“Say ‘Cheese’” by Harini Senthil
2nd Place, Informal Essay 10-12
Say “Cheese”

Sometimes, the best vacation memories are from family photo mishaps. My family and I have experienced many of those ourselves. As I was scrolling through all of the pictures that I had taken with my family on our winter vacation, I noticed a lot of those “memorable” experiences. Like ones where none of us looked at the camera lens, even my dad who was taking the selfie. I’m surprised that my parent’s phones have survived our adventures. Needless to say, we won’t ever be receiving any best family photo awards. But we went to great lengths to get a normal vacation family photo.

Selfie Struggles

My wonderful parents, who probably have never taken a selfie before, wanted to try it out with the Grand Canyon looming behind us. I’m not a daily Instagram selfie poster, or an extremely photogenic person. I have plenty of awkward school pictures to prove that. I like taking pictures, not being in them. Hint. Recipe for disaster. Still, we tried it out, us being an adventurous family. We walked to a part of the Grand Canyon where no trees or people were obstructing the view and prepared to take the selfie. We didn’t bother investing in a selfie stick, because with it or without, our selfies probably wouldn’t turn out very well. I was never an optimist. As you can imagine, it was a strenuous task to get all three of us and the vast Grand Canyon into the selfie without the selfie stick. Our first one was very interesting, to say the least. A gust of wind had blown out of nowhere, and our hair stood up on end. The next few selfie attempts were
ones with me. I probably had blinked in all of those too. Eventually, we called it a day, and decided to return tomorrow for more adventures, fun, and maybe a few photo mishaps.

**Photo Shoot Assistance**

We returned the next day with a better outlook on our photo taking abilities. Not really, we had to get at least one good family photo this vacation. Today’s setting was the Hoover Dam. It was very interesting how and why it was built. And as always my parents wanted a picture there. After our “photo adventures”, we decided to get some help from other tourists. It was Christmas Eve and so there were plenty of people around to help us get a good photo together. Since it would be way too awkward to just go up to normal people admiring the Hoover Dam and say “Can you help us get a family picture?”, we decided to offer them help with their own picture instead. My dad helped a few people get group pictures and they themselves offered to help us. My mother, who is very picky about pictures, wanted a picture with the Hoover Dam, mountains, water, and us in the photo. This was a strenuous task considering that the person taking the photo was probably an amateur not a professional photographer.

Even if they were pretty good at photography, they would have to be the perfect “Goldilocks” height to get all of that in the picture. The first woman who helped us in our endeavors, was a little bit on the shorter side, so in the photo was the mountains, Hoover Dam, and us. It was actually a pretty good picture, except that you couldn’t tell if it was the Hoover Dam or just another bridge. Next up on The Perfect Vacation Family
Photo hosted by yours truly, is a 6ft 4 man who attempts to get our family picture with the Hoover Dam. Click! He hands my dad's camera back to him, and we take a closer look at his skills. The picture itself was pretty good, except for the fact that we were barely in the photo! Everything else was covered except the main subject: us. The final contestant on The Perfect Vacation Family Photo is a normal height man who looks like he might actually get "the photo". He's taking more time on this than other people, so he might know what he's doing. I grin widely because if this isn't it, we have no chance of getting a good photo. Click! I hold my breath as I turn to look at the camera. The photo is almost great! Only my dad was oblivious to the fact that the photo was taken, and he was not looking at the lens. "Dad, it could have been perfect." I groan. At least, it wasn't too bad. Maybe we can photoshop that part out. We're almost at the end of our day, and we have gotten an almost perfect photo!

Unwanted Photobombers

As we looked through all of the photos that we had taken in our winter vacation, we noticed that quite a few of them had photobombers. This has always been one of my pet peeves because whenever I'm about to get the perfect picture, someone either deliberately or accidentally gets into the photo. Even in some of our better selfies at the Grand Canyon, someone annoying just has to get another picture at the same time on the same deck. Sometimes, it's not even a person. A crow was in the corner in one of pictures. To all the photobombers out there, I know this is like a trend, but still some of
us are extremely desperate for a good vacation family photo, so please do not photobomb it.

In the end, three weeks later, we got our photos back from Walgreens, and now they have replaced the mundane, boring pictures on our wall. This photo was taken with our effort, and it is the end result of so many other vacation family photo mishaps. As Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed it, "It’s not the destination, it’s the journey." Our destination was to get a good vacation family photo. But on the way, we acquired so many enjoyable memories that I won’t ever forget. I could have never guessed that getting a good family photo would be this entertaining. So, take a few pictures with your family and have fun in the process.