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**Joe Adamczyk**

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Sisskind: Joe Adamczyk

## **JOE ADAMCZYK**

## **MITCH SISSKIND**

He was Joe Adamczyk and  
Eve Grabuskawa was her name.  
They owned a tavern called  
Adamczyk & Eve's and they  
called their sex life Grandma Fogarty.

Nights, as closing time approached,  
Joe would say, "Eve, do you think  
Grandma Fogarty could drop by?"  
And Eve would often answer,  
"I would not be a bit surprised."

Years passed in just this way.  
Blatz, Schlitz, Pabst Blue Ribbon,  
Heileman's Old Style Lager,  
Old Milwaukee—ten thousand  
beer glasses filled and emptied.

When pizza pies, as they were then known,  
achieved popularity, Joe and Eve offered  
the pies to customers and called them  
Polish pizzas for a laugh. Beer sales  
skyrocketed as pizza pies appeared.

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Also available were White Owl cigars,  
and Cubs' home runs were called  
White Owl Wallops by Jack Brickhouse  
on the TV set above the bar.  
But the Cubs lost during the 1950s.

In those days some wrong ideas were held.  
Around the time Kennedy was elected and  
Eve Grabuskawa began her menopause,  
Grandma Fogarty was told to take her leave.  
Grandma Fogarty was sent on her way.

No more did Grandma Fogarty come calling  
at all hours of the night like a will-o'-the-wisp  
fluttering, flickering, and then fully ablaze.  
As Eve and Joe's union passed twenty years,  
Grandma Fogarty was nowhere to be found.

But is this not a familiar story as married  
couples age and passion's flame sinks?  
Let us turn to the much more novel story  
of how Joe Adamczyk, the Chicago bartender,  
transforming himself into a man of ideas.

No stale autodidact would he become,  
but a thinker comfortable and at home  
in a variety of disciplines, reading widely  
in libraries, copying pages, memorizing  
long passages, and making diagrams.

He would hardly sleep. He ate little and,  
as was true of Edmund Burke,  
anyone trapped under a tree with him  
in a sudden rain would quickly see  
that Joe Adamczyk was a first-rate mind.

## Sisskind: Joe Adamczyk

With time his interests would encompass Gottlob Frege and Whitehead and also Alonzo Church and Church's dissertation awarded at Princeton in 1927 entitled *Alternative to Zermelo's Assumption*.

His transformation began inauspiciously, meandering for years like a stream. Paint-by-numbers was his first awakening: sunsets, views of old windmills, solitary reapers, the heads of noble steeds.

In faux-impressionist style these emerged from the confusing higgledy-piggledy of lines and numbers on canvas glued to cardboard. Joe could execute a large paint-by-numbers landscape in one day.

Somehow from his paintings a hunger for narrative gradually developed. He imagined stories of people who lived in his paint-by-numbers cabins with smoke curling from the chimneys.

Fascinated by the concept of man as a story telling animal, he began serious reading for the first time in his life. He read *The Caine Mutiny* by Herman Wouk and *Marjorie Morningstar*, also by Wouk.

He followed Wouk with the historical novels of Irving Stone: *Lust for Life*, *Men to Match My Mountains*, and *The Agony and The Ecstasy*. He read the best-selling *Magnificent Obsession* and *The Big Fisherman*, both by Lloyd C. Douglas.

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He gnawed himself by considering life  
as a stage play. Was it tragedy or farce?  
He pondered the nature of storytelling,  
then took the short leap, intellectually,  
to viewing the world itself as a narrative.

Turning his attention to non-fiction,  
in Volume Two of Will and Ariel Durant's  
*The Story of Civilization* he discovered  
the concept of *telos* in a discussion of  
Greek philosophy and the work of Aristotle.

He gnawed the concept of *telos* like a dog  
with a bone. He toyed with the caprice  
that even mathematics might be teleological:  
an unwinding tale with a start, a middle,  
and perhaps an end returning to the beginning.

He grew careless of his tavern and  
heedless of Eve Grabuskawa, still his wife.  
He felt drawn to the used bookstores  
and hole-in-the-wall coffee houses  
near the University of Chicago.

The day came when without a word  
Joe left Eve Grabuskawa and rented  
a room on South Harper Avenue.  
He immersed himself in the collegiate  
ambience of the University of Chicago.

In a coffee house called the Pegasus  
he saw a reproduction—displayed  
with ironic intent—of the portrait  
entitled *Arrangement in Grey and Black*,  
also known as *Whistler's Mother*.

He was shocked, was set back on his heels by the subject's strong resemblance to Eve Grabuskawa. Had all those years of marriage to Eve Grabuskawa been a dour arrangement in grey and black?

It was the last time he ever thought of Eve Grabuskawa, who evanesced like the Cheshire Cat and even his attraction to women in general deliquesced like Frosty the Snowman.

Yet the Pegasus was known for pulchritude. It was the era of girls in black turtlenecks with love for jazz and folk music—educated young women who watched Italian films at the all-night Clark Theater.

There in the Pegasus one of those women approached Joe, she stole up behind him, and in a voice rich with a kind of sarcastic academese she asked, "Have you read *The Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead?*"

Joe's look of baffled incomprehension must have moved or amused her, for she pressed a dog-eared paperback into his hand: the 1956 Mentor Classics Edition of Whitehead's *Dialogues*.

"Here, take my extra copy," she said, slinking out of the Pegasus as Joe glanced at the book's cover illustration of Whitehead reading aloud from a volume held in his liver-spotted hands.

What a revelation *The Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead* proved to be! That very night, like a magic carpet, the book whisked Joe from his bare room to Whitehead's home in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

There, close by Harvard Yard, a journalist named Lucien Price drew the eminent mathematician into conversation ranging across history, theology, philosophy, politics, education, and of course mathematics.

A truly fascinating man was Whitehead, in Joe's opinion, and a man full of surprises. He believed, for example, that mathematics beyond quadratic equations should remain the province of specialists—and Joe agreed.

As a teenager Joe was tortured by algebra at Archbishop Weber High School but he never needed algebra to run the tavern. His crank-operated adding machine lasted many years and did not even use electricity.

In fact—and here he imagined himself speaking to Alfred North Whitehead—Joe would extend Whitehead's thinking and require no math instruction at all past basic fractions and decimals.

All through the night he read, pondering, considering and re-considering, accepting many of Whitehead's ideas, questioning others, rejecting nothing out of hand though some passages caused him to stamp his foot.

Finally, as dawn broke over the university, Joe sighed and shut the Mentor paperback. He then noticed a name—Karen Schmolke—lightly inscribed by some dying ballpoint on the front cover of *The Dialogues*.

Schmolke, Schmolke... Joe stroked his chin not an uncommon name on the Northwest Side and here on the South Side more Schmolkes might be found. Should he return the book? "Schmolke" would be in the phone directory.

But no, by God. He would keep the book. It was a gift. It was now his prized possession. Phrases like, "In the nimbus of religious awe," which Whitehead used so gracefully, made one forget he was a mathematician.

Joe's studies went on. Months passed and he spoke to no one. He ate tuna fish. He ordered pizza pies. Physically he diminished. Like a breeze in the trees his sixtieth birthday came and went.

Yet he felt strong and growing stronger. *The Dialogues* whetted his appetite for more Whitehead. With difficulty, sometimes pounding his head on the wall, he read *Treatise on Universal Algebra*.

*The process of forming a synthesis between A and B, and then to consider A and B united, as a third thing, may be symbolized as AB.* As Joe's familiarity with Whitehead grew, the significance of this proposition awed him.



How striking that even in the *Treatise*,  
His earliest work, Whitehead referred to AB  
as symbolic of process rather than product.  
Yet the *Treatise* came thirty years before  
Whitehead's greatest book, *Process and Reality*.

On and on he read. The vigor with which he  
once devoured Sidney Sheldon's *Rage of Angels*  
now energized his attack on Gottlob Frege's  
*Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik* which he read  
using Langensheidt's German-English dictionary.

For Joe, October of 1962 was noteworthy  
not for the so-called Cuban missile crisis  
but for his completion of Ernest Nagel's  
*Problems in the Logic of Explanation*.  
He found Nagel's easy style very appealing.

No sooner had he finished Nagel  
than a still greater dreadnought hove  
into view. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*  
by Thomas Samuel Kuhn made Nagel  
look like a Sunday school picnic.

One midnight—or was it noon? for night  
and day were now indistinguishable—  
Joe in his reading came upon a name  
that, like no other, would inspire and  
instruct him for many months to come.

The name was Alonzo Church. Who was  
Church? Well-known, but not well-known.  
Very well-known in the world of philosophical  
mathematicians and mathematical philosophers  
but unknown in most Chicago neighborhoods.

## Sisskind: Joe Adamczyk

Something about Church captured Joe's fancy. Perhaps Church's theorem on the undecidability of first order logic (extending Godel's incompleteness proof of 1931) engaged Joe's sense of himself as an intellectual outsider.

Church—like Jack Brickhouse celebrating White Owl Wallops—was an appreciator of Godel, but his appreciation was such that Church's connoisseurship and Godel's creation actually fused. This was Joe's hope for himself.

He phoned for a pizza pie and took stock of his life. Whitehead, Nagel, Kuhn, Church—his understanding was real even if only he knew it. Just like the tree falling in the forest. Which still falls though no one hears.

His room—austere, ascetic—this was how Wittgenstein lived. Little furniture but the air abuzz with energy of intellect. He would die here. He would die happy. There was a knock on the door: the pizza.

He opened the door and it was one of those so-called deer in the headlights moments, but since that trope would not achieve currency for some years Joe thought of it differently. He thought he was fit to be tied.

Yes, he was fit to be tied. "Schmolke?" He inquired, diffidently. And then with much greater force: "Karen Schmolke! Delivering pizza?" He quoted Shakespeare: "Confusion hath made his masterpiece."

She was frightened. You know my name?  
Then, laughter: "Are you psychic or what?"  
"Here's your pie, cheese and pepperoni.  
And yeah, I'm doing deliveries, man."  
"Life takes dough just like pizza."

The pizza changed hands and Joe stared  
blankly at the box as Karen Schmolke stated,  
"Four ninety-five plus tip. Hey, are we old friends?"  
"Wait a minute. I know you. I gave you  
a book in the Pegasus coffee house."

"Yes, absolutely," Joe said and quoted Buddha:  
"What you have given will always be yours."  
He reached in his pocket, found a five,  
then found another five and gave her both.  
"I'm so grateful to you. Please come in."

She entered, saw his table piled high  
with books and papers, his telephone  
for ordering pizza, and in a corner  
his mattress. "Nice place," she quipped,  
but sarcasm was wasted on Joe Adamczyk.

Mole-like or like a digging aardvark  
he was attacking a seemingly random  
hodgepodge of books that in his own mind  
was superbly organized, and from this  
he soon retrieved Whitehead's *Dialogues*.

"Look familiar?" he said, grinning triumphantly.  
Karen Schmolke nodded: "You read it?"  
The question insulted Joe: "Of course."  
But now her attention was drawn to a paper  
on the card table. "Look! Alonzo Church!"

## Sisskind: Joe Adamczyk

It was Church's June 1940 review of *Are There Extra-Syllogistic Forms of Reasoning?* by S.W. Hartman from the *Journal of Symbolic Logic*, Joe obtained it from the John Crear Science Library where zeal for learning won him borrowing privileges.

"I called him Uncle Alonzo," Karen Schmolke said. "When Uncle Alonzo taught at the U of C, he and my dad would sit at the kitchen table working on the Entscheidungsproblem and I drew pictures of them with mustaches."

"You knew Alonzo Church?" Joe urgently demanded—and then, as if to answer himself, he shouted, "You knew Alonzo Church!" Recovering, he pointed out with reverence, "Church was the teacher of Alan Turing."

"Yes, he was," said Karen Schmolke. "He also taught Barkley Rosser, Raymond Smullyan, and don't forget Isaac Malitz. Dad took me to Uncle Alonzo's lectures but at ten or eleven years old I had no interest in the philosophical underpinnings of arithmetic."

As she began a narrative of her undergraduate years at Oberlin College, Joe Adamczyk with an impatient wave, as if shooing away a horsefly, cut her off and with fierce interest demanded, "What kind of lecturer was Alonzo Church?"

"Well, he had a very careful, deliberate style," Karen Schmolke reminisced. "He would start writing on the left side of the blackboard in a large, clear, cursive hand..." She paused. "Are you all right? Have some pizza."

"Pizza?" said Joe distractedly, for the word meant nothing to him now. With the clarity of inner vision he saw Alonzo Church at the blackboard, he saw Alonzo Church pacing around a lectern deep in thought.

And this girl Karen Schmolke! With her own ears she heard Alonzo Church lecture on the Church-Turing thesis, the Frege-Church ontology, the Church-Rosser theorem, and many similar matters. With her own ears!

For her part, Karen Schmolke just stared in quiet puzzlement at this peculiar man whose name she had still not learned, this odd duck who with his head cocked seemed to hear some far-off supernal music.

"Please try some pizza," she offered again, now more insistently—for Joe's face seemed to be changing, his expression deepening. What did he see? With his obvious interest in logic, she surmised it was some esoteric proof.

But no, it was Grandma Fogarty! Oh God, Grandma Fogarty had dropped by unexpectedly! Joe Adamczyk felt the presence of Grandma Fogarty and indeed he felt the presence of Grandma Fogarty more strongly than ever in his life before!

Turning his gaze toward Karen Schmolke, he wondered whether she might also sense the arrival of Grandma Fogarty. Gently, hesitantly, he reached toward Karen Schmolke. He caressed her cheek, then took her hand.

Wow, she thought Sisskind Joe Adamczyk  
On the other hand, never had Karen Schmolke  
felt such...desire? Or was it desperate need?  
It was flattering, in a way. She smiled benignly.  
"It's okay," she said. "Just don't have a stroke."

Her acquiescence, her mercy, Joe chose  
to see as acceptance, as heartfelt assent  
when hand-in-hand they drew nigh the mattress.  
She wore no bra and this fact, to Joe Adamczyk,  
was a powerful expression of youth's *sans souci*.

But was there not also a *sans souci* of age?  
An insouciance, a devil may care perspective,  
a what-the-hell attitude, a damn-the-torpedoes  
point of view? Yes, yes, yes, goddamnit!  
And Joe embraced that *carpe diem* sensibility!

He gamahuched Karen Schmolke with startling  
enthusiasm. Cunt, slut and similar words  
edded and swirled in his brain. Yet a *logos*,  
a *telos*, was also disclosing itself, cleverly  
interweaving his fucking with philosophy.

Through this most intimate touching  
of a woman who had seen Alonzo Church,  
Joe felt himself connected not just to Church  
but through Church to the realm of pure forms  
described by Pythagoras, Plato, and others.

Thought and feeling, cunt and consequentialism,  
mingled until an aphorism of Whitehead's emerged:  
"There are no whole truths. All truths are half-truths,"  
the great man explained. That is: truth is never final,  
truth is ever on the way, always halfway there.

Like Achilles' fabled pursuit of the tortoise  
truth is a reality but a reality of process.

Truly Joe had been a bartender. Just as truly  
he was one no longer. Who could aver that he  
would not one day be President of Mexico?

Rising to his knees, he poised his swollen member  
to enter Karen Schmolke. She arched her back  
and her breasts like spring lambs leaped to meet him  
until for at least a moment his ratiocinations quieted  
and twice she nudded to one nut of Joe Adamczyk's.

I hope you have enjoyed this story of a man who  
late in life undertook what Alfred North Whitehead  
called *Adventures of Ideas* and then, to his surprise,  
reignited his sexuality, which he called Grandma Fogarty.  
and Eve Grabuskawa? Her story will be told, but not today.