I Okay it’s going now. Right, so, as a kind of way in to talking about what we’ve just talked about, like community and how social relationships have changed I thought it might be good as a starting point to just think about a day recently, that could have been yesterday and talk me through what you did in that day and the people that you met or communicated with during that day.

P Yes, erm, yesterday well I had my grandchild with me yesterday. He’d been with us for the, for a couple of weeks and his parents came back to collect him and they live in London, so yesterday was more or less taken up with this handing back procedure, we took them over to Seaford and they went to the indoor play area, we spent a couple of hours with the parents there while the kids were busy on the soft area, chatting with them, my daughter and her husband. After that, we came back and they packed up and left back for London and that took up the day really.

I Okay, looks like we’re about to be invaded. Wouldn’t you know it!

P The leisure centre in Seaford is very good, it’s only three years old you see. He enjoys that.

I Do they have a padded, jump around space?

P Oh they have a massive area of padded, particularly, they have an adventure type playground which is all kids orientated and everything’s padded and they’ve got a wide expanse all with padded floor with lots of soft toys and pyramids and they build castles and all sorts of things. That keeps him going.

I So, back track a bit, they were with you most of the day?

P Yes, there’s two, one who’s six and one who’s three and we’ve had the one who’s six is going to school, the three year old we’ve had for ten days and he went back yesterday after the ten day stay with us down here and when the parents came down with his older brother, the six year old, instead of sitting at home with the two kids, battling it out all the time we took them to show them the soft play area because over the last ten days we’ve taken him there about five or six times, he’s always saying, ‘let’s go to Dino’s’, they call it Dino’s, which is an abbreviation of dinosaur I believe. That’s why it’s called Dino’s. It’s got a dinosaur theme, the place and so… if we gave a choice, he was always, ‘can we go to Dino’s, can we go to Dino’s?’

I And do you see them a lot? Do you get to see the grandchildren a lot?

P Yes, a lot and which might be relevant, we see them a lot through Skype as well and certainly when we’re away for the winter we’re in contact every other day or so on Skype.

I Oh, okay. Yeah that’s nice isn’t it? And did you, when did you start using Skype? Was that a recent thing?

P Oh, four or five years probably, one of the earliest ones of it possibly? I don’t know. Yeah, four, five years ago. Because as I say, with us always going away for the winter and our daughter’s in London we communicate, the cheapest way of doing it, rather than telephone calls and of course now it’s all video, when we first went on I don’t believe it had video, but now it’s got video on.

I Yes, so even when you’re not in the country you still see them regularly.

P Oh yes, and they chat with us on Skype.

I And they’re easy on Skype are they?

P What the kids? Oh yeah! They’re better than we are! Even the three year old, on the keyboard, he finds his own stuff on there.

I That’s lovely.

P Oh it’s amazing to watch. The ones who were born to it.

I They do it so quickly don’t they?

P It’s just natural to them. It’s just part of life. He’s goes onto it, if my computer’s around he’ll switch it on and as I say, he’s only just three, about three years and two months he is and he finds whatever he wants and that’s it.

I Yeah, that’s lovely.

P If he wants to go to Skype, he’ll go to Skype and if he wants to go to his own things, games and what have you he goes to that.

I That’s nice. And I mean it’s perhaps a silly question, but your relationship with your grandchildren is really important obviously.

P Oh, it is yeah, very much so. Yeah.

I And it’s not… how often do you see them, how often do you… is it something that you’d like them to be closer or…

P Every two weeks. At least every two weeks we drive up to London, they come down here. His parents went off to America for a couple of weeks and about four or five weeks ago and we had them both then.

I For the whole two weeks?

P Yes, while his parents went to America, yeah.

I Right. I bet that was a tiring couple of weeks.

P Oh when the two are together they’re terrible. Two boys and sibling rivalry and all that business and when you’ve got one, either one, it’s totally different set-up then, but when the two get together you’ve got to constantly keep them amused, separated.

I Ah, great. So moving on to, so one of the things that we’re interested in is this whole notion of community. So what do you think, when I say this word community what does it mean to you?

P Well the environment in which you live, which includes the human contacts and the social aspects of where you live in the area that you live in and then of course there’s a wider community, which you’ve got to embrace of course in your study. I don’t know, I mean the local, personal community or the community at large.

I I mean do you, as an example if you had to describe an event that you’ve been involved in, for instance, where you’ve, or something that’s happened where you’ve felt a strong sense of community? What would that be?

P Recent events… I can’t really say. On a community level, on a local family level, plenty of things, but not on a public service type level, no.

I Right, okay, so you said, ‘not recently’, are there things earlier in your life that you would have said there was a strong sense of community?

P Yeah, well we have residents association where I live and which is a small community, we go out to lots of social events around here, we probably come here, probably around averagely once a month.

I And what kind of things do you come to here?

P Well, on a Thursday there’s a market. Every Thursday. We usually time our visit to that. So, we’ll all go into the one with the ladies in there who’s husband’s a fisherman and he sells the fish and he’s got a boat and my wife likes a lady who’s in there selling spices and stuff. I think she’s an Indian lady, or Sulanese or something like that. So we usually time our visits to go on a Thursday when the market is on and we’ll go to the market and then we’ll go in and we’ll have a meal.

I So do you, so you come here for the market, but do you get to meet lots of people while you’re here?

P Yeah, we meet people, we meet people, as I say we meet people who are on the stalls for various reasons. As I say, one is the wife of a fisherman that we know, who’s got a fishing boat, his own fishing boat, commercial fisherman he is.

I What from Newhaven?

P Yes.

I Oh, great.

P As I say, he is a commercial fisherman, that’s his fulltime job. We know him. So we come and support her, we buy a bit of fish off her and then there’s this other lady who my wife is friendly with who is the Indian lady or Sulanese.

I Yeah, okay. So you have met people through this space?

P Yes, if we see something on the noticeboards that takes our interest we would go.

I So do you feel like, that family gives you a sense of community as well?

P Oh yes, family and our neighbours and friends. We’ve got several friends in the area that visit and we visit them. All our neighbours. We’ve got apartments. There’s only 21 apartments and we’re friends with those and you know, we visit each other and generally keep an eye on each other and we’ve got two friends who’ve just gone to Spain for a couple of weeks who live two doors down from us and we’re taking in their mail and checking on them and so…

I In the summer I guess that’s vital isn’t it?

P In the summer, yes.

I Yeah, okay. So there’s something about people nearby that you have a good relationship with?

P Yeah.

I So, one of the questions on here is, in the area where you live do you ever have conversations with people that you don’t know very well?

P Yes. Oh yes. People that you just meet or acquaintances or something.

I I mean, is your area quite a chatty place? Do people strike up conversations? Is that…

P Are you talking about talking to neighbours or people you just meet?

I Well either… is that a difference then, if you know someone lives nearby?

P Well, you naturally talk to people who reside in the same block of apartments as you do. You’re on either close terms or just acquaintance terms, just a ‘hi’, or a couple of comments or whatever. And then you’ve got other ones who are friendly and you are more friendly with those than others.

I You mean there’s those kind of different depths of friendship?

P Yes, yes. Yeah. And I live right opposite the river, our apartments look over the river and everybody fishes along that stretch, go fishing and I go fishing and the only time that I go fishing is when I can look out my window and watch them and if I see them pull out fish…

I You know it’s time!

P … I think, well I’m not going to go and sit down there and wait, but if I see them pulling in mackerel I think, ‘ooo they’re biting’, so I’ll get my rod out of the garage and go over and join them.

I Oh great.

P And I’ve met a lot of people through that. Through fishing actually. You know, there’s always five or six people fishing…

I They’re quite eager to share their…

P Yeah, you’ve got a common interest so, you’ve got a common interest so over the years I got to know quite a few people that way.

I That’s nice. What kind of fish do they catch down there?

P Mackerel or… Mackerel.. well, in the summer it’s Mackerel you see them pull them out two or three at a time and when I see them pulling out the Mackerel I’ll get out the Mackerel, but you get the other ones, you stick a worm on the end and throw it in and wait around for hours and then quite happily go home with nothing. I’m more of a mercenary type! If I see the Mackerel coming in then I’m down there, but I won’t throw a worm in and wait. I might as well wait indoors in comfort and I can play on my computer, or watch the television, read a book or what have you and I can watch and if I have to see a couple of Mackerel coming in over that side I think, ‘hello, supper tonight’, you know.

I Time to get the rod out. Fantastic. So one of the other things that I thought might be interesting is how do you think your experience of community, so some of the things that we’ve talked about, you know, how well you know your neighbours, organisations in your area, how do you think that has changed during your lifetime?

P Oh well, yes. Has changed. Has changed a lot. I was born, or raised in a small village where everybody knew everybody and I could name everybody that lived in our road from up one side and down the other. These days, I live in a small apartment block and I don’t know everybody, whereas as I say, in my young days we lived in a long road and I knew everybody in the whole street. Every house. I knew everybody and they knew me and…

I And how does that change the way you live or the way you feel about the way you live?

P Yeah well, it does make you in a way regret it because two years ago I went to New Zealand and New Zealand suddenly reminded me of what England was like 30 years ago. I realised how much it had changed and it wasn’t as I say, until I went to New Zealand that I realised how much England had changed, because England to New Zealand reminded me as I say of England thirty to forty years ago.

I Right and what kind of things do you think have changed?

P Well, the social atmosphere, the shopping and everybody at their local, they use local shops whereas everything now is shopping malls and what have you and they have a better community spirit than we have here and a far wider one than we have here. They tend to have little social circles here instead of a wider sort of community. So it seems to be social circles, you could almost go as far as saying cliques. It’s not such an expansive…

I Yeah, you mean that it doesn’t feel like a single community but it’s lots of different groups?

P Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

I Why do you think that is?

P Possibly because of travel I think. People didn’t move like they move today and the movement of people… people tended to stay in areas a lot longer, being here people come, they go and I think it’s the movement of people, people didn’t move houses like they move these days. Families didn’t stay closer together than they do today and whereas today they don’t go hundreds of miles away in this country they even go abroad and places like that and so you get the parents just alone and it’s not that family grouping that’s maintained like it used to be.

I So did family used to be more connected to the broader community? Is that what you mean as well?

P Yes, yes, because the family would stay together and each individual family would be linked for a lot longer and a lot closer. Your neighbours weren’t always changing, whereas today, neighbours come and neighbours go frequently.

I So, there’s the sort of speed of change as well isn’t there?

P Yeah, yeah. And it’s all to do with the movement of people, the way that, nowadays people come and go a lot more than they used to.

I Do you think that’s just because we can travel, or do you think that there are real needs for people to travel?

P I suppose it’s because we can travel and need to travel as well I suppose. The need to and the ability to.

I It’s difficult to separate those two I guess isn’t it?

P Yes, the opportunities arise because of the ease of travel and the way people want to travel these days. They just sell up and move or what-have-you. People aren’t rooted into one area like they used to be. I go, I can go back sixty years or more. Imagine the situation then, it is totally different, well totally different, it’s a lot different now than what it used to be.

I Okay, so moving on to, to something slightly at a tangent. This is about social relationships and who are the central people in your life now? Who would you say are the most important people in your life at the moment?

P Well my direct descendants shall we say, my daughter and her husband and their children.

I The recent visitors.

P Yeah, they’re directly the most important people.

I Okay. And what do you think it is, this is probably going to be a really obvious question for you, but what is it about those relationships that makes them so important to you?

P Their relationship with us I suppose, it’s kind of reciprocal, yes, it’s family I suppose. Blood runs thicker than water.

I Yeah and that’s, yeah. I mean are there other members of your family that you’re less close with? Because it sounds like you’re closer to…

P Yes, my brothers. I’ve got two. One who’s died, but I’ve got two left so I’m fairly… yes, one I’m fairly close to and one of my brothers I’m reasonably close to, not all, not very close and the other one I don’t have much to do with at all. We had a fall out several years ago which rather ruined the relationship, but I’ve got the other brother who I’m quite close to, yeah. But they live… well one’s at Hurstpierpoint and the other’s at Wivelsfield so they’re all reasonably local.

I But there’s not the same closeness?

P Oh no, no, a different level of closeness entirely, yes.

I Where were we. So yeah, you’ve got brothers nearby, but that’s not the same kind of erm, closeness that you have with… so this is your son and his wife.

P Yeah. My daughter and her husband.

I It’s your daughter. Okay. Yeah. Families are strange aren’t they? So how do you think, this is a very big question, how do you think the nature of your relationships has changed during your lifetime?

P What with everybody?

I Yeah, I guess so. So what kinds of relationships would you have had in your twenties say and how do you think that they’re different to the kinds of relationships that you have now?

P Well I suppose the age group I suppose. In my twenties I wasn’t sort of living down upon my family, I had a sideways relationship with my own…

I So, more sort of, peer relationships?

P Yeah, sort of peer relationships rather than family relationships, whereas now, I can’t really say I have peer relationships really. I don’t belong to any, either formally or informally sort of groups, you know, with any mutual interests really.

I But you did when you were younger?

P Well, yes. When I was younger, I did. Well all sorts, like I used to run badminton club when I was younger and I run a badminton club and sports, various other sports and then in those days we all went to the forces, we were all called up and so you had all your army friends, which I’m still in contact with the ones that are, a few of them, very few of them now. That’s on the web that is. I’ve still retained some friendships from there. It’s got down to about two or three now but…

I And you found those on the web, did you say?

P Yes. Yeah.

I Right, was that another searching forum?

P Yeah. Yeah.

I So, where did you find them?

P Oh through the association, the regimental association. I was in the guards, so they have their own association. So, as I say, it’s a long distance to pay the odd visit. A couple of years ago was the last time when I actually met one face-to-face.

I Yeah, yeah. So as you’ve got older it’s, I guess because you have family it’s become more… the relationship’s…

P Yeah, yes it’s more time occupying, you know. Because as I say we go away for about five months every year and we’re here for about seven months and I suppose in a way, well it’s not in a way, it’s definitely… it does effect in some way, your community actions. Where we live, we have a management association which is always asking me to join, well I said, I’m away, they meet every month throughout the year and I said, ‘well I’m not, I wouldn’t be here for five months so it’s no good’. They appreciate that, me being away for five months and any friendships you sort of have to, at my age, people you tend to meet are in the senior bracket themselves and then I’ll disappear for five months and then you have to pick it up again when you come back.

I Oh right.

P And in that time, they could have, you know…

I Yeah. So, is the Internet helped in that way?

P Oh, tremendously so, yes. Because that’s the way we maintain contact, through the internet. It’s like this couple that are on the way to Spain now, they’re, well he’s actually older than me, he’s two years older than I am, but he wasn’t too savvy with the technology and so he wanted to keep in contact in case there was anything that he wanted to know or there was any emergency, so I set him up with Skype and what-have-you and got him ironed out with the difficulties that he had with it and so he’s gone away now and he can, they contact us. He was waiting for something to be delivered. He’d ordered something and it hadn’t arrived by the time they left.

I So the ones that you’re watering their plants?

P Watering their plants, taking in their parcels and they do the same for us. Well, we don’t ask them to water any plants, but I remember we told the postman that anything, if it arrives, give it to him and they have a key to our apartment and they come in and make sure especially during the winter, because we’re away during the winter, so if we get any hard frosts we turn all the water off and we say, he does come in and keep an eye on in the evening, make sure there’s no freeze ups or anything like that and if it’s any severe weather is forecast he’ll put our central heating on for a little bit on a low level just to make sure that we don’t get a freeze up while we’re away. So there’s that.

I So you’ve talked about, going into the technologies that you’ve used for keeping in contact with people. You’ve talked about Skype. I know you use Drop-by.

P I probably… not as much as I should. I tend to only go into it when they send me an email about something that somebodies contacted me. A link is already in the letter so it’s just a matter of clicking on. I’m not a regular…

I So you don’t log-on.

P I don’t go in probably as much as I should do really.

I And how did you find out about Drop-by, was that…

P Yeah, I don’t really remember, it was probably, what, about three years ago, three or four years ago. I must have come across it somewhere just surfing around. But I can’t tell you precisely how I came by them really. No I can’t remember.

I So, some of the other ones, we’ll come back to it in a minute but so presumably you use email. Are there any other things that you use? Have you got a mobile phone?

P Yes. Yes.

I Do you use Facebook?

P My wife does, I don’t.

I Okay.

P I positively don’t!

I Right.

P Let’s put it like that. I’ve no time for Facebook really, but she does and if there’s anything on Facebook she’ll show me anything, we’ll all have her friends, who are mutual friends of course. A lot of them are on it and if she thinks it’s something that I’ll be interested in she’ll show it to me, but I don’t personally have a Facebook site of my own although my wife does and I see hers. I use Twitter but…

I Oh right. Twitter. Okay. But why? Are you a regular Twitterer? Is that the word?

P Tweeter.

I Tweeter.

P Erm, regular? Not really. I’m not a regular contributor much. But I read a lot of it.

I Yeah. And who do you follow on Twitter?

P Everybody and anybody really. I’ve got hundreds of… well hundreds, it must be dozens. And they send you emails… you get emails from them saying, ‘so and so has a message for you’, which is a message for a thousand other people as well. Yes, all manner of people. Because you’ll quite often see something, maybe months ago you were interested in and so you, you were interested in that particular topic that they were on about at that time and so you’ll link up with them and then go away and probably not see them again, or read what they’ve got to say until something else pops up.

I So, what kind of things pique your interest?

P I’m a bit of a political animal.

I Right.

P Yeah. I like politics.

I Yeah.

P One of my hobbies is cooking, believe it or not.

I Oh, right.

P Too much so according to my wife. I’ve lost three stone in two years.

I Too much cooking before, is that…

P Yes and tasting my own efforts. I’m still very interested in cooking. I like cooking. Yes, but as I say politics, I like politics. And current affairs, you know.

I Yeah. Yeah. What so kind of news feeds and things like that?

P Yeah. News feeds. Yeah. Blogs and things like that.

I So, erm, do you, do you kind of use the internet to keep in contact with people?

P All the time, yeah. My wife uses something called Viber. I don’t know if you know it?

I What’s it called?

P Viber.

I Viber?

P V.I.B.E.R.

I Viber. No.

P Oh you get all free texts and everything’s free on Viber. She doesn’t spend anything. We don’t spend anything on mobile phone charges really because if you use things like Viber, anything you can pay for on a mobile phone you do on Viber. I don’t quite understand… I don’t know how they finance themselves, it always amazes me how these firms finance themselves. As far as we’re concerned the service, but they don’t get any money on it. She can talk on it for ages, if she uses Viber, whereas she’s gone a bit away. She uses Skype for her family and she uses Viber as well, but she’s heavily into Viber.

I Okay. So is it mainly family that you keep in contact via the internet?

P And friends, and friends.

I And is that friends that live here or friends that live elsewhere?

P That’s both, because my wife’s Malaysian, so that’s where we spend the winter. In Malaysia. We’ve got a business in Malaysia. So, my wife is every day, in contact with her business in Malaysia, every day. So she’s contacting her staff and things while she’s here and then when we’re in Malaysia we’re contacting people here.

I So, like family and friends who are here? So, it’s quite important for you, that form of communication.

P Oh yeah, yes, as I say, it keeps you in touch with the grandchildren. They come on and chat to us. The kids do, they come on to Skype and chat with us.

I And do you ever, do you meet people through using the internet, do you meet people online that you’ve struck up friendships with? Or is it only people online that you know?

P Erm, well no, I’m just trying to think now, where these friendships originated. I’ve met a few people, a few. Not too many face-to-face, but a few people that I originally met online.

I And can you remember where you originally met them, from where you meet them online to how you get to meet them in person, sort of thing.

P It’s usually been through other people, via other people that you’ve been in contact with. Oh you must contact so and so because they’re into that or whatever or they tell somebody to contact you because you might know something that can help them, or something like that.

I Is this like websites?

P No, no, not through websites, I don’t really belong to any websites where it’s…

I Where you have to sign up?

P No, I don’t like those, they’re too time consuming, well not necessary or time consuming. I don’t want to get anything where you have to got to sort of… that’s why I don’t do, well it’s not one of the, it’s one the reasons, probably it’s Facebook I can’t see the point in it myself. Saying what I had for dinner and where I’m going shopping. Putting loads of photographs up and all that business. I don’t have any time for that. It’s too time consuming that is.

I Yeah, so the people that you have met, do you mean that you’ve met them through email contacts, or…

P Yes, email or they’ve located me one way or another. I was just trying to think just now whether I’ve actually gone looking for somebody and found somebody or I told you my cousin who now lives in America who I haven’t seen for 50 years.

I Was that just a search?

P She found me somehow or other. I forget now how. It was about six years ago, we found each other. She found me somewhere on the web and just made first initial contact, ‘are you who I think you are?’ Yeah, we were very friendly, we lived almost opposite each other when we were children, up to the age of about fourteen we lived opposite each other and knew each other very well.

I Yeah. So really grew up together.

P Yeah, yeah, yeah. And then all went our separate ways, that was when I used to live in Berkshire and the family moved down here, down to Sussex…

I …and she moved to America?

P Yeah, because she married an American. Which I found out subsequently. She was a quite a number of years in England and then somehow or other met the American and they got married and then moved to America.

I Right. That’s a nice story. So do you think, this might be a question related to your earlier comment. Do you think that community is something that can exist online?

P Yes, a community of a type. A type of it’s own. It’s a different type of community isn’t it?

I How do you think it’s different?

P Well, it’s not a… a personal contact, you’re dealing with online individuals, so a sort of, virtual reality almost. Well, not a virtual reality, but you know, it’s just a separate thing which never existed before, it’s a new thing that is still evolving I suppose.

I Are you saying that because it’s something that you’ve experienced? Does it feel to you like there is something like community that you experience when you go online?

P Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I suppose it is, community. Like I say, although I don’t belong to many or, if any, groupings shall we say on community.

I So you don’t join pre-established community websites, but you have a sense of community of your own.

P I would say I’m probably a bit stand out in that I probably prefer Twitter to Facebook, I suppose.

I Right. Yeah. What’s… trying to think…

P I mean all the people from Twitter are people I know personally. They are people who, I’m just interested in their… interests. They might be celebrities some of them. Some of them may be celebrities, who we aren’t particularly interested in and some who I hadn’t heard of before in my life.

I So, if you… so you talked about Facebook. So what do you think things like Facebook and other social network, as they call them. What do you think they’re for?

P Oh well, what they’re for… they’ve just evolved. I don’t think they’ve been set up with any positive purpose. They’re well used and people enjoy using them more. Some people enjoy using them. The people that participate with them, if you’re of that type, if you’re of that way of thinking, they’re very enjoyable I suppose.

I So what do you think it is that people enjoy?

P I don’t particularly get involved myself, although my wife enjoys it, although she doesn’t really contribute, the people that she enjoys reading all the rubbish about, about other people that they’ve put out there she says, what other people have written and blah-blah-blah, but she’ll never write. She’d probably put a couple of photographs of the grandchildren up on her site and maybe a couple of… yeah, hardly ever in a written form. Just contribute very little, but she’ll look at it every day and read what her friends are doing.

I And why doesn’t she contribute?

P I think because she thinks a bit like me I suppose. Why should we discuss all our business and what we’re doing with other people. I don’t know. I’ve never quite seen the point in it myself, but then, obviously there’s so many millions who seem to and as I say, I don’t know why she enjoys reading them, although what I say, there’s so much twaddle is on there. She’ll have a read but she won’t contribute her own twaddle.

I Yeah, it’s funny isn’t it? Other peoples twaddle is easier to see isn’t it?

P Yes, I can’t understand why she doesn’t put her own for them to enjoy!

I That’s great. Okay, so that’s kind of just about all the questions I have. I just wondered if there’s anything that you thought I was going to ask about.

P No, do you know it was so long ago that I couldn’t quite remember what I’d agreed to, or whatever, I think, you know, was it Mary from Drop-by?

I Oh, Mary, yeah.

P Mary somebody or other, I forget what her real name is, but Mary.

RECORDING ENDS