

# MAN OF LETTERS

The story of 'lettergraphs' **by David Matthews, Alexander, Man.**



As they look through the array of photographs of everyday objects representing letters of the alphabet and place them together to form their name or a special word, people visiting my art booth at shows often comment, "You must see letters everywhere!"

Since I was 12 years old and had my first photograph published on the front page of our local newspaper, including a credit line "Photo by David Matthews," I have been hooked on photography. It became my hobby, passion and profession. The excitement of working in the darkroom has never left me and today I am slowly, somewhat reluctantly moving with the times and going digital.

After the photography bug hit, a career as a photojournalist and industrial commercial photographer developed. More than 30 years ago, while working on a newspaper in England, I offered some personalized gifts to co-workers. Using my talents for photographing everyday items in a unique way, I found letter shapes in everything from nature to architecture. I would then string them together to form words, names and phrases.

At first I did this for the girls in the typing pool—replicating their babies' names or new last names when they married. Life and my profession took me to many places after England and I now live with my wife, Mary Jo, in Manitoba. It was here that my letter photography idea was rekindled and further developed.

Volunteering for a literacy program at our local school, I used this idea to help children learn and make reading fun by asking them to find letters in items like desks and chairs. I had no idea at the time this would lead to my artistic venture and business, A to Z Illusions. Viewed as an individual photo-

graph, the letter might look like, say, just a ladder, but when placed together with other "lettergraphs," you can see it as the letter "A."

That is why we came up with the name A to Z Illusions, because only by putting the pictures of trees or fences or buildings together do you create the illusion of a word and its individual letters. Plus, one of my many hobbies is magic, which I sometimes get the chance to do at the art and crafts shows we attend.

I have now been nicknamed "David the Letter Man" at shows. On my website, I offer more than 1,000 different letters to choose from so clients can personalize their framed letter art themselves; even those who feel they do not have any artistic abilities can create their word their way and have fun in the process. I have thousands more in stock and even some themed alphabets such as music, fire and hockey. I'm always working on adding more to the selection.

Mary Jo and I run this small, home-based business and, since beginning this venture, we have mailed framed words all around the world. They're hanging across Canada, in the United States and even as far away as Europe, Hong Kong and Australia!

There is nothing I enjoy more than wandering around hunting for and photographing letters. I always ask permission from owners if I can wander on their property—most think I am crazy but say yes anyway! The knack of finding letters has evolved over the years; it is what I train my eyes to see. The letter "R" is without a doubt the most challenging to find.

I am delighted and often surprised to discover clients from far and wide. Some of my notable customers include Alison Arngrim (who played Nellie Oleson in *Little House on the Prairie*), W. Brett Wilson of *Dragons' Den* fame, illusionist

Ryan Joyce and Winnipeg musician Sierra Noble. Recently, I framed a few words for Deanne Bray, the deaf actress who played in *Sue Thomas: F.B. Eye*.

One of my most unusual creations was for a lady in Winnipeg who wanted a word for her bathroom. At first, she was thinking of words like relax, or enjoy. I suggested "Crapper" after flush-toilet inventor Thomas Crapper—and she went for it! ■

Visit David's website to see more of his work: [www.atozillusions.com](http://www.atozillusions.com).

