



Electronic media reanimate magazine

While electronic media are often viewed as the Grim Reaper for traditional print publications, they also can breathe new life into fading titles. Such is the case with the former *Life* magazine, which now exists as an electronic publication at Life.Time.com.



KEVIN O'NEILL
InSites

Life became famous for its photojournalism, chronicling world-changing events, such as war and politics, as well as the popular culture of the day. Portraits of presidents, starlets, athletes and artists all graced its cover and inside pages over the years. The iconic image of a sailor kissing a nurse in New York City on VJ Day in 1945 first appeared in *Life*.

Life started in 1883 as a humor and general interest magazine full of the work of the best writers, illustrators and cartoonists of the day. It was transformed in 1936 by its new owners — who also published *Time Magazine* — into a photographic news magazine that was popular for decades. Eventu-

ally the magazine's circulation started dropping and it stopped and restarted publishing in various forms several times.

Electronic resuscitation

The printed version of *Life* has been deceased since 2007, but it has been reborn on the Internet. After brief partnerships with Google and Getty Images, *Life* now lives on as a photo website run by Time Warner.

The Internet always has had a split personality. On the one hand it's a valuable tool for research and commerce. On the other, it can be a mind-numbing time waster of incessant posts, likes, tweets and cat videos.

Life.Time.com exists somewhere between the two sides of the Web. While it's easy to burn up a good chunk of time browsing through the decades of photos in the site's archives, it's not necessarily wasted time. Because of the historical and cultural significance of many of the pictures, the time spent perusing them is a bit like research. You'll end up learning something in the process.

Looking back at *Life*

The website is basically just a collection of *Life* photo galleries, chronicling all aspects of life,

going back to the 1930s. The galleries are organized into several categories: History, Culture, Icons, Curiosities and Photographers. Clicking on the links for one of the main categories brings up a list of clickable subcategories.

For instance, clicking on History brings up a list containing major wars, world leaders, politics, crime and more. Select Culture and you get numerous options including art, fashion, literature, sports, movies and many more. Icons consists of actors, actresses, athletes and musicians. Curiosities is a collection of images of unusual subjects, such as mutant bicycles or a honey bee market in the Netherlands. And finally, Photographers showcases the work of a long list of notable shutterbugs who have provided images for *Life* over the past eight decades.

Once you choose a category, a grid of related images is displayed. A large, featured subject is pictured at the top of the grid, with a series of smaller images arrayed below. Under each picture is a gray block with white numbers designating the decade the images are from and a brief description of the subject.

Click on the photo for the subject you want to view to bring up

the gallery page. The gallery pages have a headline at the top with a large photo beneath it. The photo can be enlarged further to full-screen size. Forward and back arrows appear when you hover the cursor to the right or left of the image to navigate through the gallery. Each picture has a caption beneath it describing the circumstances and date. Under the gallery is an essay giving background information on the subject.

Easy living

Life.Time.com is easy to look at and easy to use. It has a simple yet dynamic color palette featuring a black background with white and gray type, and selected red text. The typography is unified with a clear hierarchy. The navigation is logical and intuitive. A search field and links to more Time.com content round out the site.

Viewing the site is a pleasant and even educational way to spend some time. Looking at historic events and notable people through the eyes of *Life's* talented photographers provides additional insight that just reading about them can't do.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for *The Times-Tribune*. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.