

Topic: Smile

Say "Cheese"
by Liz Gibbons

In the last few years I have hated to have my picture taken. The image that appears is no one I know. Who is that stranger who is so wrinkled and old?

I have pictures of my paternal grandfather and great-grandfather. These pictures were taken in their later years. They are both rather handsome men. When their pictures were taken photography was in its infancy. Most people back then had just one or two photographs taken of them their whole life. It was a big deal, and they dressed in their finest. It was usually done in a photography studio. Interestingly, they did not smile in those old photographs. Part of the reason was that their teeth were not in good condition. Many people had missing, broken, or discolored teeth. Dental procedures were not available at that time to cap broken teeth, so they were removed. This was also during the Victorian era where you were expected to act dignified. so casual pictures were not taken.

It was Eastman Kodak who introduced a camera for the masses in 1885, and that opened photography to include casual photography. In 1900 they introduced the Brownie camera which sold for a dollar. I suspect that would be like twenty-five to thirty dollars today.

The smile gradually became accepted in photographs. Photographers began saying "Smile" when they were ready to shoot a picture. Then in the mid-1940's "cheese" was used as saying that placed the mouth in a pleasant smiling position. The "ch" sound clinches the teeth and the "ese" sound parts the lips into a grin. Some think saying "money" is a better word to use as it gives a more natural smile.

Compare that to today where people take selfies regularly. I doubt that they tell themselves to say "cheese" so that their face has a smiley appearance. They are usually enjoying what they are doing and naturally have a good expression on their face.

I am thankful that photography evolved so that it became easy to capture our lives on film. I appreciate having photo albums to remind me of people in my life, many who have passed on, and a visual record of good times in the past. Looking at those old pictures often brings a smile to my face.