

Bad news about Out of Town News ends writer's ritual

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Cambridge - Bad news, bad news. Out of Town News will likely be shutting its doors for good in the very near future.

I haven't been to that small, but jam-packed, oasis of a newsstand plunked right in the middle of Harvard Square for about three years. That last time was to pick up a copy of the Village Voice. Lucky for me that I was in that neighborhood that day, because I can't think of any other place around here that would carry it.

But there was a time, many years earlier, when Harvard Square was a sort of stomping ground for me, that I would visit the wonderful newspaper-and magazine-filled kiosk at least a couple of times a week. I was a college student in Boston in the late-'60s and early-'70s, and I was a specialty magazine junkie — but one with a limited scope: I was only reading publications that had to do with pro wrestling (my guilty pleasure) and cinema (my passion).

A T ride on the Red Line brought me to the Harvard Square stop, where I would first check out the new black light posters or sniff the candles over at the head shop called Truc, then stop for a coffee at Café Algiers.

Like a ritual, I would always save Out of Town for last, bravely making my way — along with all the other hippies and Harvard students and faculty and tourists — across the busy street to find solace at the then-island newsstand.

I knew exactly where the movie and wrestling magazines were, but another part of the ritual was to first peruse through the exotic magazines from other lands. I couldn't read any of them (beyond a few words in the French ones), but they somehow made me feel that I was actually in a newsstand in another country.

Then it was time to get serious: Who would be on the cover of that week's "Pro Wrestling Illustrated"? Who was the feature interview (most likely a made-up one) in "The Wrestler"? What genre of film was covered in the new "Time Out"? Which director would be profiled in the new "Sight & Sound"?

In a sad foreshadow of Out of Town News' apparent fate, most of those magazines have long gone out of business. A number of new titles — now known as "fanzines" — have popped up, but they're very hard to find, unless you happen to be at that kiosk in Harvard Square.

It appears that soon that will no longer be an option. My new alternative — visiting the (yawn) Internet (no candles to sniff there) — feels like a shallow substitute for that Harvard Square ritual that I remember clearly and dearly.