I I’m going to start by asking you a question that’s quite broad. We want to see if you could walk us through yesterday. So, thinking about all the things you did yesterday, or if yesterday wasn’t a typical day, you could pick a recent day.

P I’ve got ME so I don’t have a typical day, so obviously it depends what I feel like when I get up in the morning. Yesterday, I got up and I had to get down to the chemist to get my prescription. So I walked down there. Came back. Had a cup of tea then did a bit of housework because I have to pace myself. Then I had a chat with my friend on Skype and in the afternoon I just sat and played games on my i-pad.

I Okay.

P Obviously eating meals during the day. Just general stuff really.

I Okay. What kind of games do you play on the i-pad?

P Mainly word games. Keep my brain active!

I Yeah, there’s quite a lot of word games, scrabble, or…

P Yeah, that sort of thing. Or you know, pictures and you’ve got to find the words to go what the pictures tell you and of course candy crush.

I Oh yes, I’ve played that! Okay, that’s great. So, you had, yeah you mentioned a few communications that you had with other people. There was one via Skype.

P Well, we normally chat every day on Skype.

I So is that one particular friend that you speak to?

P Yeah, I met her about four years ago on a widows forum. We both recently lost our husband and we just seemed to click somehow and we speak practically every day which is nice. It’s just a shame that she’s so far away.

I Oh. Where does she live?

P Tamworth, down in Staffordshire.

I So, have you been able to meet in person?

P No, not yet. Perhaps one day.

I Okay, that’s very interesting. So, I’m going to move on to thinking about different kinds of community engagement and start by asking, what does community mean to you?

P Erm, well what it means and what it is are two different things. Community is where people meet up and socialise, but I haven’t found that yet, so…

I Okay. So, when you say meet up is that in a physical way?

P Yeah, like in a group. You know. I did join a craft making class a while back but I’m so short of people going that it just sort of died a death.

I Okay, so is it something that the organisers weren’t keeping going?

P Well, it was costing them more money hiring the hall because I think it was ending up about three of us that were regulars and it wasn’t cost effective and she had to travel down from Burgess Hill as well, so she just stopped doing it, so…

I Okay, so that’s all thinking about local types of activities. Did you, while you were attending the craft group did you feel that there was a sense of community there?

P Oh, definitely. We all seemed to get on very well together. It was nice. I looked forward to going. Mainly for the social side of it, more so than the card making.

I Okay so it was an opportunity to…

P … well get out of the house! Meet people and just chat about everything and anything.

I Okay and that was a shared location. Thinking about the area where you live now, do you ever have conversations with people that you don’t know very well?

P I don’t see anyone, I don’t have visitors, if I go down the shops or if I’m waiting for a bus I might just have a chat with the person sitting next to me about the weather or if the bus is late, just general chit-chat.

I And do you start to build up people that you see regularly around and about?

P I don’t really see people regularly. Obviously I’ve lived in Lancing for forty-odd years so, I do know people that work in the shops, I mean you know I have a quick chat with them, or I see people in the street that I know and just pass the time of day.

I Okay and do you think the experience of community has changed in your lifetime?

P Oh, definitely.

I In what kind of way?

P More so family. Years ago the family used to all get together of a Sunday and now every part of the family is so busy doing their own thing, living their own life there’s no community within the family any more, which I find quite sad.

I And have you got any thoughts on why that might be?

P I really don’t know, because when I was younger I always visited my mum and dad, every week. I had two grandparents alive. I visited them every week. It was something, it came natural to me. Now if I want a visit from the grandchildren they never offer, I have to say to them, ‘well come on, it’s about time you paid me a visit’.

I Right.

P And it does annoy me. Because they’re old enough now to just pop in when they’re passing. But they’re just so wrapped up in their own lives they just don’t think about anyone else.

I And do they live locally?

P Oh yeah, my granddaughters live what, well one’s just moved over to Southwick but she’s got a car but the younger one lives five minutes but you know, they’re always too busy and I thought, well I’m not going to be here for much longer, you should make time, but you know, it’s the way I feel about it. It makes me angry! You know, because I think they should make time. It’s not just my family, it’s people you speak to. Their families are just the same. They’re just not interested.

I Yeah, I certainly don’t think you’re alone in things like that. So, yeah, the next thing I wanted to ask about was about the more important relationships in your life, so thinking about who are the most important people in your life at the moment.

P My cat.

I What’s your cats name?

P Kitty.

I Aww. Okay. Anyone else.

P My son. He lives in Reading. He’s married. We’ve always got on. We’ve never rowed. I know I can ring him at any time of day or night and it wouldn’t be a problem. He’s never judged me, yet my two daughters are completely different. I think me son takes after me and the girls take after their father.

I Okay. And then, you mentioned a friend that you’re regularly in communication with via Skype.

P Yeah, Maureen. Yeah.

I Is she quite an important person in your life?

P Oh yeah. Yeah. If I’m not well, because some days I have off days where I’m not even on the computer. If she doesn’t hear from me she’ll ring me. Just to make sure I’m alright, which is nice. It’s just nice to, you know, if anything happens there’s always someone there even though she can’t really do anything because she’s so far away. It’s just nice and we do have a good moan!

I It’s always nice to have someone to moan with!

P We just sort of bounce off of each other which is nice.

I Yeah. Okay, so what is it about those relationships that make them so important to you.

P I feel they see me as a person. They treat me as an equal. I’m not just someone sitting in the background.

I That’s very interesting. We’ve already talked about this a little bit, but I wanted to ask how the nature of your relationships has changed over your lifetime.

P What with my family?

I With your close relationships, yeah.

P We were, yeah, we were a close family, we used to meet up a week before Christmas and have an early Christmas when everyone was around. When the air show was on we had family barbeques because we could see the aeroplanes from the garden. Yeah, we did have a lot of family get togethers. But it seems to have deteriorated over the past four years since my husband died. There’s no family bond any more. My younger daughter, I haven’t got a clue where she is or anything. We had a row. Which wasn’t very nice, but you know. She thought more of her father than what she did me. I’ve tried making contact, but… I’m sorry, I’m getting a bit upset.

I No, no, I’m sorry. I don’t mean to be raising topics that are very upsetting to you.

P Well, it’s part of life isn’t it?

I Yeah. Thank you for sharing that with me. Are you okay, do you want to…

P No, no, it’s fine.

I So, thinking about friendships, if you wanted to make new friends what would you do?

P I don’t make friends very easily. I think I’ve been let down in the past so if I meet someone I put a wall up, so I don’t let anyone that close and that way I can’t get hurt.

I And does that extend to whether you meet them in person or whether you meet them in some other way? I know that you mentioned that you met Maureen online, in a forum?

P Yeah.

I So, did you find it easier to make a connection in that way?

P Yeah, I think it’s a lot easier online because you can make up… I think over time you actually get to know the person better than meeting someone face-to-face. I think you talk more when you’re online than when you’re face-to-face with someone because when you’re online talking to someone I think you let out more of your own feelings. Especially more so when you don’t see each other, when you’re just typing. Because you’re just typing to someone even though you don’t see them as such. It was quite a while before I even started talking to Maureen on Skype face-to-face because I didn’t feel comfortable with it.

I So why do you think it’s easier to open up in some ways when you’re typing to each other?

P Well, there’s not a closeness there is there? You’re not actually with that person and if you’re typing online and you’re not seeing that person you don’t have to face them again if you don’t want to. Is that making sense?

I Yeah, it does, yeah. And then, so, when you made the decision to start having Skype conversations with Maureen was that… why did you decide to do that?

P I suppose we had a bond and the bond was we’d both lost our husbands within a couple of months of each other so we had that sort of connection.

I And that made you feel that you wanted to build up a relationship?

P Well, yeah. Build up a relationship online with her.

I Thanks, that’s very interesting. So we’ve talked a little bit about the technologies that you use to keep in contact with people. You’ve mentioned Skype and the telephone, are there any other technologies or sites that you use?

P Well, obviously, email. And there is a couple of sites I do belong to, I don’t go into them much because I find them very cliquey. Now you say something wrong, because when you type it’s a lot different than speaking with someone and your words can be mis-interpreted, even though you don’t mean to come across that way. Prime example, I belong to a forum and there’s one guy on there and he keeps telling jokes and I don’t mind a joke or two but when you log-on all you see is joke upon joke upon joke and it’s silly jokes. There was one about a scarecrow in a field and he made a comment that he was working… oh, I can’t remember what it was, anyway it was silly, childish. So, I just typed in, ‘I think you need a new joke book, lol’, and he took offence to it.

I Oh dear.

P And I’m thinking, ‘get a life!’ It’s just so silly, because he didn’t have to take offence from it. Then someone else come up and defended him. ‘Oh, that’s alright, I like reading your jokes’, making out that I was in the wrong because I made a comment, you know, ‘groan, you need a new joke book, lol’, you know, it was meant to be a bit of a joke but it just fell flat.

I And is that the sort of thing that you think if it had been in person, that it wouldn’t have happened, or it wouldn’t have been interpreted that way.

P It might not have been interpreted that way, but like I say, there’s nothing so queer as folk. True saying isn’t it! You know.

I So has that made you less keen to go back to that forum.

P Well, yeah because I don’t feel comfortable. It’s alright if you were to sit there and write jokes and put them on there and someone makes a joke about a joke he’s made, you take offence, you know. I think internet with forums, it’s a power thing with people as well.

I That’s interesting. Can you say a bit more about that?

P Well, you always get someone who’s very outspoken on a forum. I belong to a small forum. I think there’s about thirteen or fourteen of us. We’ve known each other for years and I mean, in some cases going back ten or more years and we’ve all collected together because we were part of other forums that didn’t last on the internet and we’re all outspoken and we can say things and we know we’re not going to upset each other. Sometimes on a forum someone might put something you don’t agree with and you wouldn’t dare think of saying, ‘well what a load of crap’, but on the forum that I belong to, you can put, ‘oh, that’s a load of crap’ and no-one takes offence and that’s what I like about that small forum.

I That sounds very interesting. So you all met, it’s all online relationships, you haven’t met in person?

P Well there’s Judy. We ring each other, we don’t Skype because she hasn’t got Skype she doesn’t feel comfortable with it. But every now and again we ring each other. She lives in Liverpool. So, but we’ve known each other for years, we have a laugh, we’re on the phone for ages sometimes and sometimes we’re on the forum typing to each other and we think, ‘well this is stupid’, we just pick up the phone and ring each other.

I Okay. Do you think that in that forum, is there any sense that you’re a community in that forum?

P Oh yeah, definitely.

I So you think that community can be formed other than when you’re in a local area?

P Yes, I think it can, so long as you get on with each other. We’ve had several people in the past who have joined the forum and they’ve left because we are all outspoken and they take offence at something that’s been typed so they get the hump and they leave, so they don’t seem to fit in and yet we always make people welcome when they join.

I And would you say that you all have a shared interest? Or is it more about your shared sense of…

P … sense of humour.

I Sense of humour, okay.

P Yeah, because there’s a lot of… yeah, there’s a few of them that are quite political. I’m not a political person. They get involved with, is it UKIP… there’s a couple of them there that have joined UKIP and of course, me, I just said, ‘you’re being brainwashed’, we just have a laugh and a joke about it which is nice.

I You can say those sorts of things to each other.

P Yeah, yeah, yeah. Which is nice. But there again I’m a very outspoken person anyway, so… not good sometimes. Well, that’s the way I am, so…

I And they obviously all appreciate that about you.

P Well, yeah. Yeah.

I So, we’ve talked about keeping in touch with people via phone and online. Do you have a mobile phone?

P Yeah, but I very rarely use it. It’s mainly for emergencies, if anything happens and I’m about and I need to get a taxi to get home.

I And do you use online means for keeping in touch with any of your family or friends?

P Well, Facebook, that’s my grandkids and also my younger daughter. She’s on Facebook and although she won’t talk to me I can get onto her page, just to make sure that she’s still around, so that’s one good thing.

I Okay and does that give you a sense of knowing…

P Yeah, because it was the not knowing before because she had, originally she’d blocked me on Facebook and I had enough of Facebook so I deleted it and a couple of people that I know on Facebook said, ‘well come back to Facebook’ and I thought, well I did, and because I used another account I could gain access to my daughter on Facebook, so every now and again, not every day, but every now and again I’ll just have a look. Just to see if she’s posted so I know she’s okay.

I Okay, so that provides a way of…

P … yeah, it makes me feel relieved that I know she’s okay because if she wasn’t posting then I’d know something was wrong, not that I could do anything about it because I didn’t know where she was living.

I So, why did you decide to come off Facebook when you made that decision originally?

P It was mainly me grandchildren because they post everything on Facebook and they were posting like, they were having family days out and family barbeques and I wasn’t being included and I just felt out of it. I didn’t want to read that. It was just upsetting. I don’t want to read on Facebook that they’re all going on holiday together and I’m not included, or they have days out here there and everywhere.

I That certainly seems familiar as a reason that I’ve heard for other people choosing to close their Facebook accounts. That sense of seeing something else that’s going on…

P Well, yeah, it’s like you’re being rejected. They don’t think before they speak. It does niggle me.

I Okay, thank you for that and then thinking about keeping in touch with people in your local community, so perhaps thinking about the craft group or any other people that you might want to keep in touch with.

P Well, no, I don’t keep in touch with them, it finished and that was it.

I How was that arranged, the craft group? Was that something that you’d heard about…

P … I saw it advertised. I can’t think… I can’t even think when it started because after my husband died I went through quite a traumatic time. I went through two major operations in that year as well. I needed to get out and do something. I was having panic attacks when I go out. So I was really confined and I had to really push myself and I just saw it advertised and I thought it was a good opportunity to get out because it was a regular thing as well, it died as soon as it started which was an unfortunate thing for me, because now I feel I’m back at square one.

I And would you look online to see if there are any other local groups?

P Oh, I’ve looked. There’s just nothing. We’ve got the WRBS in Lancing. They do things there and I did pop in there and I know this is going to sound crazy, but they’re all old people! When I say old, I’m talking about eighty-odd and you know, I’m sixty-five, I don’t feel old and I don’t want to associate with old-old people. I’ve done that when I done volunteering. You know, I don’t want that again, so…

I So, you’re looking for a different kind of…

P Yeah, but the trouble is that most people nowadays, my age, are still working. Or they’re looking after their grandkids while their kids go out to work.

I So do you think that they don’t have time to get involved?

P Well, as I say there isn’t any. Not in, you know, even round here there isn’t, there’s been so many changes of people coming and going, but there’s no-one that… it would be nice to pick up a phone and saying, ‘oh, do you fancy going for coffee?’ But I don’t know anyone. When I was married we never had friends, we never socialised outside the family if you like and trying to build that from nothing it’s hard work.

I Yeah, I can imagine it would be.

P Yeah.

I One thing we haven’t talked about, am I right in thinking that you’re a member of Drop-by.

P Yeah.

I So is that something that you would…

P … well that’s the site that I was talking about the jokes!

I Ahhh, okay. So, that’s where you don’t tend to go there quite so much anymore?

P Yeah, I don’t go there as often. I might just pop-in every now and again just to see what people have posted, but it’s very cliquey and it’s the same people that seem to be posting all the time. You get Mary the founder, keeps saying, ‘welcome to the site,’ to these people that have joined, but they join and they don’t post anything, they don’t do anything on the site, so… it’s not my sort of site to be honest because they’re too straight laced for me, if that’s the right word to use.

I It sounds like you’ve been online for a long time, you know. So was it pretty soon after… yeah, pretty soon after people started going online from home?

P Well, funny enough he’s forty-something, he was born in ’71 so he’s about forty-two, forty-three now and when he was, he must have been about twelve, was when the ZX81 came out and we brought him the ZX81 so he taught me a lot of computers and he’s had everything since, the ZX81, then it was the spectrum, then it was the commodore, you know, as he’s gone down the road he’s had them all, so… no, it was him that taught me how to use the computer.

I That’s good.

P Well, I don’t know what I’d do if I didn’t have the computer. I wouldn’t have access to anything outside. I don’t know how I’d cope, because if I don’t feel well enough to go out, there’s always someone on the internet that I can make contact with.

I Does that help?

P Oh definitely! Yeah, you know, I can go weeks without seeing anyone, when I’m ill. All I’ll see is just people walking by, but knowing that there’s someone there, or that I can send an email, or a message on one of the forums, to get some response back, as if to say, ‘look, I’m here! I am alive!’

I Yeah, it’s great that you’ve got the skills.

P Oh yeah, definitely.

I Okay. So, thinking about, well I think we’ve already talked about that you’ve had a Skype conversation yesterday, but the final question is about walking us through the last time you were online and for you it sounds as if that’s a fairly regular occurrence.

P It was this morning.

I Yeah, okay. So tell me about what you did when you went online this morning.

P Well, what I normally… well since I’ve got me i-pad, obviously get up, got to feed the cat first, priority.

I Oh yes, that’s the same for me.

P Obviously shower and then I sit and have breakfast and while I’m drinking my cup of tea I just have a quick look, you know, just check Facebook, the local forum and me emails. You know, that’s before I do anything and then later on in the day I sit at the main one just to go through everything again.

I Yeah, so did you say, ‘a local forum’?

P Well, it’s that forum with that group of us. We’ve known each other for years.

I Oh, the one… yeah. Okay, so you think of that as being a local forum.

P Well, yeah. Yeah.

I It’s a kind of local, online.

P Yeah, local online. Yeah, I shouldn’t really use the word local should I really?

I Well, no, it’s really interesting because to you it does sound like it’s your local group online and it makes a lot of sense.

P Although they’re scattered all over the country, because one of them’s in Spain, he lives in Spain, but I don’t, when I’m talking to it, I don’t look at it that they’re all over the country, we’re just, sort of in a room together if you like.

I I think that’s a really nice idea, I like the idea of there being a sense of local online based on how you feel about each other.

P Yeah, I think that I can honestly say that I’m closer to them than what I am my family.

I Yeah. It sounds good that you’ve got likeminded people that you can talk to.

P Yeah!

I Okay, we’ve talked about where these people that you talk to online are based, so it’s all over. The last question is about what your idea of what social networking sites is? What you think they’re for and what you use them for.

P Some of them that I’ve come across are just people bragging. Twitter I haven’t got time, I haven’t got the time of day for Twitter. You know to me it’s just a pointless exercise and it’s just an excuse for people to go out and sue everyone else for what they put on there. It’s a bit much like Facebook, not it’s bad, but there again, if I didn’t go on Facebook I wouldn’t know what my kids were up to.

I So it’s useful for having that…

P … yeah, it’s useful, it’s a link, you could use it as a link as a link to my grandkids and me younger daughter. That’s what it’s mainly used for.

I Okay. I think we’ve covered all of the questions that I had. Was there anything that you were expecting me to ask about but haven’t.

P Well, no because to be quite honest I didn’t have a clue what sort of questions you were going to ask.

I Yeah, that’s fair enough and was there anything that you wanted to add about anything that we’ve talked about?

P Erm, not that I can think of, no. What’s going to happen to the research now? Obviously you’re writing up a paper on it are you?

I Yes, so what we’re doing now, we’re interviewing sixteen people from the questionnaires that were filled out and have agreed to be interviewed and we’ll sit down and look at all of the interviews and the topics that people talked about and we’ll, yeah, we’ll then spend some time trying to put together, we’ll try to work out if there are lots of interesting themes that people have talked about, whether there’s different types of experiences that people have online and offline and in terms of community and yes, we’ll aim to write, certainly one and maybe two different papers on the findings that we’ve come up with and those will be completely anonymised so there won’t be any way, if someone…

P Well, it wouldn’t bother me anyway because I haven’t said anything, you know…

I I know, but sometimes, you maybe wouldn’t necessarily want my interpretation of your words to be put up and to be available for other people to see, but if you’re interested we can make sure that we send you the papers that we write on it.

P Oh yeah, I would love to, I’d be interested to read it. Yeah.

I Well, I’ll make sure I remember that.

P Oh no, I would be interested actually.

I And yes, the original idea of the project, sometimes it’s hard to, it’s hard to know what you’re going to find, so I can’t necessarily tell you at this stage what the paper’s going to be about. We won’t really know until we’ve looked at what everyone said, but what we were particularly interested in was looking at whether people engage in community online, whether they think of that as being a community. So, some of the things you’ve said have been very interesting in relation to that and crossing between online and offline community. So, in some cases, people have either moved from a local community group to being in an online community or visa-versa. So we’ll be looking at those kinds of things and other peoples experiences.

P Well it’s the only way you learn.

I Yeah. That’s true. Okay?

P Yeah fine.

I Right. I’ll turn off the recorder.

RECORDING ENDS.

P