

# Financial counselor pens comic book to teach hard lessons of money management

By Don Wade

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She grew up reading Mad Magazine and Pam Pitts' idea to teach financial literacy through a comic book struck some people as, well, a little mad.



Photo by Ben Fant

Pam Pitts, president of Butterfly Financial, networks with other entrepreneurs and small business owners at the Economic Development Fair at Cook Convention Center on Friday.



Photo by Mike Maple

Pitts wrote a comic book in which three spirits show a financially troubled couple their past, present and future.

But in "The Awakening: Is This Your Financial Life?" Pitts just might have proved that sometimes less is more and that hard realities are best-delivered with a touch of humor.

"In 20 pages, it tells it like it is," said Lois A. Vitt, founding director of the Institute for Socio-Financial Studies in Charlottesville, Va. "That's something many (longer, more serious) books don't get across."

Said Rob Dingler, executive vice president of FSG Investment Management in Memphis: "The book might start with a chuckle, but it certainly provides some life lessons."

Pitts, 49, has her own financial counseling businesses, Butterfly Financial. She self-published the comic book, which is available for \$4.25 at [IndyPlanet.com](http://IndyPlanet.com) and in a few weeks will be available for \$10.99 through [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

Born in Tennessee and raised in Detroit, Pitts has been an officer in the United States Navy, an attorney in Nashville and a longtime employee of FedEx.

She called more traditional books about personal finance "too bland." She borrowed the three spirits concept from "A Christmas Carol" in her book, in which a financially troubled married couple is visited by the ghosts of their financial past, present and future.

Artist Matt Bowers illustrated the book and Adam Shaw designed the cover, which depicts people in a city trapped by a swirling financial storm cloud labeled "debt."

"Read that book before you go to the shopping mall," Pitts said, "and I promise you won't buy all the stuff you were going to get."

If her comic book is a little bit over the top -- and it is -- it is also grounded in an-all-too-familiar reality.

The story opens with John and Jane Knowdow in the middle of an argument. As for the name Knowdow...

"It's a double play," Pitts said. "At first, they don't have any (knowledge about money) and in the end they're learning about money."

The mother and father play the blame game with their debt as their teenage daughter and son listen, but it's soon clear there is more than enough blame to go around.

The spirit of their financial past shows John and Jane their individual destructive money habits -- he plays too much golf and she buys too many clothes -- and also their collective financial sins:

Buying new cars too often, taking too many vacations, and buying a new house every few years.

The spirit of their financial present shows them their low credit score, their addiction to credit cards, the relentless stress from financial worries and the poor habits they're teaching their children.

The spirit of their financial future shows them losing their home to foreclosure, having to work long past the age of 65, eating canned tuna for dinner most nights and their 30-something son jobless and still living at home and selling his blood for money.

"Stop it, stop it!" John screams. "I can't take anymore of this! Please just make it stop ..."

And with that, John and Jane fall to the floor in each other's arms.

"I know of nothing that can cause more stress in people's lives than their money being out of whack," Pitts said.

"Pam knows you have to hit people viscerally in some way in order to change a self-sabotaging habit," said Vitt. "It's not enough to go into a seminar and listen to someone for an hour."

Pitts is marketing the comic book to nonprofits, such as consumer counseling agencies, public and private schools, church organizations and private companies.

Dingler bought several copies and gave them to co-workers and friends. Vitt recommends the book for financial counselors and their clients, and for young people in general.

But the audience is really boundless, Pitts said, adding, "A lot of people believe the only people who need financial education are on skid row. There are plenty of people making six figures that lack money management skills."

As a country, we know too well there are plenty of multimillion-dollar corporations that could learn a few things about money management.

Individually, too many people too often have spent money they didn't have -- just like the characters in Pitts' book.

So, how does the story end?

There is no stereotypical comic book superhero flying to the rescue, no Bailout Man in a red, white and blue cape.

Rather, we see John and Jane Knowdow taking difficult, deliberate, self-sacrificing steps down a long path that will lead them to a genuine measure of financial security if they continue to live within their means.

"All of that instant gratification was simply causing delayed financial pain," John says while flipping burgers on their backyard grill; they now go out to dinner less often.

"Buying all that stuff wasn't making us happy," Jane chimes in.

"Who's the hero here?" Pitts said, pleased to supply the answer: "The same people who got into a financial mess in the first place."

--*Don Wade: 529-2358*

### **"The Awakening: Is This Your Financial Life?"**

**Author:** Pam Pitts, who has a financial consulting business, "Butterfly Financial."

**Plot:** A married couple in debt is visited by the spirits of their financial past, present and future.

**Where available:** The book may be ordered through [IndyPlanet.com](http://IndyPlanet.com), \$4.25 a copy. In a few weeks, it also will be available through [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) at \$10.99 a copy. For orders of 1,000 or more (for less than \$4.25 per copy), contact the author at [pitts@Butterfly FinancialLLC.com](mailto:pitts@Butterfly FinancialLLC.com).