

Harry Krebs

Interview with: Harry Krebs
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Childhood years

GP: Harry, when were you born?

KREBS: I was born in Nambour on the 4th August, 1914 in a Nursing Home. There were no hospitals those days.

GP: And where did you live in the early days of your life?

KREBS: For my first seven and a half years I lived in Nambour, in an old house which is still there, where the B.P. Service Station is on the corner of Arundell Avenue and Currie Street.

GP: And what were your parents doing?

GREBS: My Father was a blacksmith, that was his trade. He served an apprenticeship in Beenleigh, starting in 1890. And eventually came to Nambour and that's where he met my mother and that's where they lived when they were married. They were married in 1913.

GP: You say that you lived at Palmwoods for quite a long while, so you must have moved did you?

KREBS: Yes, well my Grandfather Krebs owned a small thirty acre farm in Palmwoods. He was a carpenter by trade but he did grow small crops to supplement his income at Palmwoods. And when he died in 1921 my Father inherited the farm. Work was very scarce at that time so we shifted to Palmwoods and lived on the farm. Firstly in a slab house, my grandfather's old house. Dad sold the house in Nambour and then built a new house in Palmwoods.

GP: He built the house himself?

KREBS: No, it was built by a Nambour carpenter, but Dad cut and supplied the house stumps for the house from timber on the property.

GP: Is that house still there?

KREBS: It's still there and still being lived in. It was built in 1923.

GP: And just the same as it was then?

KREBS: Yes. Mostly the same, a few little alterations to it.

GP: What do you remember about your life there on that thirty acre farm?

KREBS: Well, it was a good life really. And we went there just before the Great Depression started which meant that when we were hit by the Depression we did have access to lots of fruit and vegetables, because nearly every fruit known was grown on the farm. And we had our own fowls our own cows. We had our own horses, one to ride and on for the ploughing. And we reared a pig every now and then because we had excess milk, and this supplemented our food supply. And the calves which weren't required, particularly the bull calves, we reared them till they were old enough to be killed and we used them too. So food was not a big problem during the Depression. Clothes were, they were hard to buy because of the lack of money. So we did find that a bit of a hardship.

GP: How did you get the clothes?

KREBS: They were either made by Mum or in some cases just bought in the local store. And of course mended by Mum. Boys will be boys and there were often tears. We went to school barefoot and only used shoes for special occasions.

GP: How many were in the family?

KREBS: There were six of us altogether, three boys and three girls. I was the oldest. And one little girl died when she was only a few days old.

GP: Were you all born at home?

KREBS: No, the three boys were born in Nambour in a Nursing Home and when we went to Palmwoods to live my three sisters were born at home. And Mum was assisted by a midwife, a Mrs. Hill from Nambour. She used to come down a week or so before the expected confinement and stay for about a fortnight afterwards and look after the house and look after the children until Mum was able to look after us herself.

GP: What did you do? Being the oldest you would have had some duties, I suppose?

KREBS: We all had duties to do. As we got older, they were extended. I can remember that when I was old enough, when I was in my mid-primary school years, I had to get the cows, bring them in from the pastures and milk them and separate the milk. We milked up to three cows at a time. And in wintertime I had to cut cow cane and elephant grass and also any other grasses around about and chaff it up in the chaffcutter to supplement their food in the winter time. My younger brothers had lesser chores to do, but eventually took over from me as I got older. They took over some of that and I did other things. We had to do a little bit of farm work, there was planting to be done, ploughing to be done. Dad was working as a blacksmith then in Palmwoods, but eventually only a couple of days a week. During the Depression he used to get two days a week work on government projects, which were established during the Depression. One of them was the re-alignment of the railway line from Caboolture to Gympie, and he worked on that, mainly around Palmwoods and Woombye. And he had to walk to work if it was at Woombye, he'd walk there every day. Or he camped in tents supplied and took his food with him. And another job he worked on was the new road opened between Maroochy turnoff, just past the Pineapple to the Caloundra -Landsborough turnoff. That road was built during the Depression time. And when he worked on that, tents were supplied and he used to walk out there on Sunday nights and stay till Saturday and then walk back. When it got to a two day a week job, he walked out, did two days and came home again, and he had to carry all his food with him. And he walked out mainly by following the Buderim tramline from

Palmwoods to Forest Glen were it crossed the new road. And then he'd have to walk from there in whichever direction the work was taking place.

GP: So your mother coped at home?

KREBS: Yes, well Mum had a house full with five children and coped, while Dad was away. And all sorts of things to do - as I said we had fowls, so they had to be cared for and fed.

GP: How did you feed them?

KREBS: They got a lot of kitchen scraps and they also got ground pollard which we bought at the local store. That was mixed into a mash and generally kitchen scraps were mixed with it.

GP: So you did actually buy grain, you didn't grow it?

KREBS: We did, we grew some corn, but not enough, but did grow some corn. It supplemented those things.

School in Nambour and Palmwoods

GP: When did you start school?

KREBS: I started school in Nambour in 1920, when I was six. In the old Nambour School which was where the D.P.I is situated now, between Wimmers' old cordial factory and the Sugar Mill. That was very close to where we lived. I remember the first day I went to school, Mum took me to school and enrolled me. And when it got to eleven o'clock, or little lunch as it's called now, I thought that was the end of it, so I went home. Mum had to take me back again. (LAUGHS)

GP: You'd had enough?

KREBS: Well I just thought that was the end of it, I didn't know any better.

GP: What do you remember of school?

KREBS: I enjoyed school. I can remember some of the teachers I had. Most of them of course have gone now. It was a fairly big school, I imagine by standards those days. There must have been about two or three hundred children there. And it also incorporated a Rural School, where boys and girls after scholarship could go on and learn manual trades, or commercial trades or dressmaking and cooking.

GP: There was no high school?

KREBS: There was no high school and there was no actual certificate. They could go on till about sixteen when most boys then started work or had an apprenticeship if they were lucky.

GP: And you did that?

KREBS: I did that, but in the meantime I went to Palmwoods when I was eight and I finished my primary schooling at Palmwoods. And after I'd finished my primary schooling I went back to Nambour and did what they called a commercial course at the Rural School, which was bookkeeping, typewriting, business methods, with some manual instruction on Fridays. We got a little bit of instruction in woodwork, tinsmithing, metalwork, beekeeping and mechanics.

GP: Do you remember your teacher or teachers?

KREBS: Oh well yes, I do. When I started school in Nambour I had a Miss Prue Low, a Miss Green.

GP: What were they like? Were they very strict?

KREBS: I suppose we thought they were. But not overly so. There was a Miss Clark, who became Mrs. Chadwick of Chadwick's Clothing Store in Nambour.

GP: So there were mostly women teachers?

KREBS: I think the infant classes, they were mostly women teachers, but of course there were men too. And the headmaster was a Mr. Bill Steele. I didn't have any contact with any men teachers until I went back there to the Rural School part of it. When I went to Palmwoods School it was only a one teacher school, then a two-teacher school. The headmaster was a Mr. William Frawley. He was there for all of the time I was at Palmwoods. He was there as headteacher. And as the school gradually grew and I remember a new classroom being added to it while I was there.

Pupil teachers

KREBS: In those days it was before the Training College was started, young people were appointed there as pupil teachers after they passed scholarship. So they would go there at fourteen and they'd continue on from there. One of them was a Bill Cranny.

GP: What did they do, those young people?

KREBS: Oh they took charge of classes under the direction of the Head. It was mostly in the same room as the Head, it was easier for him to supervise it. I think they got a bit of a rough time from the older pupils. They were only fourteen to fifteen when they started, and they were looking after boys of up to thirteen and fourteen. So they not only supervised our sport, they played with us, when we played football or cricket. And sometimes I think the boys got a bit rough. Well I can't remember if they all did it, but I think sometimes that's the way it developed.

GP: They must have been the ones that were quite good at school, would that be so?

KREBS: Well they wouldn't have been appointed had they not passed what was then called the scholarship examination, which was the entrance examination to secondary school.

Scholarship examination

GP: Do you remember doing that scholarship examination?

KREBS: Yes, it was a written examination, the whole of it was written. I think it was a two day examination. Usually with all children going to one central school, in those days possible Nambour. And all of it was written. You got a folded sheet of questions and you had to write your answers in the spaces allotted.

GP: Was it a big deal? Were you nervous?

KREBS: Oh I think everyone was a bit nervous about it.

GP: What was the outcome of the results?

KREBS: Well according to your pass, I mean, there were scholar-ships allotted, but only very few. I think there were only maybe twenty scholarships for Queensland. And those who got

scholarships would get some sort of reimbursement for their school fees or whatever. But there were no high schools between Gympie and Brisbane in those days, so you had to board. Anyone living in the Nambour district, if they went to high school their parents had to pay their board. Which meant that they didn't come home every weekend, they came home on special weekends or at holiday time. And for most of the time they lived in the town where the school was. Totally different from now, when there are high schools within bus carting distance of very child.

Walking to school

GP: I suppose the children then had to get to school their own way?

KREBS: Yes there were no buses. There were very few cars. And most children walked, some rode horses. And as they got older some even rode push bikes, but most schools had a horse paddock, and the children used to put their horses in it for the day, and they rode three to five miles, to my recollection of it. At one stage at the end of my schooling, I was the only one in the class, in the highest class at the school, and so Mum suggested I go to Nambour where there was a full class of my age. And so I walked to Nambour, which was five miles. I'd be walking a mile and a half every day to school from my home to Palmwoods School so I didn't consider it a great hardship. At the latter end of that time I acquired a very second-hand push bike and I did push it a lot too, because there was seven hills between Palmwoods and Nambour on the old back road, and I had to push it up each one of them; so it was alright going down hill, but it was a push bike going up hill.

GP: So you walked five miles. Did you have to do anything else before you set out for school?

KREBS: By that time my younger brothers were getting on to the stage where they could take over with the milking and other chores. I did have jobs to do at home, but I was relieved of some of it because I had to leave early to school and got home late. It took me about an hour and ten minutes to walk the five miles. I walked quite a bit of it at a sort of a jog trot.

GP: You didn't have a watch I don't suppose?

KREBS: No, no I didn't have a watch.

GP: Were you ever late for school?

KREBS: No, I think sometimes I must have got there just about when school went in, if I was held up for some reason. But mostly I left early enough to get there in time. And I found the walking interesting with the various things to see on the way. Koala bears were plentiful along the way, and the various birds and their nests; the little pardalote that used to burrow their nests in the embankments along the road. By the time I got to Nambour I'd sort of picked up with other pupils, particularly from Woombye on, who were going to the same school. One family I can remember particularly were the Brinkleys who lived half way between Woombye and Nambour. We used to walk in together.

GP: It's a lot different from now, isn't it?

KREBS: It's a great difference now of course, with school buses. Another difference I think today is that the children don't get kept in so much because they've got to catch a school bus. If we did anything that needed keeping in for we had to stay and write lines or re-do our work because; well we walked home anyway, so it doesn't matter if you were an hour late. But now you've got to catch a bus.

GP: It sounds very strict to me. In a way I look back and I think well it must have been very strict and harder on the children then.

KREBS: It may have been. Now that we can compare it, I suppose you'd say it was. But because there was no comparison it was the norm and so you accepted it. Oh I didn't begrudge what I had to do to get to school and homework and any of that sort of thing, because everybody had to do it. So you just accepted it as the normal thing.

GP: Can you tell me when you had to make decisions like who did what chores, like who fed the cows and chooks, who made those decisions?

KREBS: Well I suppose my parents made them but it sort of came so quietly and naturally, I mean, it's my job to do this, it's Alwyn's job to do that, and Ken's job to do something else. There was no question about it, the biggest boy did the heaviest work. Another job I had to do, and the other boys did the same, was cut wood for the fire. They were all wood stoves those days. So we had to first of all, get small logs of wood, which Dad probably cut up in the first place, and put them on a sawhorse, it was called, and then cut them into blocks and split them. If I was the one that was splitting the wood, the younger boys had to carry it in to the wood box near the stove.

KREBS: And they had to get the kindling wood to light the fire in the morning. By the way, the fire in our home very seldom we t out because we used iron pots and iron kettles and urn kept a fire burning all the time, a small fire. And without much effort she could just stir the fire up and make a cup of tea at any time of the day or night. The only time the fire went out would be from midnight till daylight.

Motor Mechanic Apprenticeship

GP: When did you decide that you'd like to be a motor mechanic?

KREBS: I suppose I got the idea, firstly because motor cars were just coming to the district and of course it was a very exciting thing for a boy to see those cars. And secondly, because on Fridays at the Rural School, when we had manual training, one of the things we did was motor mechanics. And a chap from the Nambour garage, Whalley's Garage, used to give us instruction. Those days the instruction in manual classes was mainly provided by tradesmen in the district. The blacksmith was a man called Redsell from Yandina who came down on a day a week to teach blacksmithing. The chap who taught leather work also came down from his business to teach it and the man from this garage was a motor mechanic who taught us mechanical work, and I sort of showed an aptitude for it, so I decided I'd like to work with motor cars. It wasn't an easy thing to get a job so I just kept going to this commercial class at Nambour. And eventually because my Father and I had both been asking around for a job as an apprentice, a man at Palmwoods called Harry Reed said he had a job for me as an apprentice. He had two garages at the time, one in Palmwoods and one at Nambour. And the one at Nambour also did retreading of tyres. And he wanted me to be apprenticed in Nambour. So I got this apprenticeship, and batched, at t e Nambour garage, which was situated just alongside where the North Coast Rubber Works is today. It was the next building to that. North Coast Rubber was a blacksmith shop and our garage - H.G. Reed and Son was the name of the firm – was next door; and that's where I started my apprenticeship. Besides learning the mechanical trade, I learnt the vulcanising and retreading trade as part of it. And my apprenticeship papers show that, that I learnt vulcanising and retreading. Those days an apprenticeship was far five years and we studied by correspondence. The Apprenticeship Board in Brisbane used to send up papers every week, and we had to write our answer's and send them back. The only instruction we had was from our employer and in my case I was very pleased that he was ever ready to help me and he used to spend extra hours sitting there showing me various things. And showing me how to do trade drawing and that sort of thing. There were no apprenticeship training classes in the country, no doubt there were in Br1sbane, but there weren't up here. And all of our study was done in our own time. We worked our normal eight hour day, forty-four hours a week, and we did our study at night. We didn't get any time off during the week, as apprentices do now, and we didn't go to Brisbane.

GP: What was your salary?

KREBS: I started at twelve shillings and sixpence, or \$1.25 a week.

GP: What date would that be?

KREBS: I started my apprenticeship on the 13th September 1930.

GP: And five years you did it for?

KREBS: Yes, an interesting thing happened. After I'd been serving my apprenticeship for three years - I said interesting, that's the wrong word - something happened which changed my apprenticeship a little bit. My Father died in 1933 and my employer, Mr Reed said, "Well Harry, it'd be good if you could be home a night with your mother now, being the oldest of the family." I was nineteen then. So he took me to Palmwoods to finish my apprenticeship and sent his son to Nambour to take my place. So I finished my apprenticeship and worked with him for about another year at Palmwoods on the site where Russ's Garage is today. During the time I was an apprentice with him, Mr Reed and I built the house that Mr Russ lived in. Mr Reed did the whole thing himself and I was his assistant. He even put his own roof on, although people said you'd need a plumber for it

GP: This is outside your forty-four hours?

KREBS: No, work of course was very quiet then; it was depression time and we built the it probably took us eighteen months to build that house. But we built it when we had time. Of course Mr Reed worked on it at weekends but I didn't. He probably spent all his weekends on it. I can remember getting the stumps for the house, by going up into the bush, to an area where Mr Reed had got permission to cut timber, and cutting these trees down and cutting them into length and then putting them one or two at a time on the back of an Essex utility and bringing them into the local sawmill where they were squared. Then they had to be brought back to the site and put in the ground. I think some of those stumps would still be under Mr. Russ' house.

GP: So after your five years as an apprentice, what happened then?

KREBS: I was still working for Mr. Reed but I heard that Sims Bros in Kenilworth who had the only garage out there, and it's still the only one there, were looking for a motor mechanic. And I asked Mr. Reed what he thought of the idea, should I apply for the job. And he said he was quite happy to keep me on, but it would be better for me to have a change of employment, because I'd get new ideas and meet new customers and perhaps be working on different vehicles. Because it was a forestry area where tractors were being used and timber trucks, which we didn't see in Palmwoods. So he said use my phone and ring them up. So I did and I got the job. So I went to Sims Bros in Kenilworth and stayed there for four years. I went to Brisbane and worked for a garage or two down there. Then to Pomona, to Page Motors, the Ford people, and I worked with there for a while. I also worked as a mechanic on a road job, when the road was widened between Nambour and Yandina. I was a mechanic on that job, looking after all the trucks on the job.

GP: So there was never any difficulty in getting jobs?

KREBS: Oh, no I think you just had to go out and get one.

KREBS: I remember at that time when I got the job at Pomona there was an ad in the paper for a mechanic wanted in Stanthorpe, which I replied to, but in the meantime I got the job at Pomona. So I had to write to the people in Stanthorpe and tell them I'd found a job. So there were jobs advertised in the paper.

GP: Was that the only time you found a job in the papers?

KREBS: Yes, the time I looked for a job in the papers. The other times, I heard of the people wanting someone. After working in garages around the district and in Brisbane, in 1946, (I was married then,) we came to Maroochydore and started a garage under what was called Jazzland Dance Hall.

GP: Was this your first garage of your own?

KREBS: It was the only one that I had of my own.

Vehicles in the 30s

GP: Can we just go back to the sort of vehicles that you were dealing with and the sort of work that you had, before we go to '46, just back to the '30s. What were the features of motor mechanics and how have they changed?

KREBS: Well I started work in 1930 and most of the cars at that time only had two wheel brakes instead of four wheel. The majority of them were touring cars not sedans, and the common ones were Fords and Chevs, Dodges, Studibakers, De Sotos, Essex, Rugby, several others.

GP: Were they all American?

KREBS: Those were all American: we still had Austin and Morris from England.

GP: Were there any Japanese cars?

KREBS: No, no Japanese cars at all.

GP: Were they simpler mechanically?

KREBS: I think their mechanics were simpler. But you had to know more about them, because you couldn't just get replacement parts or exchange parts. Well you couldn't exchange parts at all and replacement parts were not easy to get. So you had to make a lot of parts: and if you had trouble with the generator, for instance, you had to find out what the trouble was, remove the generator and repair it. And replace it. Today, in most cases it's possible to get an exchange generator or starter or even an engine. That's the common way to do it today. So that a mechanic today can repair a vehicle without actually having to know a great deal about what's wrong with the part he's replacing. That's possible. But I think the further out in the country you are, the more you're left to your own resources.

GP: When you say generator, a lot of them were crank started, so what did you need a generator for?

KREBS: A generator was to generate electricity for the battery to supply current for the lights and for the ignition. Today we still have the same thing, it's called an alternator today. So it supplies current for all of those things, plus starting the car. There were self-starters on cars those days, but a few of them were cranked more than they were started by a motor. All cars had a crank handle.

GP: That's my memory, using the crank. (LAUGHS)

KREBS: (LAUGHS) They had a crank handle because those days, I suppose, batteries weren't as efficient as they are today and they were often quite flat so you had to crank the car.

GP: In what way were the batteries different?

KREBS: I suppose they've improved in technology and they've made alternators instead of generators, which produce more power at low speed, so the battery is charged even when a car is only doing a low speed. In those days with the generator the faster you went the more charge you got in the battery. So a lot of idling at traffic lights and so on, would flatten your battery because - a generator would not be charging at idling speed. But now an alternator produces a full charge even at idling speed.

GP: What proportion of people do you think would have had motor cars in the 1930s?

KREBS: Well in those days it would be mostly business people who had them. Very few just private individuals had a car. As time went on they did have them. And they generally had a fairly basic type of car that didn't cost very much. Farmers got them of course to bring their produce to the railhead or to town. And quite a lot of timber work in the area so there were trucks that were able to bring logs into the mill. But the biggest trucks we had before the Second World War would have had a capacity of about thirty hundred weight. There were many one ton trucks and then thirty hundredweight and then two ton, but I can't remember on this area anything over that capacity until wartime. And then after the war they started to get three ton, four ton, five ton and now they're twenty ton, some of them.

GP: The roads wouldn't have been able to handle the bigger ones, would they?

KREBS: They wouldn't have been able to handle it. The roads, of course were just dirt roads with a bit of gravel sometimes, and there were no bitumen roads in this Shire, until about, well there was one in about 1926. There was some bitumen from about the Big Pineapple down to Kuskopf's corner that's the intersection of the Buderim Road - Jones Road and the new main road. That was the first bit of bitumen and the other bit, the early bit, was from the Palmwoods School to Montville.

GP: How did that get bitumened? I'm quite curious about that road

KREBS: When it was first opened it was to replace what they called the Razorback Road, which went up through Hunchy to Montville which was very, very steep. And very hard to negotiate in bad weather and it was very rough. So they got some engineers to survey a new route to Montville in the mid '20's and they built the present Montville - Palmwoods Road. At first it was dirt or gravel and a few years later it was bitumened in three stages. I think the last stage of it was 1929.

GP: What was at Montville that they needed to travel to?

KREBS: Oh it was a thriving farming community. It was all farming, they had strawberries, pineapples, lots of bananas and other fruits, citrus, and their outlet was Palmwoods through the Railway Station. It was the shortest way, much shorter than going via Maleny to Landsborough. And of course on the dirt roads in bad weather, in very wet weather they were just impassable.

Garage in Maroochydore

GP: So coming back to Maroochydore, this is your first business that you actually ran yourself?

KREBS: Yes, well I worked in Brisbane during the late part of the War as a motor mechanic at the Ford Motor Company's assembly plant at Eagle Farm and eventually became assembly line foreman. At that time we were just building military vehicles, Bren gun carriers and another part of the Ford Motor Company were building army personnel landing barges. So after the war ended we decided that we'd like to strike out on our own so we found these premises at Maroochydore and opened a garage there in February 1946. And there were only two other garages in Maroochydore at the time. Of course we started off in a very small way and gradually built the business up. Bought an old home which was just behind the garage,

lived there for a number of years. And eventually sold the garage in July 1958. After having a round-Australia trip by van, I looked for another job and I got a job as a company representative for a Brisbane firm. I covered all the area from Caboolture to Gympie and out to Kingaroy. My job was to sell motor parts and tools and also engine reconditioning. I got the job mainly because I was a motor mechanic and I knew engine reconditioning. I had done reboring and all that sort of thing during my other garage work. And I was able to advise my customers whether we could reclaim some engine or not. I did that up until my retirement.

GP: So running the garage in Maroochydore, how many hours would you have worked each day?

KREBS: There was no set limit. I mean the garage was officially opened from eight o'clock in the morning till five in the evening, including Saturdays. But if the work was there, well you worked longer hours and you went back after tea. I mean, many a night, even two or three nights a week, I'd go back and work till ten, eleven, twelve o'clock at night to finish a job for someone that wanted his car back on the road.

GP: What were some of the other things you did in Maroochydore?

Volunteer Fire Brigade

KREBS: Oh well in 1946 when I came here, the Department of Health and Home Affairs, let it be known that they had a surplus of fire-fighting equipment, mainly trailer pumps, which they would make available to any town or district who would form a volunteer fire brigade. So a group of businessmen in Maroochydore got themselves together and decided they would avail themselves of this opportunity and we started a fire brigade. It was a volunteer brigade and none of us knew anything about fire-fighting, but there was a similar brigade already working at Yandina and then in Nambour. So we gained a little bit of knowledge from them and assistance. We got one of these pumps and - there was no water supply here then - so we had to use either tank water at the various houses that might have been threatened, or from the river. So to do that we needed a lot more hose than what was supplied with this pump. So our wives and other ladies, they formed a Committee to raise money by street stalls and balls, raffles, competitions. We bought the extra hoses and equipment we needed and eventually bought a four-wheel drive vehicle, a blitz vehicle and we mounted our pump on it. It made us more mobile and we could back down to the river and lots of places and get the water we required.

GP: Were there more fires in those days?

KREBS: Yes there were a lot of fires, not so many house fires, because there weren't so many houses; but Maroochydore was only a strip town then with buildings along the riverfront and nothing behind it but scrub and grass. And there was often fires in this bush area which threatened the houses on the front. A lot of the houses were only occupied over the holidays and their yards were overgrown and so if a fire started in the scrub behind, say a house on the Cod Hole, it could quite easily be burnt down if we didn't put the fire out before it got through the house yard. And so a lot of our fires were grass fires which were threatening houses. We had several house fires and commercial fires in the area. That was our main problem, all this bushland right up to the back fences of the houses in Aerodrome Road, the Cod Hole Road, as Bradman Avenue was called then. Even Picnic Point had There was a lot of vacant allotments between houses too and the owners may have not lived here and so they were not looked after and kept clean. And they were a source of fire risk too.

GP: Do you remember any particular fires as standing out?

KREBS: We had quite a lot of fires. I suppose one of the biggest fires we attended was when Wilkinson's building, that's on the corner diagonally opposite the hotel, caught fire one very hot day and we were able to put it out without the fire spreading to a neighbouring premises. It destroyed most of the contents of Wilkinson's building but as those shops were more or less

joined up on both sides of it, we were lucky we were able to save it; and that water was pumped from the river, by going down between houses. I remember we had to back down between two houses to get to the river and there was a picket fence in the road and we couldn't stop to dismantle it so we just backed the truck over it. The fence was replaced later. We had a ladder with us, so we could get up on high tank stands and put our suction hose in the tank. And if that one ran dry, we'd get the next one on the neighbour's tank. If we drained someone's tank the water was replaced. So that went on till about 1960 when water was reticulated to Maroochydore and with that we got a permanent fire officer. We still acted as his volunteers for a while until we got another officer and eventually a full crew. And now it's a full-time fire brigade.

Music and bands

GP: What other community things were you involved in?

KREBS: I was involved in all the normal community things like Progress Associations and the Ambulance Committee. One thing I was involved in for a long time was the Maroochydore Brass Band. There was a brass band in Nambour, the Nambour Town Band but we formed a band here. And I played in that for about ten or twelve years I suppose.

GP: What did you play?

KREBS: I played first cornet. Also I became secretary of the Bank Committee for a while. We used to play around Maroochydore at weekends out on the river front and played for various community things. I remember playing for Anzac Day parades, marches. We took part in band contests, particularly when they were in Nambour.

GP: Did you play at dances at all?

KREBS: No, this was a District Brass Band. No we didn't play at dances, but members of the band were musicians in other spheres as well. Before this I used to play in a dance band, a few years, but not the cornet, I used to play violin.

GP: Which did you prefer?

KREBS: I like playing the cornet, but I suppose the violin was the main instrument because I started to learn it when I was still going to school.

GP: How did you come by a violin at that stage?

KREBS: Well I was always interested in music and I wanted to play a piano. But of course in Depression times we couldn't afford a piano and Dad said to me one day, I can buy a violin for - I think he said five pound. He said, "If I get it for you will you learn it?" So I said I would. So we got this violin. When I look back at this violin it was a very very crude instrument, but at least it was the basis for my career as a violin player. So I learnt the violin.

GP: Did someone teach you?

KREBS: Yes, well Dad knew a man who could play the violin and he'd arranged with him to give me lessons. His name was Bill Marks, he lived in Palmwoods. When I moved to Nambour to start work, at sixteen, I got to know a Mrs Edwards who was a violinist in the Nambour Orchestra, and she taught me for about three years. By that time I'd started playing music for, just for our own entertainment with a group of other young chaps. Another bloke played a banjo and a saxophone and someone else played something else. And then we got to know a girl, Phyllis Muller at Woombye, who played the piano and played it very very well, for dance music. We got a few little engagements playing for little social things, voluntarily. Someone said, "How about coming and playing for us?" So we did, and that led to getting

engagements to play for dances. So Muller's Band was formed and I played with it until I left the district to go to Sims Bros at Kenilworth. I've always retained an interest in playing and through my mother, who played the old button accordion and mouth organ, I inherited those instruments and eventually learnt to play them. So I still play them and I've still got the instruments. At the present moment I'm a member of a musical group at the Palmwoods Senior Citizens.

GP: So in those days you wouldn't have much radio would you, or records? So for entertainment, you made it yourself.

KREBS: We didn't have a radio when we were children, not many people did. By the time I was a teenager radios were becoming common but in the meantime we amused ourselves by having sing songs round someone's piano. I remember young people used to come over to our place and Mum used to play the accordion while we danced on the verandah. We used that also for sing songs. By that time I could play the mouth organ and accordion a bit too. I could take the instruments with me when we went out on trips to the beach and so on.

GP: What were some of the songs?

KREBS: Oh well - there were so many of them, it's fair to say just which ones we played then. But even in those days the common songs that we played for dancing were 'After the Ball' and 'Two Little Girls in Blue', that sort of song. There were hundreds of them, and the first war-time songs like 'A Long Way to Tipperary' and 'Pack Up Your Troubles'. Course our local songs like 'Gundagai', 'Jolly Swagman', they were popular then. All the music hall hits and the light opera thing, Gilbert and Sullivan stuff, was very popular. Other songs I think of in the '30's was things like 'Red Sails in the Sunset', 'Girl of my Dreams'. Oh gosh I know hundreds of them but it's hard to think of them just on the spur of the moment.

GP: Did other people sing along very much or did you just listen?

KREBS: Oh we had - people sang. I don't think any of us were trained to sing, but you know people just sang for the joy of it.

Dances and balls

GP: And dances, what were they like?

KREBS: They were what you'd call old-time dances today, where the main dances were the waltz, the schottische, the barn dance, the mazurka and the veleta; eventually the foxtrot and the one step and the more modern dances came into it. In those days we also played or danced square dances - not the square dance where you have a caller today, that's the Americanised version of it - but the lancers and the Alberts and the quadrilles, which were a set type of square dance where you danced various figures in their order one after the other. Very boisterous dances, there would be eight in a group, four couples, and you danced with your partner and the other women in the group. You cross over and change partners and all that sort of thing.

GP: It sounds like what we call bush dances now.

KREBS: Yes, I suppose you'd call it a bush dance, yes. They just called them old-time dances. I remember spectacular part of dancing those days, particularly if there was a ball, was what they call the Grand Parade. The first thing that happened at night, was that everybody lined up with a partner in the middle of the hall, one couple behind the other in a great long line, from the front to the back. And then the music started and they paraded around the hall. First of all going round in a great circle, each couple following each other round and then dividing and going round in two circles, each second couple going at a different direction and then forming up in fours and eights and so on. The call that the Grand Parade or the Grand March. That was part of any important ball.

It was most impressive those days because the men dressed in suits and the girls were all in long frocks, beautiful frocks. I suppose they got one specially made for a particular ball. But it looked so graceful and colourful to see all of these couples on the floor. Most of the men would be in black suits and for a ball they'd have a black bow tie. For ordinary dances they just went in lighter suits or sports coats and flannel trousers. I can remember that. I suppose I remember the spectacle more because for a lot of them I was upon the stage playing and you're looking down on it all while it was happening.

GP: That would have been a major entertainment?

KREBS: I think it was the entertainment - I mean every organisation in the district had a ball every year. Lesser dances were used for raising money for various organisations. But all the churches had a ball. There'd be the Catholic Ball and the Church of England ball and so forth; later on the Fire Brigade ball, the Masonic ball, football club and cricket club ball. You name it, whatever organisation there was in the town, they had a ball. The Ladies Committees for those various clubs usually worked in the supper room getting a supper ready. Course the supper was a big part of it, it wasn't just a cup of tea and a sandwich it was a real supper. With the fire going out the back with the four gallon kerosene tins boiling on it, for the tea, and the coffee. Usually one of the older chappies in the place looked after the boiling of the pot and that was his job. It wouldn't matter what ball it was, that chappie would be out there boiling the billy. In most cases the same women would be the committee for the various organisations. And if it was a church committee, the other church groups all banded together to help. And they helped one another like that, it wasn't just say the Church of England doing the ball on their own, the Catholics or any others would be there too, to help, and so it went on; the Ambulance ball, the Show Ball, was the ball of the year.

The district show

GP: They'd have a show princess.

KREBS: Yes, and those days every town had its own little show. Nambour had a show and Woombye and Palmwoods and Maroochydore and Buderim, Montville; all these places had their own show. It was only since the War that they've gradually amalgamated and become one big North Coast Show. But as far as we were concerned as kids, you went to the Palmwoods Show, then you went to the Woombye one, and then you went to the Nambour one. I can remember going to the Buderim Show on the Buderim tram, going up on the steam tramway to Buderim to the show. I can remember going to the Montville Show and the Maroochydore Show. The Maroochydore Show used to be held in the ground to the west of the present State School.

GP: What was on display in the Maroochy Show?

KREBS: They'd have a pavilion with cooking and needle work and sweets and vegetables. Then they'd have another area with fowls and dogs and cattle and horses. There'd be the odd little sideshow. A lot of them were competitive things like the knock-ems and coconut shies and things like that. Course there's always the fairy floss stall and that sort of thing. One of the things they had at some of these shows was a ploughing competition. A man would bring his own horse and plough and they'd have to plough a furrow. And the prize was to the man who could plough the straightest furrow with his horse and plough. Catching the greasy pig was another pastime. They'd grease a pig, put grease all over him and let him go and the men had to chase him and catch him. They could all chase him alright, but they couldn't all catch him cause they couldn't hold him. But I can remember the men disappearing into the scrub behind Palmwoods Show grounds one day with the pig heading for the scrub and all these men in their good suits disappearing into the bush after this pig. I don't know what the prize was, it might even have been the pig, I'm not sure.

END OF INTERVIEW