

Obituary

# Benjamin "Babe" Witten

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## Witten, Benjamin "Babe"

passed away on Sunday, January 17, 2010 at the age of 91 in Phoenix, Arizona after having suffered a stroke in January, 2007. Ben was known to all as Babe/Uncle Babe /Zadie Babe. Babe was born on May 1, 1918 in Winter set, Iowa and when he was 6 months old, his family moved to Des Moines, where his mother operated a small grocery store and his father started a junk business. Babe was a member of the 'greatest generation,' serving with distinction in the Army Air Force in World War II, where he flew 25 missions and earned the Distinguished Flying Cross. In 1946, Babe married Alicia Hoffman and they had three children. Babe and his brother-in-law, Joe Blumenthal, took over the scrap metal business and expanded 'Witten & Sons' into one of the largest scrap-metal dealers in the mid-West. In 1961, Babe moved his family from Des Moines to Phoenix, Arizona where he resided until the death of his wife, Alicia, in

1974; at which time he moved back to Des Moines. Babe was beloved by hundreds of friends and admirers because of his zest for life, his fun-loving nature, his intellect, spirituality, his creativity and his generosity. He charmed everyone with whom he came in contact. As was true with Will Rogers, Babe truly never met a stranger. He hosted many gatherings in his home, regaling his guests with stories and stimulating them with brainteasers. His positive attitude was infectious and ever present. Ben was a generous man. He was not only generous with the money he gave (whether he had any to give or not) to his friends, his family, his Synagogue and several veteran's groups, but he was very generous with his time as well. When in town, he would help out by cooking a family meal, taking his young grandchildren out for lunch, by making repairs around the house or by running errands for his family. He was always doing something to help somebody. Babe holds the distinction of having donated more blood (over 42 gallons) than anyone else in the history of central Iowa blood donors. He was also inducted into his high school's Hall of Fame in 2007. Babe began sculpting in 1948 using scrap metal as his inspiration and medium. He created hundreds of works which are installed in homes and public buildings throughout the world and have been featured at the Iowa State Fair, on television and in local newspapers. To see a sampling of his art, visit his Art Yard website at <http://www.art-yard.com>. Babe was predeceased by his wife, Alicia, his sisters, Jenn Brody and Anne Blumenthal and his daughter Linda Starkey Smith. He is survived by his long-time companion, Ruth Starkey of Des Moines, Iowa, his daughters, Rochelle Witten of Phoenix and Donna (LeRoy) Luepker of Lowden, IA, his sons Blake (Janet) Witten and Dwayne (Susan) Witten of Phoenix, his 10 grandchildren, 7 great grandchildren and many beloved nieces, nephews and cousins. A memorial service is scheduled at the Arizona State Veteran Home on Sunday, January 31st at 10:00 a.m. A celebration of life gathering will also be held in Des Moines in May. The family asks that instead of flowers, donations can be made in Babe's name to either the Arizona State Veterans' Home, Hospice of the

Valley or The American Red Cross. The family would also like to thank all those at the Arizona State Veterans' Home and Hospice of the Valley for the care and dignity with which they treated Babe during the last 3 years. Dad, if you are right and there is an afterlife, we will all see you again someday. P.S. - Say 'Hi' to Mom for all us. Arrangements by Sinai Mortuary.

To Plant Memorial Trees in memory, please visit our [Sympathy Store](#).

Published in The Arizona Republic on Jan. 24, 2010.

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**3 entries**

January 30, 2010

I met Ben in St. Louis over twenty years ago at a seder where he and Zach were attending. I remember thinking how sweet it was for a grandfather and grandson to be sharing this event together. Later that year I shared some vivid moments while he was visiting Shelle and Zach.

Besides the 42 gallons of blood, the most striking memory I recall is Ben's passion for whatever we were doing or discussing. The topic of an

undivided Germany was the news item of that particular time. Ben considered this event to be potentially dangerous. I remember asking if his concern was based on his WW2 experience. He agreed that was part of his concern and did the next generation learn from their past mistakes? Also, I liked his choice of hats as well.

**Rich Neuman**

January 24, 2010

CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILY.

REST IN PEACE.

KIM MCVAY SMITH DOMOVICH

**KIM DOMOVICH**

January 24, 2010

How I can remember our visit with cousin Alicia and "Babe" and your family so many years ago. Our first visit together. Have the movies to remember a wonderful family reunion.

**Margaret Aronson Wilonsky**

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