



Photo: NPR

# Mamie “Peanut” Johnson

September 27 –

Born September 27<sup>th</sup> in South Carolina, Mamie Belton lived with her maternal grandmother while her mother worked in Washington, DC. From a very young age, she passed her time playing baseball with her uncle. After high school, she married Charles Johnson and had a son. In 1953, she was working at an ice cream shop and playing baseball on the weekends.

In 1954, Mamie Johnson became the first female big-league baseball pitcher for the Negro League Baseball’s Indianapolis Clowns. In the late 1940s, she had wanted to join the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) but was not allowed to try out for a team. However, she was determined to play baseball; and, during her three seasons with the Clowns (1953-1955), she played with several Negro Leagues stars, including Hank Aaron and Satchel Paige. In fact, she credited Paige with helping her improve her curveball. She ultimately finished her career with 33 wins and only 8 losses; one of the best pitching records in the Negro Leagues.

Playing baseball in the Negro Leagues did not pay well. Johnson earned between \$400 and \$700 a month. She retired from baseball at the end of the 1955 season. She then graduated from college as a licensed practical nurse. During her 30-year nursing career, Johnson coached youth league baseball teams. After she retired from nursing, she worked in a Negro League Baseball memorabilia shop that her son owned in Capitol Heights, MD.

In 2008, Johnson became the only woman to be drafted by a major league baseball team when she was selected by the Washington Nationals in a ceremonial Negro League Draft. During the event, every MLB team drafted one player who was denied access because of the color of their skin. In an interview, Johnson did not regret not being allowed to join the AAGPBL. She said, “I’m very glad I wasn’t picked because if I had been picked by the girls, I wouldn’t be who I am today.”

- For more information about the real Mamie Johnson, go to: <http://www.visionaryproject.org/johnsonmamie/#1>.
- For more information about *Writing Her Story*, go to: <http://www.in.gov/icw/2440.htm>.

*Additional and more detailed references available at the end of Women’s History Month*

