

I always wonder, when I go into a library, why I see so few people. Oh, the parking lot is full of cars, and the rows of computers have patrons sitting in front of the majority of them, but I don't meet many other people back in the stacks, looking for and at books.

I can't understand this. Has the internet really stolen most of us from the realm of books? I ask myself if there is a difference between, for example, looking something up on the internet and reading what there is to say there, and finding information in a book.

I suspect there is a great difference in many cases. We all know that anyone can easily "publish" whatever information, speculation, or downright wrong conclusions on the world wide web, and millions of other people can read it and accept or reject it. The sad part is that the wild theories and false information—in reality there are no "alternate facts", and "truth IS truth," in spite of Guiliani—are often used to shore up or reinforce someone's preexisting beliefs and, in many cases, prejudices. And, information that is so outrageous that complaints pile up, can just as easily disappear from sight on the internet.

But, books are physical entities. They exist in the real world. And, as they are read—or not read—quoted or disputed, their veracity can be checked, and, at least sometimes, the popularity of a particular volume will rise and then fall after serious consideration.

Even more, though, books take a person into new realms. The public library has resources—physically present on printed pages—to educate any of us readers on any number of subjects. One can become an expert in some fields just by using the materials in the library.

But, the library is also the place to go, I think, for quality entertainment. And, yet, it is seldom that I see someone as I browse through the fiction section, or even in the other parts of the stacks that deal with history, biography, biology, gardening, animals, health, and so forth.

So, it was with pleasure that I ambled through the fiction shelves in the library the last time I was there. A man was doing the same thing, and he stopped and read—more than just a few words—as he moved from authors beginning with "B" to those that follow. I regularly follow this procedure. At first, I assumed he was a library employee, since, as I move through the stacks I usually see only people who work there. But, no, he was a library patron, and a reader of more than just what appeared on the screen in front of him in the computer section. So, there are more of us, in spite of the instant gratification obtainable on the internet.

I love our libraries. I will never call them "media centers," no matter what has become common in schools in recent years. Libraries are the places where I find books old and new—volumes that entertain me, teach me about the world now and in the past, and provide me with a free education in almost any subject. Every time I meet someone coming from the library with a bag full of books or meet a fellow reader in the stacks, I regain a little hope for the future.

