

Alfred Quarterman
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Interviewer: Edward Woodward

Alfred Quarterman was born in 1929 in Tarpon Springs, Florida. He talked about his early childhood memories. He recalled a music and dance gathering on weekends known as a "Nassau Shake," led by Caribbean migrant workers who came to Tarpon Springs to work in the sponging, fishing and saw mill industries (Track 4). For instruments they used mouth harps, washboards, a pot with sticks, their voice, a jug to blow into, and spoons that they rapped against the knee or thigh (Tracks 4 and 5). "Through this music would be ... a pace there where everybody is jumping and dancing and hollering and having a good time," recalled Quarterman, who watched the gatherings when he was about 10 years-old, but didn't participate. "In our own way we tried to imitate by doing our little shake," he laughed.

Quarterman recalled scalloping and fishing for food, not sport (Track 5). He caught red fish and sheepshead in Spring Bayou using shrimp and fiddler crabs. He described catching the fiddler crabs as a "round up," running them into a bucket. Sometimes his family bought mullet for 10 to 15 cents a pound from men driving through the neighborhood with fish on ice in truck beds.

Quarterman talked about his family. His father Richard Quarterman was a master cook (Track 2). He cooked for a prominent family known as the **Bukers (sp?)** who lived in Anclote. Later he cooked on sponge boats and learned to speak fluent Greek. Quarterman recalled eating dinner with Greek families when his father was on sponging trips (Track 3): "I was invited to come over and eat the spaghetti and the goat cheese that they have, Greek candy and stuff like that. They didn't see the division of race as some others did, I would say. It was always a friendly family atmosphere." Quarterman elaborated about the relationship between the black and Greek communities during segregation: "It's a strange thing for those who lived in Tarpon Springs back in those years, in the 30s and the 40s and the early 50s. The relationship between the Greek community and the blacks was very cordial, because if you look at the pigmentation of some Greeks from working on the sponge boat, now some are dark skinned just as well as blacks, they didn't see that division as opposed to whites who would see that division." Quarterman's father left sponging in the early 1940s and moved to New York City (he and his wife separated) where he became a plasterer (Track 2). Quarterman's mother was a domestic (Track 1).

Education was important to Quarterman's family (Track 6) After attending Union Academy in Tarpon Springs, Quarterman went to Pinellas High School in Clearwater (Track 1). But bus service didn't reach Tarpon Springs, so during the week Quarterman boarded with a family his mother knew, and returned to Tarpon Springs by train on weekends (Track 7). Quarterman paid for the room by working at McCrory's Five and Dime - janitorial and stocking duties - from late afternoon to early evenings during the week (Tracks 6 and 7).

During some high school summers, Quarterman visited his father in New York City (Tracks 12 and 13). He recalled the segregated train trip, standing in his designated coach when others had empty seats (Track 13). Coal particles from the train came through open windows. "They would not care if the other coach following that was half empty, you were not allowed to go and sit back there," he said. "You had to stand up. Can you imagine standing up from Ocala to Jacksonville ... people don't realize what kind of hassle you had to go through living under these conditions that you had." Quarterman had an interesting experience after returning to Tarpon Springs as a retiree (Track 7). When he walked into the once segregated train station to speak before the Tarpon Springs Historical Society, he started laughing. Curious onlookers asked why: "All the years that I lived here I never was on the other side of that wall until now," he recalled saying.

After graduating from high school in 1947, Quarterman had several jobs and served in the Korean War before settling in New York City for most of his adult life (Tracks 1, 8, 10, 12-13). During segregation, Quarterman was a traveling salesman in Florida for **Ed Henry Fashionette (Sp)** measuring black customers for clothes (Tracks 8-9). Nylon stockings were a big seller among women. Quarterman talked about an experience that taught him not to judge people. A man in coveralls approached him for measurements. The man bought a suit and three pairs of pants. "And all of a sudden, people started coming into this place that I was," recalled Quarterman (Track 9). "I found out later that this guy owned practically half the town ... they were waiting to see if he would trust me, and then it was like the pied piper. Once he did, then all these people came in. I never had to leave that store, I just sat there and waited for them to come in. That told me one thing: never, never judge people on their outward appearance."

In New York City, Quarterman's early jobs ranged from selling lamps door-to-door to filling food dispensers for Horn and Hardart (Tracks 10 and 12). He also attended tailoring school, repeating much of what he'd already learned at Pinellas High School: drafting, grading, making patterns and jackets (Track 8). But the tailoring field was not open to blacks, he recalled, and his options were limited to alterations, well below his training. Eventually, Quarterman worked for the New York City Transit Authority (Tracks 1 and 15). During a 21 year career there, he rose from bus driver to director within the authority (Track 15). As a bus driver, Quarterman preferred that elderly riders sit up front so that he could talk to them (Track 9). He explained why: "They have lived where I got to go, and I want them to tell me something."

When Quarterman retired in 1990, he returned to Tarpon Springs (Track 1). He wanted to help his hometown (Track 15). He began working with young adults, but their attitude discouraged him (Tracks 1 and 15). Led by the "Spirit of the Lord," he said he was inspired to reclaim the predominantly African American Rose Cemetery, which had fallen in disrepair and had countless unmarked graves (Tracks 1 and Disc 2 Tracks 2, 4 and 6). Since then, Rose Cemetery has become recognized as a state historical site (track 1). But Quarterman's ultimate goal for Rose Cemetery is to be included on the National Register of Historic Places: "Once I have accomplished the national register status, I think that maybe I could be able to relax a little bit and decide, 'Well now it's time for you to go fishing (Disc 2 Track 6).'"