The Matz Family has played an important role in both Harlingen and Cameron County history. The following items document some of its contributions.

Presentation About  
E.O. and Eleanor Matz  
To  
Harlingen Historical Preservation Society  
General Public Meeting  
Harlingen Public Library  
November 11, 2005  
By  
James R. Matz
I’d like to begin by commending Mary – you and everybody else who is associated with the Harlingen Historical Preservation Society. What you do is something that is so really very important. I had a chance to visit with Rafael for a little bit while we were setting things up. That you are able to attract people like Rafael to become members of your group I think is really great. I also would like to congratulate you folks for what you did at the Harlingen Museum. We became aware of the Dia de los Muertos “the Day of the Dead” exhibits from Mary Lou. The exhibits were outstanding. I just hope that each year more and more people will come and have a chance to see those because it’s obvious that an awful lot time and effort went into what was done. I would like to mention that we have some friends of ours here today, Joan and Rod Olson. They spend four or five months up north where it’s a little bit cooler in the summer and then come down here in the winter time just like the ducks and the geese. So, we’re glad you’re here as well as Lynn Lerberg, their daughter.

That having been said, I guess what I’d like to do today is talk a little bit about both Mom and Dad. To begin this, since it is Veteran’s Day, could we just have a moment of silence to remember all the men and women who have gone before and who are serving today and made it possible for us to live in this great country. Thank you.

I’m going to begin this discussion of my mother by sharing with you part of the minutes from the Harlingen City Commission Meeting of June 3, 1987.

QUOTE “Eleanor Matz told Mayor Card he had forgotten Citizen Communication. Citizen Communication is ordinarily the very first item on the agenda of a commission meeting, and evidently that had been overlooked.” (And here comes my Aunt Fern who was married to my Dad’s brother, Martin. We are so glad you’re here.) “Eleanor said she had been waiting here all through the meeting to address the Commission. She came to thank the Commission for getting a job done and just found out it had not been done yet. She commented on the condition of Commerce Street, one of the main streets leading into Harlingen. She said it is a disgrace. There is a building at Fair Park that has three sides standing and rubble all inside it, something needs to be done on that. She told the Commission about calling City Hall to find out who owns it. There was a problem about the legal description as the Tax Office said there is no such block number. She noted the Harry Day parking lot downtown needs caring for. There are rusted pipes and it looks terrible. It needs sweeping. She said she has been talking to people, giving them instructions on how to get to the Cultural Arts Center by using the Library as a reference point. The old bicycle rack is terrible right there in front of the Library. She walked out of the Library with a lady from McAllen who commented she should see the McAllen Library. She said she is tired of the unfavorable comparison. Why can’t Harlingen shape up? Mrs. Matz said she is proud of the oak trees in town, but they need to be pruned. She had talked with the City Manager, Gavino Sotelo about the front of this building. He suggested getting someone who really knows what he is doing to care for the trees. She said she does that at Liberty Garden. Another thing is the city should write the Wendy’s people and get them to do something about their property. The grounds need attention. Mayor Card said he wished all the citizens of Harlingen were as conscientious as Mrs. Matz. He said a number of those things are in the range of private citizens. He agreed
with her about the bicycle rack, but the city does have a Library Board who has never made a recommendation. Commissioner Bonner said they have. Mayor Card said a lot of the property along North Commerce is private property. Mrs. Matz said some of it is also right of way. She said there are two dead palms on Commerce. She asked why a garbage truck driver could not jot down these things that need attention. That would be a good way for Ruben to know about these problems.

Commissioner Vittitoe commented on Mrs. Matz’s diligence and said he appreciated her efforts. Mrs. Matz said she had talked with the City Manager, asking if someone bought the paint, could the city would do the work?

Mayor Card thanked Mrs. Matz and said that lot would be cleaned up tomorrow. He asked for an executive session to discuss lease of property at Valley International Airport. Commissioner Vittitoe moved to go into executive session. Commissioner Menchaca seconded the motion and it carried unanimously. Mayor Card recessed the meeting.”

That gives you a flavor of Mom. Now, if anybody here knew Mom they have at least one “Eleanor Matz” story, I’m sure because I still hear them. There was nothing that was sacred. Anything that she saw that needed some attention, she did not hesitate in bringing it to people’s attention. I see Blas Cantu is nodding his head also.

So how did Eleanor Matz, who was born March 1, 1914, in West New York, New York, come to be a resident of the Rio Grande Valley? I guess it began with her mom and dad, Charles and Anna Frieda Ochsner, who immigrated from Switzerland, legally, through Ellis Island in about 1910. They ended up in New Jersey living at Palisades on the Hudson where she attended Fort Lee High School. I have brought a number of pictures here. If you haven’t had a chance to look at them, maybe you would like to afterward. There is a picture of the home they left in Palisades and there’s a picture of the family - the father, mother, the three daughters Mom, Alice, and Frieda, and the dog, Teddy. In New Jersey Grandpa Ochsner had a lace factory and here are some pieces of lace that came from his factory. He also imported marble and did the finishing of the marble in New Jersey and sent it out from there. They moved to La Feria in 1929, the first year of the Great Depression. Here you have a picture of the Parker Mann Land Party. Land promoters like Parker Mann would bring folks in special train cars from the east coast and mid west to this area, they would show them the orchards with the fruit, convince them that money did grow on trees, and sell them a piece of property. Then it was up to them to fend for themselves. Mom graduated as Salutatorian from La Feria High School.

Grandpa had a small orchard, but what he ended up doing was opening up a café in La Feria called The Snappy Café. There is a picture of that here as well. In 1932 the family moved from La Feria to Harlingen and opened the Swiss Chalet Restaurant. I don’t know if there is anyone here who remembers that, but it was located about where Boggus Ford was located on West Harrison before it moved out to the expressway. I’ve got some memories of the Swiss Chalet Restaurant, particularly going into the kitchen where Grandpa had a big round table. He would import Swiss cheese from Switzerland, the big
round, and he would cut it off slice by slice. Fern, I don’t know if there is any of this you are going to remember, but at some point, if there is something you think is important, don’t hesitate to speak up. The other thing that I remembered well about the Swiss Chalet Restaurant was in the back on the outside there was a beer garden just like you would find in Germany or Switzerland. As a kid, when I was five or six years old, Grandpa would ask me to sing “God Bless America” for the people who were there. That’s still a very strong memory. In addition to the restaurant, Grandpa Ochsner put in the first bowling alley, very small, but the first bowling alley I guess in all of South Texas. Grandma passed away in the late 60’s, he passed away in the late 40’s. Both of them are buried in Mont Meta cemetery.

E.O. and Eleanor Matz married in 1937, had four children - Brant, Joyce, Susan and myself. There is a picture of a Christmas card that Mom and Dad put out every year so they could share with the community the fact that the family was growing in numbers and also just growing.

Mom and Dad were from the very beginning, partners in their business. I guess you could probably say Mom was a very liberated kind of woman. She believed in being involved in exactly the same way anybody else would be in the business so she usually ended up handling the front end of the Matz Electric Gift and Radio store, while Dad handled the back part which was the electrical contracting business. Over here you’ll see pictures of the opening of the second location of Matz Electric and Gift and Radio at 214 E. Jackson Street. The first location was on Commerce next to where the old Ridgeways used to be in that very narrow building across from Pueblo Tires. That’s where Mr. Miller also had his bicycle shop right next to Matz Electric. They moved from Commerce St. to Jackson St. and then to the Matz Building at 513 E. Jackson.

Mom and Dad also got involved in considerable real estate development. He would buy property, find a tenant, do a lease, and then he would build a building. The first one he did like that was a building for the Rio Grande Valley Gas Company which was at the corner of 4th and Jackson Street. It was later sold to Al Padilla and became the McDonald’s business office. Next to that he built the building for Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. I’ll never forget one time we were working on the plans and negotiating with them. They sent down drawings of what they thought they wanted here and we showed it to a local architect. He said “you don’t need to build the roof that way.” So we got on the phone and called Metropolitan Life in New York. The guy said “yes you do because if you don’t do it, it will never take the snow load.” We tried to explain to him where we were, and that maybe once every 50 years it snowed just enough to hit the ground and then melt. That was the second building. The third was for Butte Paint Company, and then ultimately of course they purchased the Sam Houston School Building, renovated it and turned it into what is known as the Matz Building today. And in all of these ventures Mom and Dad were partners. In addition to the commercial development, they did residential development with the Matz Subdivision in the Lake Drive area. When they bought the property it was an abandoned orchard whose trees had been killed by the freeze, in I think, 1950. They turned that into one of the first major up-scale residential development areas in Harlingen.
Mom got very involved in community activities. I’m not sure if you’re aware but the land we’re standing on right now used to be part of City Lake. I remember as a kid we used to fish and swim here. At one point the City decided it was going to half the size of City Lake and they were going to sell this land to developers to put in a housing project. Mom and Dad, in particular Mom, got very involved in going to City Commission meetings, enlisted the aid of other people to convince the City Commission that this land should be kept for public use. And as a result, we have today Liberty Garden, which she was very involved in developing. There’s a picture of her and some of the other ladies that were involved in that initially. They transplanted something like 400 or so daisy plants from our home, planted those around the center rotunda area. Then of course the Cultural Arts Center, she was very involved in the construction and the organization of that. I guess the story was that way back when there used to be a Woman’s Club here in Harlingen. They had the Woman’s Club building over where the Harlingen Community Center is now on Madison Street. In the early 1950’s the City built the Casa del Sol building and told the Woman’s Club that they were going to tear down that building but they would build them another one right away. They tore down the building, built the community center, but nobody bothered to build the new woman’s club building. It took a major city election, I think about 1984 thereabouts, when some people didn’t win elections because they were not supportive of building that cultural arts center. As a result people were elected who were supportive and the building was finally built. She was also very involved in development of the walking path around City Lake.

Other things she became very involved in were as a founding member of the Child’s Study Club, the Well Baby Clinic here in Harlingen in the late 1930’s. She’s the one who decided that rather than have a PTA (Parent Teacher Association), they really needed a SPTA (Student Parent Teacher Association) and students should be part of the decision making process. She became very involved in the Harlingen Youth Conference. For years and years she was the leader in bringing together the youngsters in the community, putting them through a leadership program, with emphasis on volunteerism, and then taking them to Austin to the Texas Youth Conference Meetings. For probably 30 years she worked as a volunteer for the Cancer Society, she was a member of the Harlingen Traffic Safety Board, the Harlingen Parks and Recreation Board, Cultural Arts Center Board, President and long time member of the Harlingen Garden Club. She was very involved when we began the Harlingen Proud project. She was one of the persons responsible at the very beginning for establishing the annual Festival of Faith program. The Easter Sunrise service was something she was very instrumental in getting started and keeping going for many years. One of the things she was particularly proud of was the Christmas Tree Lighting in front of the Cultural Arts Center, and a live nativity scene that took a major, major effort to get put together every year.

I’d like to share with you at this point a letter that was written to her by Amos Gonzalez. Amos Gonzalez was a fellow that lived in the Las Palmas Colonia. I don’t know how many of you folks are aware, but we have two major colonias near Harlingen city limits. Both of them are on the west side of town near Wilson Road. One is Las Palmas and the other is Colonia Juarez. Those are tough neighborhoods, both of them. Amos is a fellow
who decided he was going to try to turn things around for the youth in the Colonia Las Palmas. He established what was called the Las Palmas Thunderbolts Youth Club. Among other things he worked with me through Harlingen Proud to do major cleanups in Las Palmas. Well, evidently, at some point Mom talked to him about the nativity scene and the Christmas Tree Lighting. This is what Amos wrote. This is in November of 1995.

QUOTE “The Las Palmas Thunderbolts Club is a non-profit organization. Our purpose is to help the people of Las Palmas to beautify the colonia. Our goal is for everyone to participate in positive activities. Also to help the children and youth to succeed in their education, and for their parents to give them positive reinforcement in their parent skills. Our second goal is for the youth to participate in activities within the city and otherwise. We are going to try to help them get financial grants for their education.

Mrs. Matz, we are going to help you in your Christmas event on December 5, 1995. We are going to sing a song in Spanish for the people who may want to hear a Spanish song. Once again, thank you for your generous invitation for this event.” Amos Gonzalez

UNQUOTE

To me, this tells an awful lot about Mom. Here she was 81 years old reaching out every opportunity she had to the youth and the disadvantaged in this community to try to bring them in and have them make a positive contribution. The other thing she did that she was particularly proud of was to, through Harlingen Proud, initiate the production of the Children’s Theater at the auditorium at Christmas time. Dan Nedermeyer came here from Connecticut and put together the scripts. He put together the music, he then did the directing, and each year he had hundreds and hundreds of youngsters participating. Over time it touched the lives of thousands and thousands of kids, which had been their only opportunity, I’m sure, to participate in live theater. She was also a member of, first, Grace Lutheran Church with Dad, and later, the First United Methodist Church.

I’ve got a list of about fifteen major forms of recognition that she received and some of these are shown over there, including the Proclamation for Eleanor Matz Day on November 2, 1995. Should you go into Liberty Garden on the back part, you would see a very nice piece of signage talking about what Mom and Dad had done contributing to the betterment of Harlingen. I think what really made her happier than anything else was when Harlingen earned first place in the Keep Texas Beautiful Community Service Award Competition activity and, even more importantly, in 1992 earned the All America City Award. That was really a very important event.

She passed away at her home on Christmas Day 1995. Both she and Dad are buried at Mont Meta. I would like to close my comments on Mom with something else here that I think is pretty relevant. This is written by Charlie Deal, that’s a Ms. Charlie Deal. She was a student at that time, a junior at Harlingen High School South. She wrote a column called “Teen Scene”. This was published five days after Mom passed away, on December 30, 1995.
“Much has been said and printed about Eleanor Matz since her death Christmas Day, but I would like to add something.

Although she was 81 years old, Eleanor was a true friend to young people.

That is evident because of her interest in the theater for young people.

If she had not been such a pusher, it’s doubtful that the Christmas and other plays by teens and younger children would have been so successful.

I first met her several months ago while I was in my dad’s (Jerry Deal-Editor) office at the Valley Morning Star. She was looking for him, no doubt to tell him about one of her projects, and we had a long talk.

She was very interested in the fact I was writing a teen column. Later, she even offered some ideas for columns.

It’s been told before, but I’d like to tell a story on her.

A few years ago, there was a teen-age girl who dropped out of high school and was working in a local restaurant. Eleanor Matz came into the restaurant occasionally and one time asked the girl why she was not in school.

“I dropped out and they (school officials) won’t let me back in,” was the reply.

Well Mrs. Matz went to the next school board meeting and the result was that girl got back into high school.

The teen-ager, now in her 30’s, is a deputy county clerk in Galveston. She also is my stepsister, Kim Marquez.

Eleanor Matz last talked with my dad on the Thursday before she died, Dec. 21.

She was making certain the Star knew about a live nativity scene at Liberty Garden, involving a Los Fresnos family. The last thing she said to Dad after making her pitch was, “How’s my Charlie doing?”

To me, that is very moving. We, the young people of the community, will miss you, Eleanor Matz.”
Somehow, someway, he ended up with red hair. In 1905 Ernest Matz made his first trip on what was probably one of the first trains into the Rio Grande Valley. In 1907 he moved the family here. He was a farmer and ended up being a sharecropper on the Landrum and the Hicks property just east of Los Indios on the Rio Grande. They moved into a five room mud, log home. There is a picture of that with the family here. Since they didn’t have any lumber, Dad said that for the roof they used reeds and they tied them very closely together. That’s how that house was built. Unfortunately, when you have a hurricane as they did in 1912, you lose most of your house. You have wind and you have rain and that takes the mud off. That house was reduced from five rooms to about two and one-half rooms. They then moved in with the Landrum family for awhile.

We have to think about what it was like back in the 19 teens around here, especially if you lived in the country, especially if you lived along the Rio Grande. You didn’t have electricity, you didn’t have any grocery stores. If you didn’t have electricity, you didn’t have refrigerators. If you didn’t have electricity you were cooking all your meals on open fire in the stove. There were twelve kids in that family. Can you imagine what it was like to prepare three meals a day for fourteen people from scratch? Of course, that’s just one part of it. You had to grow most of the food that you ate. That’s what they did. They had corn, cotton, maize, sugar cane, carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers. They grew alfalfa to keep the cattle growing, and then they grew sugar beets for the pigs. In addition, they grew watermelons, and they constantly fought the coyotes. Coyotes just seemed to love watermelons while the raccoons loved cantaloupes. What the coons and the coyotes didn’t get, the bandits did. So it was a pretty challenging time around here.

I guess Grandpa Matz is best known because he produced numerous first bales of cotton including the earliest bale that’s ever been grown in the United States, and probably the world. This was 1911. Here is a picture of him at the Cotton Exchange in Houston. I think the date on that picture is May 23, 1921. Norman (Rozeff), do you remember the date in 1911? It was the earliest bale that was ever produced in the United States. To achieve that, think about this also, they had to pick the cotton by hand, they had to put it on a wagon and take it from wherever they grew it along the river to a gin in San Benito. They had to gin it, they had to compress it, they had to put it on the train and take it to Houston, then put it on a truck and take it over to the cotton exchange. That’s what it took to produce and deliver the first bale. There is a very, very good account of that that I have if anybody’s interested in reading it. That particular bale ended up selling for $1,015.00. Again, if you stop and think about that, that was an awful lot of money in 1911. From there the bale was then shipped on to New York and it was auctioned again. But Grandpa Matz had the first bale for many years.

Unfortunately, both Grandpa Matz (9/16/27) and Grandma Matz (8/6/33) passed away before I was born, so I never really had a chance to sit down and talk with them. Both of them are buried in the Harlingen cemetery. The twelve children were: Arthur, E.O., Elizabeth, Frank, Johnny, Martin, Minnie, Malinda, Charlie, Bill, Alex. Fern was married to Martin. They lived at different places after coming here from Warda, Texas. First on the Landrum property, then they moved to the Stillwell property, a place on the Moore property, and then finally here to Harlingen. I guess they probably ended up here
because, as they farmed, the way they made a little bit of money was selling food to the hotel, in particular the Moore Hotel, where Dad mentioned they delivered regularly eggs, butter, buttermilk and vegetables for use in the restaurant.

Education – can you imagine again what it was like about 1910 or so? Dad said they had a one room school that was twelve feet by sixteen feet. Mrs. Landrum was the teacher. There were seven students. She didn’t call them by name, she just said, “one, two, three, four, five, six, seven”, expected them to raise their hand. Dad made it very clear that when you went to school you were there to learn and not to mess around. Have you seen the picture of the kids sitting in the corner with the dunce hat on? Evidently that happened. He talked about that if people didn’t do their lesson, they were put on a chair in a corner with their lesson book and they were not allowed to leave that corner until they had done their lesson. They never worried so much about being disciplined at school even though the teacher had a paddle and used it often. If Mom and Daddy heard that there were any problems at school, that’s when things got really serious. Unfortunately, Dad had to drop out of school in the sixth grade to work and help provide for the family. In spite of the lack of formal education, he was fluent in three languages - English, Spanish and German. He was also a very accomplished musician. He played the guitar, the accordion, violin and harmonica. And, of course, he was self taught.

He told me stories about picking cotton. I tried it for a week once. Now I know why he decided he didn’t want to be a farmer. He said during cotton season they were expected to pick cotton six days a week. They were expected to pick a minimum of one thousand pounds each, and if they picked that thousand pounds, they got a dollar. That dollar went to Mom and Dad to help take care of the family. He did decide that he wanted to become an electrician. He worked at a cotton gin in order to pay for a correspondence course which he took from the University of Chicago. In 1922 he opened an electrical business in partnership with a Mr. Barth and later went on his own.

What did they do for recreation and sports? Well, they went fishing. There were a lot of catfish in the river. But they also chased snakes. Evidently snakes were a big, big problem here. He said “we had black snakes, we had rattlesnakes, we had moccasin, and we had a water snake and then the bull snake.” I want to share with something that came out of his presentation to the Tip of Texas Genealogical Society in 1983.

QUOTE“As far as the snakes are concerned, well, we pretty well took care of them. We used to go out in the brush and we’d see those big wooden piles of sticks where the rats stayed in, hatched in, bred in. They were all over. For sport on Sunday afternoon we used to set those on fire and wait for the snakes to come running out and hit them in the head with a stick. Sometimes big snakes would come out. After doing that for several years we finally decided one Christmas that we were going to do something special. We decided that we would take all these snakes and some twine, and decorate a big tree with snakes just like a Christmas tree. One whole afternoon we did nothing but kill snakes and we hung them up. I would give anything in the world for a picture of that. So that was just one of our sports, the other was fishing.” UNQUOTE
Mom and Dad married in 1937. I mentioned the children, what they did together working in business, the real estate and residential. I’ve also brought a copy of the program we used when we dedicated the historical marker in front of the Matz Building. There’s also a replica of the signage that is there. Dad was very active in the Grace Lutheran Church, as were all the Matz’s. He was a very religious person, and was a biblical scholar. I never ceased to be amazed as a kid the way he could quote scripture. One day it occurred to me why he was able to do that. When you are dirt poor and you live in the country and you don’t have electricity, you don’t have a radio, you don’t have a library to go to. The one thing every family had was a bible. So when you had time, and you weren’t worn out from working, you would sit down and read the bible. As a result of that, he could quote you line and verse of just about any scripture you might have an interest in. He was very proud to be a Kiwanian. He had forty-five years of perfect attendance. There’s a sign over here that he would hang on his office door every Tuesday saying “This is not my time, this is the community’s time, and I’m going to Kiwanis. I’ll see you when I get back.” He did a lot of things there to try to help the club raise money, particularly to help youth. He managed a gum ball machine collection program for decades, was there at the pancake breakfast every year, and was very instrumental in establishing the Key Club at Harlingen High School.

He was a very patriotic person. Once they built Liberty Garden they put a flagpole in the middle. There’s an American flag that flew there every day. Do you want to know who put that flag up every morning and took it down every evening? Dad. Every day. When I came back to Harlingen in 1982 we decided we were going to go snapper fishing. Well, to do that you have to get up pretty early in the morning, drive over to South Padre Island, get on the boat usually before dawn. I think we needed to be over there something like 6:30 a.m. So I said, “Dad why don’t I pick you up around 5:30”. He said, “No, you better come by about 5:15.” I said, “Why?” He said, “Because we have to go to Liberty Garden and put up the flag before we go fishing.” And we did. And, yes, the first stop we made when we got back from the fishing trip was to go to Liberty Garden and take the flag down. And he did that every day until he passed away.

I jotted down some of the quotes he was fond of.

“Waste not, want not.”
“It’s not what you make, it’s what you save.”
“If you watch after the nickels and dimes, the dollars will take care of themselves.”
“If you don’t have your health, you don’t have anything.”
“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding”

I think that’s pretty good advice.

Some of the memories I have:

We had a swing on our front porch at 810 E. Madison Street. We would sit out there in the evenings, if he got home in time, and play the accordion or guitar and sing “You Are My Sunshine”. I can still remember the first time I ever caught a fish in the drainage ditch
just north of here by Briggs Coleman. Then on Sunday afternoons one of the big sports for the Matz Brothers (You can see a picture of them. They are pretty good sized guys.) was to go seining in the canals. Then generally what you were looking for were catfish. That was the desired food to eat. But you would catch a lot of other things. You would catch snapping turtles, you would catch gasper goo, you would catch big perch and then, every once in awhile, an alligator gar. There’s one time I’ll never forget. The brothers heard that the fellow was washing his dishes in a canal over near Rio Hondo. The next thing he knew he had lost his arm from the elbow down. A big Alligator gar had come up while he was doing that and just took his arm right off. So they decided they were going to get in that canal and try to find that gar. They did it, and I was there. We took chicken wire and doubled it and put the steel posts on the ends. They set up a block on one end and then dredged toward it. That gar put his snoot through that chicken wire about that far, but they got that gar. That was fun, folks. When you didn’t know any better, and you really didn’t have many other things that you could do. Then we had the drought around 1950 or thereabouts and all the canals dried up. What we ended up doing was getting “hiccups” (they were pipe benders that electricians used) and we’d climb into those canals with mud up to our knees and chase fish out of those potholes where they were. That was a lot of fun too.

I guess I must mention again that Mom and Dad were partners, and Dad’s role was always to provide and make it possible for Mom to do a lot of the things that she was able to do.

Dad passed away on October 23, 1984. Both he and Mom are in crypts at Mont Meta Cemetery.

In closing, I’d like to share two things with you. The first is Dad’s Credo. He kept this on the wall over his desk. It goes:

**QUOTE** “Therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.” DEUT. 30:19.

I choose life and to live abundantly, fully and joyfully, knowing that in every activity of my life, the expression of that which is whole, successful, healthful, and healing is my rightful spiritual inheritance.

I know that living and having the breath of life is a privilege which God has given me solely in order to express the divine nature through me.

I am an instrument, a tool for good, and I am enabled, when I flow with the stream of God consciousness, to accomplish any task, overcome any problem, express creatively, joyfully, and masterfully of myself.

I give to life the fullest of myself, and life returns in even fuller measure that which I need and want to make of myself, the perfect reality of what I am, a unique and individualized expression of God.
I choose to live my own life, not living through others, or conforming to another’s idea of how I shall live, knowing that only through the expression of my own way of life and God’s will, can I be truly me. AND THAT ALL OTHERS HAVE THIS SAME RIGHT.”

I’ll close my comments on Dad with something I added to his comments to the Genealogical Society. I’ve got a copy of that too here. This was a presentation that he made on April 19, 1983 to the Genealogical Society where he talked about the early days in the Valley.

QUOTE E. O. Matz was a simple man, a deeply religious man, a great man and my father. He was a living example of the Golden Rule – “Do unto others as you would have them to unto you”.

Uncle Remus said, “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all”. Dad agreed completely. Someone else said, “A father gives his children two things, roots and wings.” Yes, he gave me both – confidence and the ability to dream.

The son of a sharecropper who, as the second oldest of twelve children, dropped out of school in the sixth grade to help support the family, and yet became a Master Electrician, was in business for sixty-two years, was fluent in three languages and an accomplished musician. He taught me by example many things including the value of hard work and of the inherent worth of each person regardless of race, creed or color. He taught me that all men are created equal and should be respected and treated accordingly. He taught me how to plant, grow and care for a garden, and that a green thumb is nothing more than common sense and sweat.

There is a saying which always reminded me of Dad – “The Kiss of the Sun for Pardon, the Song of the Birds for Myrth; One is nearer God’s Heart in a Garden, than anywhere else on Earth.”

A man should not be remembered by how he dies. No. He should be remembered by how he lived. There is a poem:

The Bridge Builder

An old man going along the highway
Came at the evening, cold and gray,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide;
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The sullen stream had no fear for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide.
“Old man” said a fellow pilgrim near,
“You are wasting your strength with building here’
Your journey will cease with the ending day,
you never again will pass this way;
You’ve crossed the stream deep and wide,
why build you this bridge at evening tide?”
The builder lifted his old gray head –
“Good friend, in the path I come,” he said,
“There followeth after me today,
a youth whose feet must pass this way;
This chasm that has been nought to me,
to that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be;
He, too must cross the twilight dim –
good friend I build this bridge for him.”

E. O. Matz was a bridge builder, a man who believed in mankind and his community. His legacy will live forever.”UNQUOTE

Thank you. I’ll be glad to answer any questions.

Matz Family Tidbits

A feather in San Benito’s cap and a generator of favorable news was its production of the first bale of cotton in the U.S. on June 11, 1911. Producer Ernest Matz broke the Texas record by 10 days. The bale was rushed to the Houston Cotton Exchange and sold to New York buyer Jesse Jones for $1,015 – an unheard of price, breaking all world records. Matz also received an additional $125 bonus from Gohlman, Lester and Co. Matz was reported to have produced 60 bales on 40 acres in 1910. (From the Brownsville Herald of 6/1/1911.)

1922 The E.O. Matz Electric Company commences business first as the Barth and Matz Electric Co. Lawrence Electric opens this same year. Ernest C. Barth works out of 217 E. Harrison.

1925 Early in the year a doctrinal disagreement arises among the Lutherans here. Some charter member then left to form another congregation, namely that which would evolve into the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.
3/25 Traveling missionary, the Rev. Dr. H.W. Emil Listman is ministering to a group of Lutherans here. On 8/23/25 fourteen Lutheran families organize to establish a Lutheran Church of America mission. In the initial group are members of the Hoffman, Matz, W.W. and Clara Altus, Miller, Schmoker, Borchardt, and Laabs families and individuals Mrs. Sanders, Mrs. Elizabeth Bothwell and Ernest C. Barth. The property at 318-322 E. Jackson is purchased then later sold to E.O. Matz. In 1926 its mission is in the small, white, wood frame building on the northeast corner of 4th and Jackson. This is the building which has seen numerous previous uses by the community and various religious denominations. Pastor Nathaniel Sheffer is the congregation's first permanent minister, serving from 1/26 until the summer of 1931. On 6/15/33 a two story parsonage
has been built and dedicated to the rear of the sanctuary. Shortly after the church's formation the women of the congregation form a group named the "Evangelical Lutheran Ladies Aid." Mrs. Ed Miller is elected its president; Mrs. John Kretchmer, vp; Mrs Elizabeth Bothwell, secretary; and Mrs. A.W. Labb, treasurer. Other members are Mrs. Clara Altus, Mrs. Ida Voges, Mrs. Anna Matz, Mrs. E. Listman, Mrs. L. Hector, and Mrs. E. Hibbe.

1934  Parker Knapp, one of five brothers - Everett, John, Gilson, Fred, and Parker - opens Knapp Chevrolet dealership in downtown Harlingen at West Jackson. When it burns down in 1935 he moves to West Harrison and in 1941 to 1st Street between Harrison and Tyler. The employees number about 25. By 1939 the bothers are operating dealerships in Weslaco, Mercedes, Brownsville, and Houston. In 2000 the local Knapp facility moves to new quarters south of Expressway 83 at Stuart Place Road. Here the sons of Gretchen Knapp, daughter of Parker, and her husband Butch Cooley run the dealership. By 2004 seventy employees sell 16 different models. The old location is occupied by Frank Matz's Central Air and Heat. Some of the structures on the lot are demolished. In 2005 a portion of the property's north side is sold and MacPherson's Pharmacy erects a large building for itself.

5/17/46  After purchasing the property in late 1945, a Lutheran Service Center is established at 405 E. Jackson for armed service personnel here. With the war ending and the Army Airfield closed the center is discontinued 2/1/46 but used as a ELCA parish hall. In January it had bought the property at 318-22 E. Jackson but then is to sell it to E.O. Matz.

In 1948 Harlingen leads the Valley in retail sales at $32,864,000. It also has the Valley's largest payroll. 1,877 employees receive $3,650,000 in wages. The city has 370 stores. E.O. Matz purchases the old Sam Houston School on Jackson but doesn't take possession of it until 6/5/50. He transforms it into a business office complex.

2/90  The Jalapeno Hundred Annual Bicycle Tour benefiting Harlingen Youth Athletics is initiated. This same month James Matz of Harlingen, and who later to be a County Commissioner, organizes Valley Proud and also Harlingen Proud. Youth and others work annually in connection with Arbor Month and throughout the year to improve the Valley's environment, tree-planting being only one aspect. Although Arbor Month is held nationally in April, February is more suitable to plant in the Valley.

10/3/92  By 34 votes, 12,241 to 12,207, Lawyer Jim Solis defeats incumbent Ken Fleuret for District 38 state representative seat. In 2004 he will have run for his eighth consecutive term. In this same election, City Commissioner James Matz running for County Commissioner defeated 28 year veteran commissioner Adolf Thomae, Jr. of San Benito. Some years later James will be elected Mayor of the community of Palm Valley.
12/25/95  Eleanor Ochsner Matz dies. Born in 1914 in New Jersey she had come with her family to La Feria in 1929. In 1932 she and her family moved to Harlingen where she would eventually marry electrician E. O. Matz. She is remembered for a lifetime of tireless efforts to clean up Harlingen, her civic pride, her community advocacy, commitment to youth, health and beautification. Her children are James and Brant, Joyce Hill and Susan Raybourn. Initially an ELCA Lutheran, she was to become a member of the First Methodist Church.