

a letter to Charlotte that Holly wrote. Charlotte, whose husband was then a minister, began a phone and email friendship with Holly, and became Holly's "personal minister," helping her overcome her grief, although they have never met in person.

"I will be forever grateful for the comfort I got from Charlotte's **RISN4U** vanity plate on that horrible night, and for the open arms that Charlotte's message bestowed. So while I love a cute plate as much as anyone (and often photograph them), it's not all about vanity," Holly wrote in an email that she sent to me after she read an Associated Press news story about the *Vanity Plates Survey* results and about *LCNS2ROM*.

Holly and Charlotte's moving story demonstrates the power of vanity plates to convey messages, which is why vanity plates



have become pop culture icons.

Vanity plates have been featured in such movies as "Back to the Future," in which Michael J.



Fox's time transporter DeLorean vehicle was vanitized with an **OUTATIME** vanity plate. On TV, one of the funniest "Seinfeld" episodes involved an **ASSMAN** New York vanity plate that was mistakenly delivered to Kramer, instead of the proctologist who ordered it.

Vanity plates even inspired a Canadian word puzzle game show, which later ran on American cable TV, called "Bumper Stumpers," in which contestants won by deciphering the messages of the vanity plates featured on the show.



Vanity plates are pop culture icons because they take mundane objects – license plates – and turn them into art, using words. Vanity plates thus resemble the work of pop artists like Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns, who turned ordinary commercial