

Man of letters

Photographer David Matthews sees meaning spelled out all around him

By: David Sanderson ([see Website for full article](#))

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TWO years ago, David Matthews was volunteering with a literacy program at Alexander School in Alexander.

After noticing that one of the students was having difficulty forming certain letters of the alphabet, Matthews suggested a game: He would point to different objects around the classroom and the student would tell Matthews what letters they looked like to him.



A picture is worth at least one word: David Matthews with an example of his 'lettergraphs.'

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As the child began spotting Ls in blackboard corners and Ts in table legs, Matthews had an a-ha moment of his own: What if he photographed objects from everyday life that reminded him of letters? And what if he used those

images to form words or names which he could market to people looking for unique wedding, birthday or graduation gifts?

That in a nutshell spells out how Matthews' four-month old venture, A to Z Illusions, was born.

Since launching his website (www.atozillusions.com) on February 19 Matthews now sells L-O-V-E and H-A-P-P-I-N-E-S-S to customers from every corner of the globe. At \$5 per letter, including shipping.

"Reactions are varied; most people see the letters immediately when in word form but not when in single letters," Matthews says, taking a break from shearing alpacas at a neighbour's farm. "Some have a delayed reaction (but) then the penny drops and they laugh."

Creating your own design -- Matthews calls them "lettergraphs" -- is as easy as ABC. Go to his website, choose 'Create' and a text-box will pop up. Type in whatever name or word comes to mind and presto, your image materializes within seconds. If you want to see what options are available, click on the letter you'd like to change and alternates will appear.

Photos are 4x6 and are available in sepia tone only. (Black and white is too harsh, Matthews feels, and colour distracts too much from the shape of the letters.) Matthews doesn't offer framing but he is hoping to find a local craftsman who can create casings made to his specifications.

Matthews has a bank of over 200 letters which he adds to almost daily. "Many times we have been driving and (my wife) Mary Jo says, 'Stop the car, I see a good letter.'"

Almost all of Matthews' pictures were snapped in Manitoba. None have been retouched. "I have an O which is a full moon," Matthews says, "and soon to be on site, an M from icicles backlit at night."

Some letters are infinitely tougher to track down than others. While Q is "surprisingly easy to find," anybody with a bead on capital Bs, Rs and Zs is welcome to contact him.

"Love" is the most popular order thus far. Runners-up are first or last names as well as inspirational words like "laugh," "smile" and "hope." No cuss words, to date, Matthews says with a laugh. No spelling miscues ("Thank God for spellcheck!"), either.

Matthews is pleased that his photos have created a new pursuit in his community, located 22 kilometres west of Brandon. "Friends are now on the lookout... They tell me, 'David, there is a great A at such and such a place.'"

Matthews will display his work at the Lunder Agricultural Fair, June 12-13. For more information, visit www.atozillusions.com

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