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LIFE: Diana At 50



Synopsis

She was, indeed, the People's Princess. She belonged to them, and was beloved by them. For some reason that cannot be pinned down, this pretty young woman of the aristocracy, who married into royalty, connected with the common folk in a way that was unique and extraordinary. The people cared for and cared about Diana, and when she was killed in a tragic car accident in Paris, the outpouring of grief-not just in England, but globally-was overwhelming. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of Diana Spencer's birth, LIFE has assembled a celebratory chronicle of her too short but constantly vibrant time in the public eye. In family photos, we re visit Diana's youth and then, quickly enough, there is her courtship by Prince Charles. The Wedding of the Century really was that, an opulent extravaganza at St. Paul's that seemed a fairy tale, even unto the Glass Coach. LIFE was on the job at the time and in our pages appeared defining pictures from the day, as well as behind the scenes shots taken by the royals themselves. Those photographs resurface here, as do others from the magazine, which paid constant attention to Diana as she gracefully assumed the role of princess-perhaps the most famous princess of all time. LIFE followed her-and follows her here-as she set about doing her good works. Diana's family life with her handsome young boys in Kensington Palace is recounted, as are the travails when her marriage crumbles. On September 6, 1997, 2.5 billion people around the world watched Lady Di's funeral, televised from Westminster Abbey. LIFE revisits that sad day, and then parses Diana's legacy, catching up with her charismatic sons today- the older of whom, William, has just taken a bride. Kate Middleton now wears Diana's ring, and will one day be queen the very thing that was predicted for Diana, not so very long ago.

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Customer Reviews

The editors at LIFE vigorously carry on the traditions of excellence in photography, in journalism, and in telling the story of our country and our world which began with LIFE magazine in 1936 by founding editor and publisher, Henry R. Luce. They have published boooks on a broad range of subjects, including New York Times bestsellers One Nation, LIFE Picture Puzzle and The American Journey of Barack Obama.

Contents-wise this book is very disappointing, and represents a missed opportunity to publish some new, updated and/or different material on a much-loved global figure. The 4-11 July issue of "Newsweek" with the photo-shopped image of Diana with her would-have-been daughter-in-law, the new Duchess of Cambridge, startled and offended many. Bringing out an 'anniversary' title to 'celebrate' a milestone birthday Diana never reached does rather stretch credibility to start with, so I was expecting something more substantial than this very token effort from "Life". It is a shame they chose not to engage in any meaningful way with how Diana has been perceived since her death, and the tone of the text is both unduly gossipy and facile. Although this is pitched as a 'tribute', and therefore a certain amount of 'fluff' is to be expected, the lack of material addressing Diana's enduring legacy and appeal is puzzling and frustrating to say the least. The exhaustive French and British enquiries into the accident, the self-important ranting of Mohamed al-Fayed, the conspiracy theories and apportioning of blame, the post-Diana attitude of the wider public to the British Royal family, the ultimate 'triumph' and grudging acceptance of Camilla Parker-Bowles as Charles' second wife, and the continuing media harassment of those in the public eye are obviously subjects of too sobering a nature to be of interest to the writers. Nonetheless, the "Diana: A Celebration" touring exhibition from Althorp, the work of the Memorial Fund, the exhibition "Diana, Princess of Wales by Mario Testino" at Kensington Palace (2005), and other events commemorating Diana's life and work over the intervening fourteen years would have been eminently suitable for inclusion. There really was no need to reiterate the well-known story of Diana's life, which is raked over once again in a breathless and rather flippant way, relying heavily on quotes culled from other published sources. The text is really quite appalling, both in tone and structure. It lurches around from one scandal to another, tangled up in the type of inanity that would be comical if it didn't come off as rather tacky and disrespectful. We are subjected to howlers such as, "There was so much that was very, very,

very wrong with this pairing, and so much of what was wrong was in evidence before they wed.", "Diana was forced to do so, and if Charles cared, he cared not much", "It is statistically measurable that she was at least half-again more famous (and more popular) than her husband...". The Spencer family seat Althorp is described as a "house that contains sigh-inducing elegancies" where the family lived "in their opulent, art-filled digs". And so on. Although the writers caution that, "It is hardly elevating- in fact, it is pointless- to delve into this boyfriend or that one, or to make a list", they proceed to do just that. An entire page is given over to a 'rogues gallery' of photos of her supposed beaux and further speculation as to Diana's private liaisons (confirmed or otherwise) litter the text. How classy! Given that Diana's life revolved around her children, one might have expected several pages devoted to how Princes William and Harry have developed as young men, and what they have said publicly about her influence. No mention was made of the "Concert For Diana" they organised in 2007, or how she has inspired their choice of charitable concerns; particularly William becoming patron of the Royal Marsden Hospital and Centrepoin in Diana's stead, and Harry's work with disadvantaged children in Lesotho. Amazingly, "Life" have not included any images of William and Catherine, either of their engagement announcement or the wedding itself (preferring to promote their separate books on those events within the text). The recycled engagement ring and the groom's poignant tribute to his mother amidst the celebrations would seem an obvious way to conclude the book- but not to the editors, apparently. The inevitable comparisons to Diana, and the challenges the new Duchess of Cambridge will face in her royal life, would have also been suitable subjects to discuss, but are barely mentioned. I seem to recall that the initial promotional cover which displayed pre-publication had a much rarer formal portrait from 1986 by Terence Donovan, which I have not seen reproduced in any previous books. (A black and white version forms part of the archive his widow gifted to the National Portrait Gallery, London). The one "Life" have used on the final cover (from 1990) unfortunately sets the same-old, same-old tenor of the images in this volume. Considering that Diana was the probably the most photographed woman in the world, to see the same parade of photos trotted out again was very dull. The introduction notes, "So no chapter in the Diana saga is lean on pictures", but I noticed only five Spencer family/Diana-related images I had not seen previously, and altogether far too much filler of a scenic, crowd, or Charles-related nature. Those who collect books on Diana will probably want to add this title to their libraries as a matter of course. However, there isn't much in the way of rare/different images, or any attempt at insightful commentary. The narrative content for this title is really quite puerile and reflects poorly on a publication which used to be taken quite seriously, at least in America. It's hard not to see this as a purely money-making exercise on which little real effort has been expended.

The production values and lay-out are professional enough, but the finished work cannot be recommended.

Excellent purchase!

It is in the best condition... brand new! The book is so nice, with beautiful pictures as well as information that I have not read about before. Thank you!

I just like reading About Diana. I always did and the rest of the royals so if you like to read about the Royals you will enjoy this

Love it, tnks!

Redo of same old stuff. I had hoped for something new.

A perfect book about an amazing lady. I can't believe she would have been 50! There are photos in this book that aren't in others. I'm so glad to have this be a part of my collection!

I am 52 and have been fascinated with her life since they were dating. I am very pleased with this book. It is a great addition to my collection.

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