**Life Story of Jimmie L. Handley, Sr.**

*Born April 18, 1944*

**Early Life and Schooling**

Jimmie Handley was born on April 18, 1944, the seventh of sixteen children. He doesn’t remember much about his early years until he began school.

At age six, he started attending **Coon Bayou School**. He recalls his very first day—having to cross a rice field to get there. Afraid of the water pump used to irrigate the rice, he crawled through the field until he finally made it across.

Jimmie learned to read largely by memory. He credits his first teacher, **Mrs. Angela Mitchell**, for inspiring his love for learning. She gave him a book to read, and with the help of his older brother, David, he memorized the lessons. The next day, he read the book back to her. Impressed, she told him he was very smart. From then on, Jimmie dedicated himself to learning everything he could to succeed in life.

From 1st through 7th grade, he made all A’s. But in 8th grade, under what he described as the “meanest teacher ever,” his grades fell to D’s. He later transferred to **Loggie Bayou School** for three months, before moving on to **Wolfe Project High School**.

By 9th grade, he was back to earning A’s and B’s, despite only being able to attend school three to four months of the year—the rest of the time was spent picking cotton with his family. Back then, school for Black children often did not begin until November, with split sessions to accommodate farm work.

In 10th grade, he was inspired by excellent teachers such as **Warren Strickland** (Biology) and **Richard Smith** (Social Studies). Mr. Smith would later influence Jimmie’s decision to major in Social Studies in college.

Without electricity at home, Jimmie studied by a smoke stack for light in 1960.

**High School Achievements**

During high school, Jimmie was active in the **New Farmers of America (NFA)** organization. He participated in public speaking, livestock judging, and parliamentary procedure contests.

On **May 5, 1962**, he graduated **2nd in his class** from Wolfe Project High School.

**College Education**

In September 1962, Jimmie enrolled at **Arkansas AM&N College** (now the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff). In 1966, he graduated with a **B.A. degree in Social Studies**.

**Career in Education and Work**

Jimmie began his teaching career at **B.C. Prewitt School** in Tillar, Arkansas. In 1968, he married **Bessie Johnson**, and together they started their family.

In 1970, he began teaching in the **Watson Chapel School District**. He later returned to school, earning a degree in **Elementary Education** in 1975, as well as certification in **Special Education**. From 1981 to 1982, he pursued studies toward a **Master’s in School Administration**.

Beyond teaching, Jimmie also worked at **Central Moloney Manufacturing Plant** for 20 years, while serving as a teacher for 25 years. He first retired in 2003, returned to teaching, and then retired again in 2012.

**Family**

Jimmie and Bessie raised five children:

* **Linda (Princess) Humphrey**
* **Andre (Main) Pitts**
* **Jimmie (Lil Jimmie) Handley, Jr.**
* **Larnell Pitts**
* **Darnell Pitts**

He is also a proud grandfather of **15 grandchildren** and **13 great-grandchildren**.

**Celebrations and Legacy**

Jimmie never had a birthday party in his life until April 19, 2014, when his children and extended family surprised him with a **70th birthday celebration**. Surrounded by loved ones, he described it as the best birthday gift of his life.

His story is one of perseverance, dedication to education, and deep love for family.