



Today's column is brought to you by the letters A to Z.

About 30 years ago, photographer David Matthews was working with the Western Daily Press in England when he offered personalized gifts to some co-workers. Using his talent for photographing everyday items in a unique way, he would find letter shapes in anything from nature to architecture.

He would then string the letters together to form names, words or phrases.

"I did it just for the girls in the typing pool -- their baby's name or for their weddings," he recalled on Thursday from his home in Alexander, about 20 minutes west of Brandon.

Matthews also volunteered in a literacy program and used his skills to help a struggling child. He invented a game to find letters in items like desks and chairs.

"If they touched something like a chair leg in the shape of an H, they could then draw it," he said.

Little did he know at the time it would lead to a home-based artistic venture he would launch in 2006. Matthews calls his business A to Z Illusions alphabet and letter art, with the motto of "create your words your way."

"As an individual photograph it might look like, say, just a ladder," he said. "But when it's put in with the rest of them, you can see it's the letter A.

"That's why I called it Illusions, because it's actually a photograph of a building or a tree, but put together it gives the illusion of a word."

Also known as David The Letterman, Matthews displays his work at shows and events across the country.

"Now at shows and online (atozillusions.com) I have over 1,000 different letters, but in stock I have thousands of letters," he said. "The reason I have a selection of letters is so (clients) can personalize it themselves.

"They may like a farmyard theme or a city theme. The majority will have their last name."

A freelance photographer for more than 40 years, Matthews met and married his Canadian wife in England. They moved to Manitoba in 1999 when her career brought her this way.

It's in farmyards that he finds most of his photo subjects. Landowners often raise their eyebrows when he asks permission to stroll around and look for letters.

"They'll usually think 'oh, he's such a Brit. Let him get on with it,'" said Matthews, who has several works displayed at Forbidden Flavours coffee shop in Brandon.

His knack for finding letters has developed over the years.

"It's just what you train your eye to do," he said, adding the letter R is most challenging. "The joke is when I was in my 20s I looked for girls, and now that I'm older I look for letters."

Matthews concedes he's surprised to have attracted clients from far and wide, including Australia and England. Some of his notable customers include Alison Arngrim, (who played Nellie Olsen in Little House on the Prairie), Brett Wilson of Dragons' Den, magician/illusionist Ryan Joyce, Winnipeg musician Sierra Noble and country singer Cindi Cain.

He recently framed a couple of words for Deanne Bray, the deaf actress who plays Sue Thomas FB Eye.

One of his more unusual creations was commissioned by a Winnipeg woman who wanted a word for her bathroom.

"She wanted 'relax' or 'enjoy' or something like that," Matthews recalled. "Because Thomas Crapper invented the flush toilet, I suggested the word 'crapper' and she went for it."

If you would like to have a word with Matthews, call him at: (204) 573-6431.

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