following his graduation from the Academy, Merit played fly-half for the Colorado Springs Rugby Club (Captain), for the Boston Rugby Club, for the American University Rugby Club in Washington, D.C., (Captain) and for the Denver Barbarians Rugby Club (Captain).

While playing for the Colorado Springs Rugby Club, Merit also coached the Colorado College Rugby Team. Also, while in Colorado Springs, Merit, because of his playing experience and intimate knowledge of the rules of the game, trained to become a referee and was invited to referee a prominent rugby tournament in Anchorage, Alaska.

While in law school, Merit also captained the American University Rugby Club touring side at an international tournament in Montreal, Canada.

While working as a lawyer in Colorado Springs, Merit captained championship teams in the Denver National Rugby Sevens Tournament, in the Boston National Rugby Sevens Tournament (playing again with AFA Class of ’69 rugby teammate Roy Coppinger) and in the Aspen National Rugby Fifteens Tournament.



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Merit played on the Western United States All-Star Rugby Team ('78, '80) and the Eastern Rockies Rugby Football Union All-Star Team ('78, '79, '80), playing in tournament matches in Denver, Chicago, Kansas City, Austin and Dallas. He also captained the Denver Barbarians Rugby Club in 1982, when the Barbarians finished Second in the U.S. National Rugby Championship held in Palo Alto, California.

Merit also toured in England, Wales, Ireland, Northern Ireland and France with an All-New England rugby team organized by the Boston Rugby Club and Merit's former AFA Class of '69 rugby teammate, Roy Coppinger. The team played in arena stadiums in London, Dublin and Paris as well as at rugby club stadiums in Cheltenham, Cockermouth, Bath (England) and Ballymena (Northern Ireland).

In Ballymena, Merit had the honor to take the field against rugby international legend, Willie John McBride. Merit scored the only points for his team in that game – a forty-five yard penalty kick. See also the Air Force Academy Rugby Alumni news story of the tour in England which reunited Merit with Roy after their AFA rugby days.

<http://thebennettlawgroup.com/wpcontent/uploads/2019/02/United-States-Air-Force-Academy-Rugby-Alumni-Newsletter.pdf>

Post-Graduate Education:

Merit earned a Master's Degree in Political Science from the University of Colorado in 1972.

Merit's Master's Thesis was entitled "*The Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs: The Development of the Role of This Executive Office in the Decision-Making Process and Its Impact on Governmental Operation.*"

For this Thesis, Merit interviewed Clark Clifford, lawyer and political advisor to Presidents Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Jimmy Carter, in Washington, D.C. (Mr. Clifford's official positions were White House Counsel (1946-1950), Chairman of the President's Intelligence Advisory Board (1963-1968) and Secretary of Defense (1968-1969).)

Merit also interviewed Dean Rusk at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. Mr. Rusk was the U.S. Secretary of State from 1961 to 1969 under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.

Law School:

Merit earned a Law Degree from the Washington College of Law at the American University in Washington, D.C., in 1975.

Merit's Law Review Article was "*The Entrapment Debate: From Sorrells and Sherman to Russell.*"

Merit was awarded the Washington College of Law "Best of Clinical Program Award" at graduation. Merit was one of three students to participate in the first Clinical Semester Program initiated by an area law school in the Maryland State's Attorney's Office under the supervision



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of visionary Law Professor Elliott S. Milstein. (Professor Milstein later became Dean of the Law School.) In this Program, Merit prosecuted criminal cases under the supervision of an Assistant State's Attorney in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties, Maryland. Merit's participation was full-time (4 days per week), and he handled daily dockets of up to 65 misdemeanor cases.

Also while attending law school, Merit volunteered as a Teaching Intern at the American University Learning Center, assisting the Director of the Learning Center, Dr. Charles Ferster, by giving general educational guidance to undergraduate students, as well as providing expertise in specific content areas (especially law and political science).

While in law school, Merit saw Joan Baez perform for peace and an end to the Viet Nam War at the Washington National Cathedral and later witnessed Nixon's resignation on August 9, 1974 – the ultimate contrast of love and hate.

Also while in law school, Merit volunteered as a high-school referee for high school varsity wrestling matches in the Northern Virginia High School District.

During the summers between the years attending law school, Merit worked the first summer as a legal assistant for the U.S. Cost of Living Council and the second summer as a legal assistant for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. At the FDA, Merit helped draft the first comprehensive federal regulations requiring that ingredient statements be placed on the labels of processed food products sold within the United States – the labels on the foods that you buy in the store today.

Legal Career:

Merit's legal career began with Pikes Peak Legal Services in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1975, with a Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (U.S. Department of Justice) federal grant to defend indigent/homeless juveniles who were charged with felony crimes, which, for the first time in our justice system, entitled juveniles who were charged with committing crimes to the protection of the same due process rights only previously afforded to criminally-charged adults.

After that service, Merit was recruited to become a Colorado State Public Defender in the Colorado Springs office, defending indigent adults charged with felony crimes, to include murder, robbery, burglary and rape.

During his employment with the Colorado State Public Defender's Office, in order to keep fit for rugby, Merit underwent ballet training and performed at The Pikes Peak Theater for the Performing Arts in the Rocky Mountain Ballet production of "The Firebird" by the Russian composer, Igor Stravinsky, under the direction of Ilse Reese Gahart, who had trained and performed with the Vienna Opera Ballet and the Salzburg Festival Ballet. Merit performed the role of the Firebird. ("The Firebird" was first performed in Paris in 1910.)

Following his service with the Public Defender's Office, Merit entered private practice, forming a partnership with Richard L. Tegtmeier, a renowned Colorado trial attorney. Merit specialized in the practice of real estate, estate planning and business formation law. Lance M. Sears, another accomplished trial attorney, later joined the firm as a partner.



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In 1983, Merit moved to Ouray, Colorado, and established his own general practice with Michael Hockersmith, who left his teaching position at the University of Colorado Law School to partner with Merit. Their firm ultimately expanded into offices in Montrose and Delta, Colorado, with the formation of the law firm of Tisdell, Mathis, Reed, Hockersmith & Bennett.

While in Ouray, Merit took up cross-country skiing (he had learned how to downhill ski while at the Academy) and served on the Ouray County Mountain Rescue Team during the winter of 1983-84.

Also while in Ouray, Merit met Doris Jane Pawloski, the love of his life. In 1986, Merit and Dori moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Merit established a general practice, emphasizing business law and business litigation.

In 1987, Merit served as Special Counsel for litigation for the law firm of Mitchell & Alley (John Mitchell and Jim Alley) until Merit returned to solo practice in 1989 to engage primarily in personal injury law.

Merit and Stephen Tinkler formed Tinkler & Bennett in 1994 and specialized in civil litigation until 2004, when Merit formed his own firm, now known as "The Bennett Law Group."

The Bennett Law Group:

The Bennett Law Group is a Santa Fe, New Mexico-based firm, which emphasizes representation in personal injury, civil rights and employment discrimination law. Throughout his career, Merit has served clients in a wide variety of legal disciplines, which allows him to view his clients' legal issues in a broader context that will ultimately enhance their legal outcomes. *See* Merit's website: www.thebennettlawgroup.com.

Merit's legal achievements include: **(1)** a \$1.9 million jury verdict against Wal-Mart for sexual harassment of three women; **(2)** a \$4.9 million settlement against the Honolulu Hawai'i Police Department for race and gender discrimination that was published in U.S. News and World Report; **(3)** a \$2.2 million jury verdict against Terminix International for pesticide poisoning; **(4)** a still-ongoing (since 1999) nationwide series of lawsuits against Wal-Mart for gender discrimination. (*see* May 2019 Time Magazine article (<http://thebennettlawgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Walmart-Faces-New-Legal-Battle-From-Old-Pay-Bias-Claims-BLOOMBERG.pdf>) **(5)** settlement of over 100 cases of childhood sexual abuse by Catholic clergy; and **(6)** representation of hundreds of victims of workplace sexual harassment and of gender, race, age and disability discrimination.

Merit and his former partner brought one of the first lawsuits against the Catholic Church in New Mexico in 1994 for childhood sexual abuse.

Merit has taken the depositions of two Catholic Archbishops (Michael Sheehan and Robert Sanchez). When Merit questioned Archbishop Sanchez in a Catholic Convent south of Albuquerque, Sanchez incredibly, and falsely, stated that he "did not know it was a crime to molest a child." (Sanchez had himself sexually assaulted teenage girls.)



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Merit took the depositions of notorious pedophile priests Father David Holley (in the New Mexico State Prison in Las Cruces, New Mexico) and Father Ed Donelan (on church premises).

Merit has settled gender discrimination claims that he brought against two sitting New Mexico Governors and is currently assisting the New Mexico State Attorney General in the criminal prosecution of notorious pedophile and former priest Father Marvin Archuleta for the rape of one of Merit's clients who was only 6 years old when the assault occurred. Two of Merit's other clients, also victims of Archuleta, are witnesses for the prosecution.

In early November of 2019, Merit joined former California prosecutor, Seth Goldstein (<http://www.lawofficesofsethgoldstein.com/bio.html>), in the filing of a lawsuit in Federal Court in the Eastern District of the State of California against the Guiding Hands School, a private school for special needs students, on behalf of the family of 13-year-old autistic student Max Benson, who was killed by school staff when they applied a prone restraint on Max while he was having an episode. Teachers and the school were charged with involuntary manslaughter. See NBC Nightly News story: <https://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/video/educators-face-charges-of-involuntary-manslaughter-in-death-of-13-year-old-autistic-boy-73418821742>. Also see <https://youtu.be/8uAk5bc8wnA>.

Merit is licensed to practice law in New Mexico, Hawaii and Colorado and is admitted to practice before the Federal Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in Sacramento, California, the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver, Colorado, and the United States Supreme Court in Washington, D.C.

Merit has appeared in federal and state courts in New Mexico, Hawai'i, Colorado, California, Texas, West Virginia, Utah, Long Island, N.Y., and Washington, D.C.

Merit has conducted depositions in New Mexico, Hawai'i, Colorado, California, Wyoming, Arizona, Louisiana, Alabama, Illinois, Texas, Arkansas, Florida, Montana, Washington and Oregon.

Merit has also taught Continuing Legal Education Ethics Courses for the New Mexico State Bar based upon his book, *Law and the Heart*.

Merit was selected for inclusion in the 2017-2018 edition of the Who's Who Directory of Top Attorneys of North America (<https://whoswhopr.com/2017/12/top-attorney-merit-bennett/>).

Merit has published two books: *Law and the Heart: A New Paradigm* and *Legal Professionalism: Fifty Words That Strike the Heart*. (*Law and the Heart* is available on Amazon.)

Dori:

Merit met his wife, Dori, in Ouray, Colorado, in 1984.



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Dori is an accomplished artist, a wonderful mother and grandmother and a loving and brilliant human. (See some of Dori's art at <http://thebennettlawgroup.com/dori-bennett-art/>.) Dori's keen intellect, insightful wisdom and enduring compassion have guided the family through every challenge they have encountered throughout the years.

Dori is a rare embodiment of spirit. She is brilliantly intelligent and keenly perceptive of human nature. She can assess the character of a person instantly upon meeting or even upon hearing their description. She cannot tolerate untruthfulness. She is a devoted student of her Buddhist teachers and is a wealth of understanding and compassion for those in need. Dori is a precious and genuine expression of the enlightened nature of our being.

Dori is a blessing to all that know her, and her inherent goodness and spiritual determination have inspired the transformation of Merit's view of life from one of self to one of service, from one of casual participation to one of focus. She is a rare light being whose very presence is always wakeful and transformative - a unique combination of wisdom and humor. Always fully present in the moment, she encourages the best of humanity from everyone she encounters.

Dori is pure and unrelenting honesty and unconditional love.

Dori was a member of the Board of Directors of the Santa Fe Desert Academy when their sons Colin and Grant attended (Merit served as the Board's legal counsel), and she provided a second home to members of the basketball team (of which Merit was the assistant coach when they went to the State Championship – and placed third!).

Dori and Merit are Buddhist practitioners and students of Gangteng Tulku Rinpoche of Bhutan and Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche of Nepal. Merit is the lawyer for, and legally organized, both of the U.S. nonprofit entities which supports each of these master's travels and teachings in the United States.

Dori and Merit have also traveled to Germany and France to receive teachings from Gangteng Tulku Rinpoche, and Rinpoche has been a guest in their homes in Santa Fe and in Hawai'i.

Dori and Merit have also received teachings from Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche in Hawai'i, France and California, and Rinpoche has also been their house guest in Hawai'i.

Dori and Merit also received a teaching from His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1991 in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

On July 6, 2018, Merit and Dori celebrated Dori's 69th birthday at the acclaimed performance of *Hamilton* in the Victoria Palace Theater in London.

Merit and Dori's Children:

Talia V. Kosh, Associate Attorney

Since 2004, Merit has been joined in his practice by his daughter, Talia V. Kosh, who graduated from the Loyola University School of Law in New Orleans and who also received a *Master of*



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Law Degree from Merit's law school alma mater, the Washington College of Law at the American University in Washington, D.C.

In addition to her law practice with Merit, Talia is the President and Founder of New Mexico Lawyers for the Arts, a non-profit organization dedicated to help artists negotiate the legal system and to provide legal advice to arts-related nonprofit organizations in the Santa Fe area on a pro bono and tiered-rate basis. See <http://www.nmlawyersforthearts.org>. Talia has served on numerous non-profit boards in Santa Fe, including Creative Santa Fe, Warehouse 21, Intermezzo at the Santa Fe Opera and the Global Center for Cultural Entrepreneurship. In 2013, she served as the Chair of Intellectual Property Section of the New Mexico State Bar. Talia is also a member of the Governor's Council of Film and Media Industries in New Mexico. Talia has taught courses and moderated seminars at the Santa Fe Community College and other venues. Talia received the Santa Fe Mayor's Award for "*Excellence in the Arts*" in 2014. Talia is also counsel for *Meow Wolf* (whose chief investor is Santa Fe resident and *Game of Thrones* author, George R.R. Martin) in Santa Fe and Denver.

Talia also is the lead singer and plays ukulele for her popular Santa Fe group "Golden General."

Grant Alexander Kosh

Grant is the creator, owner and operator of the Lion & Honey Café in Santa Fe - <https://lionhoneysf.com/> - Grant graduated with a BA from the New Mexico School for the Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and is also an accomplished air-brush artist (his art is displayed and on sale in Lion & Honey).

See online links: <https://www.sfreporter.com/arts/artsvale/2013/01/29/brush-with-fame/>;
<https://www.sfreporter.com/food/2018/03/14/iron-like-a-lion-in-the-railyard/>;
<https://fineartamerica.com/profiles/grant-kosh.html>.

Colin Rush Bennett

Colin graduated with a BA from the University of Hawai'i and created and owns the popular restaurant/bar "The Malted Barley," in Westerly, Rhode Island, which he also franchised to Providence, Rhode Island.

See www.themaltedbarleyri.net and see also <https://www.travelandleisure.com/travel-guide/providence/bars/malted-barley>. Colin and his wife Stephanie have two children (Merit's and Dori's grandchildren), Sam and Hudson. Stephanie is a wonderful mother and an accomplished and artistic professional florist.

Kelsey Fox Bennett Boyd

Kelsey has a BA in Creative Writing and Dance from the University of Colorado and a *Masters of Education* in Community Arts from Lesley University, and she now teaches at the Barrow Street Nursery School in Manhattan, New York. Kelsey also is a licensed brain gym instructor and does private personal welfare and coaching consultations through her website



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(<https://www.kelseyfoxbennett.com>). Kelsey's husband, Ballard Boyd, is a producer of *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* on CBS.

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