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### Hello, Kitty!

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I've spent two decades hiding a secret — and I'm not going to do it anymore. No more shame or embarrassment. No more lies, no more hiding. I am 31 years old... and I love Hello Kitty. A lot.

If you don't know who Hello Kitty is, I pity you. But I'll fill you in anyway, since this column won't make much sense unless I do. Hello Kitty is the lovable icon created by Sanrio, the Japanese mega-corporation, along with a number of other companion characters. Since her debut in 1974, Hello Kitty's likeness has appeared on virtually every piece of merchandise possible: toasters, coffee makers, hair trinkets, jewelry, stuffed animals, stationery, clothing, contact lens cases, key chains, toys and even, uh, a rather blasphemous personal "massager." (Not available in the U.S., you'll be relieved to know.)



*(Hello Kitty is a trademark of Sanrio Corp.)*

Japan is nuts for all things Hello Kitty; all things Sanrio, really. The company bills itself as being in the "social communications" business, espousing the theory of spreading happiness through products that come from the heart. Which is beautiful, really. It also becomes genius when you realize that Sanrio creates these characters for no other reason than marketing them... they're not tied in with a cartoon, movie or video game. They just are.

And it appears to work, as Sanrio claims net earnings of 114 billion yen for Fiscal 2001. I mean, I have no idea how much a yen is worth, but 114 billion of them sure sounds like a lot. But let's not make it about money. Hello Kitty would not like that.

So why do I love her so? Why is the sky blue? Why is coffee essential on Monday mornings? Hello Kitty is cute, sweet, and doesn't speak. Hey... maybe she's all the things I wish I were. Plus, we're something of kindred spirits. After all, we were both born in November, just a few short years apart... and, uh... we're both... okay, so really pretty much all we have in common is that we're Scorpios, but isn't that enough?

But the love I have is deep and lasting and very, very secret until recently. "Coming out" happened accidentally, as do so many of the best things in life. I was at work, in the cube of a co-worker when somehow (divine intervention?) the subject of Hello Kitty came up.

"I just love H.K.," I said, before I realized I had spoken aloud. A shocked, suffocating silence followed as my co-worker eyed me oddly. I pondered my escape routes. "What did you just say?" she asked, quietly. And then, I can't explain it, but something happened to me. I knew at that moment I was not going to run anymore. I held my head up and made something very close to eye contact and said it aloud: "I love Hello Kitty!" and ran back to my cubicle.

Shortly, my co-worker appeared at my cubicle. Was she here to ridicule, to hate? "Um... were you..." she began. "Were you serious about Hello Kitty?" Here was my chance for escape: Yes! I was joking! But... no. I couldn't do that to H.K. I looked my coworker straight in the eye and I said: "Yes! Yes, I love her! I do!"

And then came the words that would clear away the stubborn rubble of the walls that had held me for so long. My co-worker said, "Me too!"

From there, it was like wildfire. We discovered others just like us who also appreciate, if slightly tentatively, the beauty of H.K. Within days even those who scoffed were entranced by H.K. video games, helping our heroine dodge digital raindrops. We shared our stickers, fluffy pens, web site wisdom, stamps and even a coveted deck of Hello Kitty tarot cards.

Loving Hello Kitty just makes sense to those of us who do, but while she may appear harmless, she is not without controversy. For decades, the debate has raged: why doesn't Hello Kitty have a mouth? The theories abound. There's the Sanrio Conspiracy Theory — that H.K. knows something, but Sanrio doesn't want her to talk. There's the mutation theory — perhaps she was once normal before a horrible accident robbed her of a mouth and left her with an abnormally large head. Perhaps she is a political statement — that women should be looked at but not listened to? Some have suggested that her lack of mouth is just the oversight of a lazy artist but I, personally, have debunked this theory due to its inherently flawed reasoning. (There ARE no lazy workers in Japan! Ha!)

The official line from Sanrio is that she has no mouth because she speaks from her heart, unbound by any one language. On my good days, I'm inclined to believe it. H.K. may have no mouth, but she speaks to me through golden silence. She speaks of goodness. She is peace, love and kindness. If there is indeed a power greater than myself, it is Hello Kitty.

*Remember, Julia Smillie Carey is also the witty author of our advice column, [Ask Julia](#), which runs on these hallowed pages every Tuesday.*

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