SHAKEY'S "MUSTACHE GUY" BANJO STORY

Figure 1

Figure 2

The Story

In the late 1960s, I spent seven nights a week performing at Shakey's Pizza in Knoxville, Tennessee. I was 23 years old at the time, sitting on a stage stool facing the audience while my 18-year-old piano player accompanist sat with his back to the crowd. Though I played both 4-string and 5-string banjo every night, I was still a novice; the piano player usually took the lead and coached me through the chords and songs.

My stage presence involved a bit of a "secret identity." On some nights, I wore a gold vest, black hat, and a clip-on mustache (Figure 1). On others, I wore a red vest and a bow-tie with a clean-shaven face (Figure 2). One night, a regular customer told me she was glad to see me instead of "the other guy," remarking that I was a much better banjo player than the fellow with the mustache. I simply thanked her and told her I was doing my best to help the "Mustache Guy" get better.

Many years later, I'm still working on that goal. Jim Bottorff's Banjo Page (jbott.com) was originally started as a way to help that "Mustache Guy" play a little bit better, and it has since grown into a resource for banjo lovers everywhere.

Happy Picking and Strumming,
Jim Bottorff