P Hello?

I Good morning, is that Iris?

P It is.

I Hello Iris, it’s Eric here.

P Ah, sorry about that.

I That’s alright. Can you hear me?

P Yes, I can hear you.

I Okay, good. I’ve just got, I must say I’m recording this chat. Is that okay?

P That’s fine, yes.

I Otherwise I won’t be able to remember everything. Let’s press the buttons. Okay. So, there’s a couple of formalities to go through first. One is to ensure that you’re happy with having this chat, or doing the interview and I sent you a consent form, I sent you a consent form yesterday. I’m not sure if you’ve opened it or read it?

P Yes, I opened it and read it.

I Are you happy with that?

P Yes, I’m quite happy with that.

I Okay, then I’ll sign that on your behalf and keep it in our records. We have to be very strict in how we do these things in terms of our ethics, so there’s all sorts of procedures to go through, which is great, okay, what I’m going to do is, I have about four sections and it’s just to ask you a few questions about your understanding of community and your sense of community and any role that technology might, or might not play in that. I’m going to read a little bit from this so do forgive me if it feels like I’m reading from a script. We’re interested in understanding peoples social lives and the role of different technologies such as telephones and the internet in supporting them. As a starting point, could you think about a day recently, a typical day that is for you, and what you did through waking up, to going to bed, trying to recount all the activities and interactions you had with other people however mundane they might seem.

P Well, my memory’s not that great really, so I’ll take yesterday. I would have got up as usual, walked my dogs, cleaned out the hens, pottered in the gardens, come in looked at my emails, had a quick look at Facebook, I don’t think I looked at Yahoo yesterday, but I might have done, oh and looked at Drop-by which is, oh you know what Drop-by is don’t you?

I I do, yeah, yes. What time would you have done that? You would have fed your hens and then what time would that typically be?

P It would usually be around 10am I would imagine.

I Okay. About this time, then.

P Which is why I set that time for your interview, yes.

I Perfect and then what after that?

P After which, I might have done a little bit of housework and then I would have got myself ready because I would have been picked up at around 12pm to go out to a lunch with a club for the disabled that I belong to. Went out to lunch with three friends, well it was two friends from that club and a new member who was joining us for the first time and to my great embarrassment I’d quoted one time of meeting to her and a different time for having the lunch to the pub that we were eating in, so that was a rather unpleasant beginning to our relationship, but I hope that she’ll continue to join us nevertheless.

I Yes.

P What about the afternoon. Oh, god. I will have gone home by about 4pm, after lunch. I think I came and looked at the computer again, possibly played a little solitaire because I like…

I You play solitaire? On the computer or…

P On the computer.

I Okay.

P On waking up I would’ve had a cup of tea and read a bit of my book.

I Oh yes, what are you reading at the moment? This is slightly outside the interview, but I’m just curious…

P At the moment, someone I’m not terribly fond of, Lynette Walters.

I Oh right, yes, don’t think I’ve read any of hers.

P So I’ll probably give that one away when I’ve finished it. But I’ve got quite a large library of books and I often re-read ones that I’ve already got.

I Oh yes, do you use a Kindle, or do you just use books?

P Do you know, I have a Kindle, I asked my husband for one for Christmas last year and I found I used it so little that at the moment I don’t even know where it is.

I Oh, okay.

P I didn’t find it as appealing as I thought I would. I don’t find it any easier to carry a Kindle around than it is to carry a paperback around. The only advantage would be, I would imagine, if we went away on holiday and you wanted to take a library of books with you, but as I don’t really go away on long holidays any more that doesn’t apply to me. Right, erm, where are we?

I So, we got up to tea-time I think…

P So, round about tea-time, so my husband and I cook tea together and then as usual in the evening he would have gone to watch television and I would have come upstairs to the computer and possibly watched i-player, I’m very fond of i-player.

I Oh yes, me too.

P Or done, oh! And in the morning I did some… I’m secretary of a bowling club so I used the computer, ah I wasn’t playing solitaire in the morning, I was doing work for the bowling club in the morning.

I Oh! Are you treasurer, oh, you’re secretary you were saying. Okay.

P So there’s a lot of letter writing which gets done on the computer and emailing too, it’s very, very useful for that and the club’s records are kept mostly on the computer as well. So, that just about ties it up, I’ll have been on the computer for most of the evening. As I say, might have been i-player, might have been… I don’t think I did any actual work on the computer in the evening I almost certainly played some solitaire and then bedtime. Will that do?

I Oh no, that’s excellent. That’s quite a full day as well. I was just curious about your computer there, is that a wireless computer? Is it a laptop computer?

P No, no, it’s a desktop computer.

I So upstairs you have a desktop computer there that you retreat to. Okay, well.

P It’s my study.

I Oh, it’s your study. Okay, yes, yeah. That’s not too dissimilar to myself and my wife’s evenings. Not completely the same, but quite similar. So, the next question’s about community and what it might mean to you. What does community mean to you, what do you think community is?

P Community means helping one another I think.

I Mmm.

P Erm, I do a lot of volunteer work. Community erm, trying to communicate with other people. Trying to bring them together. Finding common interests. Running clubs. Belonging to clubs.

I Yes, because you are a member of a club aren’t you, you were just saying the bowling club.

P Yeah, I’m a member of a bowling club and I’m a member of Delta Club. In fact I’ve been virtually running Delta Club for ten or twelve years.

I So, it’s a disabilities…

P It’s a club for disabled adults and officially I’m treasurer, but in fact I do just about everything. Negotiating some grants could be the biggest and horrible-est part of my tasks.

I Well, don’t I know it.

P There’s always organising outings and generally keeping in touch with everyone.

I So in the area that you live now, do you ever have conversations with people that you don’t know very well?

P That’s an interesting one.

I Yes, I don’t know who wrote that! But it’s interesting, I guess we’re wondering about if you have serendipitous interactions? Chance ones.

P Well, my dog walking gets me in touch with a lot of people and helps me to meet new people. I think that’s erm… and then of course there’s visits to the doctor or the hospital might bring you in contact with people that you don’t know very well. Standing at bus stops I always find it very useful. Shopping. Can’t think of anything else probably…

I No, that’s alright. Well, I mean the dog walking is a bit of a classic isn’t it? Often dog owners talk to each other.

P Yes, yes, you admire one another’s dogs.

I Do you have the one dog or more than one dog?

P I have two.

I What are they? Again, this is outside the scope, I’m just curious.

P I have a Labradoodle and a novascotian duck tolling retriever.

I I’m trying to picture that!

P It’s quite a mouthful! It’s quite a small dog.

I I pictured a big dog when you said that! Maybe because of the words. So how do you think the experience of community has changed during your lifetime? Or has it changed?

P I don’t, I don’t think I can answer that because I really only became properly community involved after I retired. Up until then my interaction with the community was much more restricted.

I Yes, in what way?

P Restricted to work colleagues. Neighbours. Parents of the childrens school friends. Yeah, that’s about it. Whereas now I belong to several different, well many different clubs and I do a lot of volunteer work and I feel as if instead of knowing a small circle with whom I’ve been forced into contact, I feel as if I’ve spread tentacles out and I know people, the town is mine if you see what I mean, not that I know everybody in the town but I’ve got tentacles stretching out all over in the town, places that I used to be in contact with, places that I’m in contact with now and so forth. So, it’s changed for me, but how it’s changed in a general sense I honestly don’t think I’m qualified to say.

I Well, that was very interesting, how it’s changed for you and in some ways that’s of more interest because we kind of understand what has changed physically out there, but quite interested in how peoples relationship with community changes throughout their lives.

P And I’m thinking from an I.T. point of view, I.T. has probably helped me to spread those tentacles. It’s not a very nice image is it, but you know what I mean! It’s actually helped me to get in touch with a lot of people. Made it much, much easier.

I Okay, so I now have a question, it’s about the important relationships in your life and who would you say are the most important people in your life at the moment?

P My husband and my daughters and their families. Undoubtedly.

I Okay, so that’s your family I suppose.

P My immediate family, yeah.

I And what, what is it about these relationships that makes them so important?

P Love and trust.

I Okay. There’s the shared history as well I guess, because you…

P Well, that’s part of trust.

I Yes, that’s right. So how do you think the nature of your relationship has changed in your lifetime?

P Sorry, the nature of my relationships with my family, is that what you’re talking about?

I Well, I think it’s a broad question. How do you think the nature of your relationships has changed during your lifetime?

P My relationships generally.

I Yes.

P Erm, that’s tricky.

I I think in a way though, I can help you here, because you’ve answered it a little bit, by earlier on you were telling me that your earlier relationships were very much about the parents of your children and they were work oriented and now they’ve seemed to have shifted a little bit.

P Yes. To shared interests and to helping. I think I’ve… I was a teacher and I think that desire to help never leaves you.

I No. No. Well, I’m meeting a lot of teachers at the moment. Not because I’m at the university…so if you wanted to make some new friends, what would you do?

P Erm, do you know, I don’t know. If I wanted to make new… I’m not, I feel that I’m not very good at making friends. There are people who would say they are my friend but to me a friendship is a very, very close thing. As I say, love and trust and my last, close friend died about five years ago and I haven’t found a replacement for her.

I Ah, that’s a shame.

P No-one else has filled that gap, so… that is a tricky one. I would love to be as close again as I was to Olive, but I don’t know how I would bring that about that’s something that just happens isn’t it?

I So, I don’t get a sense and I’m not too sure if I’m mis-representing you. Are you trying to find a closer relationship to fill that gap?

P Am I trying? Well, I suppose you could say I am. I’m certainly actively getting to know more people. Actively trying to interact with more people and I’d be so delighted if one of them turned out to be special.

I Well, I suppose it’s difficult because it takes time doesn’t it, to develop those relationships. Well, thank you very much for that. Now we’re on to questions about what part technology plays in supporting your social life, so the first question on this is, what technologies do you use to keep in contact with other people? I think again you’ve kind of answered this, but I’ll name some technologies and maybe that will trigger… you can say ‘yes’, or ‘no’, to them. We’re suggesting things like telephone, mobile phone, email, Facebook, Skype, those sorts of things.

P Well, telephone definitely. I use it less than I used to because email has pretty well taken its place. I actually prefer email. I am prone to periods of depression and email is much easier if you’re having a bad time, than the telephone.

I Oh really. Okay. You pick it up and put it down as it suits you.

P Yes. You’re more in control. You’re not invaded at times when you really can’t cope with being invaded. I have epilepsy which is obviously linked to the depression.

I All of this information is confidential, by the way.

P I’m not ashamed of having epilepsy.

I Yes.

P So yes, email I think is a great deal. I keep a very close eye on my, I forget what you call them, but Facebook and Yahoo.

I You have a Facebook page?

P And Drop-by… oh social sites.

I Yes.

P Internet social sites. I quite like that, the feeling that you’re still in contact, even though you can’t actually go out there and meet them.

I Yes, I think that we might have talked on Drop-by about four or five months ago.

P Yes, very probably.

I How do you normally keep in touch with your close friends and family?

P As I say, I prefer email, my daughters tend to prefer telephone. One daughter lives close by and obviously I much prefer to actually see her and see the Grandchildren as well, that’s by far preferable, but not always possible as she has a fulltime job.

I Okay, but they’re local are they?

P One of my daughters is local, yes.

I And the last question again, a lot of these questions you’ve managed to answer previously, but I’ll say it anyway. How do you maintain contact with people in your local community, do you use telephone, face-to-face, mobile, internet?

P I very rarely use my mobile phone, I tend to think of it as an emergency thing if I’m likely to want to message.

I Why is that?

P Because I feel no need for it. I carry it, if I ever should need it I’ll switch it on and use it, but I can’t see the point of having it switched on all the time. It’s invasive and unnecessary and anti-social in fact!

I A lot of people think that, yes. So, you mentioned your grandchildren, do you use any technology to communicate with them, or is it all face-to-face with them?

P Pretty well all face-to-face. Three of the grandchildren are on Facebook but we very rarely exchange messages. Simply because I don’t want to embarrass them because I’m out of their generation and I don’t want to spy on them. Although it’s there I don’t actually use it very much.

I There are two questions left, one again, your yesterday, walk us through your yesterday online and it seems to me you’ve already done that at the beginning of this conversation. But it does lead onto a question about, do you think community is something that can exist online? Without every meeting the other person?

P Not really. No. Not really. It’s a useful substitute for, but it isn’t community. Don’t tell Mary I said that.

I No, no, no. Drop-by’s brilliant, it has a place.

P It is brilliant, I mean I’ve made a friend in Australia via Drop-by, which is lovely, but it isn’t the same as knowing someone.

I Why do you think that is? Can you put your finger on it? It’s a difficult question, I understand.

P They are nearer to being, only nearer to being, characters in a book.

I Yes.

P In the way that you relate to characters in a book, you relate to characters you know only via the internet.

I That’s a very interesting perspective. Okay. And, the last direct question and then there’s a broad question and then we’ve finished. The last direct question is, do you know what social networking sites are? Now, you don’t need to answer that because I think you do know what social networking sites are. So, in wrapping up, are there any questions that you were expecting me to ask, but didn’t?

P Yes, what I was mainly expecting was things like, how long had I used this and how long had I had a computer and… you know, more time related and how much I used it rather than, how I used it, if you see…

I Oh, I see. Well, we’re kind of interested in that, but at this stage we’re very interested in peoples relationship with technology in the sense of their sense of community and what role that plays or not.

P Oh, can I just say, it’s wonderful for photographs.

I What is?

P The internet. Wonderful. Sending one another photographs. That’s a real link isn’t it?

I Oh, absolutely. Do you use any particular site for photograph sharing, or just email?

P Email and Facebook.

I So, do I take it you have a Facebook page, yourself?

P Yes.

I I have one, but it’s very bleak and barren! Although I have quite an active Twitter site, which isn’t everybody’s…

P I haven’t found my way into Twitter yet, but then I think that’s more phone related isn’t it?

I Yes, the mobile phone, so you look at it as you’re going around and you have a thought and you have your 140 characters to say what you think…

P No, that’s not my scene.

I No, it doesn’t appeal to an awful lot of people, but some people like it a lot. Okay, I think unless there’s something you’d like to ask me… is there anything you’d like to ask me?

P Will there be any follow-up, will I hear anything about how the research has gone?

I Oh yes, so what’s happening is Dave Harley who’s at Brighton University, there’s three of us involved directly. One is myself, at Sussex University, one is Kate who you had an email exchange with to start with, who’s also at Sussex University and the third person is Dave Harley at Brighton. Well, Dave is… will be writing up responses and reports via Drop-by because the Drop-by community has participated in this. I think we’ve had three or four people from Drop-by. So, yes, we’ll keep you informed and if there’s any papers or anything we write up, we’ll drop you an email to let you know where they are. We have one more meeting, but we haven’t quite worked out the dynamics of that one yet.

P Oh, well good luck with your project.

I Well, thank you very much Iris and thanks for talking to me.

P It’s been a pleasure.

I Alright. Goodbye!

P Bye-bye.

RECORDING ENDS.