Reflective Essay #2:
The Shifting Roles of Public Libraries *(Part Two)*

For my research paper I decided to create a brief survey and send it out to some close friends and family. It is a short survey—only eleven questions, and most of the questions only require a yes/no answer. The survey focused on awareness and library usage. I sent the survey out via email with instructions to copy and paste the survey into a new email message addressed to me with the answers to the survey written in the body of the email. I thought this was a simple task. One of the people I sent the survey to is a dear friend of mine. His name is Jairus Cook and he is a Barber (he used to cut my hair a few years back when I had it really, really short!). Anyhow, I am not sure if Jairus went to college, or how familiar he is with computers and technology, or how often (if even at all) he visits his local public library, but I do know that he has a Smartphone (something called a Sidekick) and he can access email with this phone. When I received his email response to my survey at first I was shocked, but then I realized that his response is what I should have expected (not to place judgment on Jairus, but I know that he is not very fortunate when it comes to income and job stability). I have pasted it below:

From: jairus

To: me

I don't noe how 2 do all that paste & copy. But I think tha lirbrary is still use full. Becuz. People like somewhere 2 go. That's quiet, still work & have study groups. Plus every1 doesn't have acssess 2 a computer. Or just still like tha old way. Of using a book. & my insight is helpful 2 u. K.I.t.

--thabarber

My response to Jairus was that his insight *was* helpful, and I thanked him for replying to my survey. First of all, it is easy to see from the email that Jairus uses a very familiar and informal language to communicate with me (probably because he views me as a friend and not a professional acquaintance). But still, the language he used to reply caught me off guard and leads me to think that this is how he feels most comfortable communicating. I can interpret what it is he is trying to say, so the communication is successful. Secondly, Jairus admits that he can't perform basic computer functions (like copy and paste), so it is safe to assume that his computer skills are basic at best (and there is nothing wrong with that!). Thirdly, the points that Jairus raises are very valid and will have a place in my research. He understands that the library is still useful because people need a place to go. And even though this is vague (they need a place to go to do what? Study? Read? Work?) I think that is okay. I think libraries should be just a place to go; a place where a community can go to interact and learn with each other. Jairus understands that not everyone has access to a computer (and maybe he doesn't), and the fact that the library offers this service free of charge is a major benefit to him. Jairus thinks that there is some of the population that "still likes the old way." Well put, and I love his wording. There is pleasure in the old way, and there will always be a percentage of our population who value and practice the old way when they visit the library (so it is important that the old way hangs around). He didn't say so out-right, but I think Jairus uses his public library regularly. From his reply, I know that he understands the positive affect libraries have on communities and that he values the libraries services. I think it might be worthwhile to contact Jairus and pry some more information out of him.

While I am still waiting for most of the responses to the survey to come back, I have a feeling that most people I sent the survey to have not once stepped foot in a public library in the

past year. I want to know why this is. Do people just feel that they don't need to go to the

library? Or maybe they don't want to. Perhaps they don't even know where it is. What if they

have forgotten that it even exists?? How tragic would that be? I hope the latter is not the case.

Like I said in my first reflection, I have more questions than answers at this point (which I think

is okay). I am excited about my research topic, and am very anxious to see the finished product.