

Clinton author pens three books featuring unexpected protagonist

By Janet S. Lee

Wanna-be novelists are always advised to “write about what you know,” words that Clinton author Michael Piazza has definitely taken to heart. His main character is one well-versed in the world of internal auditing, just like Piazza himself. The protagonist Matthew Petrocelli now inhabits the pages of two completed novels, with a third on the way.

Piazza’s primary career, was in fact, devoted to the intricacies of auditing and consulting in internal control, governance and related organizational applications. He followed up his accounting degree from Ole Miss with a Master of Accountancy, an MBA, and even a foray into law school.

A native of Vicksburg, Piazza spent ten years in Texas working for the Institute of Internal Auditors, as well as some time in California. Upon returning to his home state, he met his current wife Linda through their mutual interest in community theater. She resided in Clinton for the benefit of her school-age children, so he, too, became a Clintonian.

He settled in and went to work for state government from 1992 to 2002 as an executive, then as a consultant to agencies of state government. He served as State Policy Director and Director of Compensation for the Mississippi State Personnel Department and Deputy Director for the Mississippi Arts Commission.

When he left staff work, it was to found Professional Development Associates, where he served as principal associate and lead consultant. He has consulted with more than thirty agencies in performance management and control.

His comprehensive knowledge of financial systems and auditing procedures prompted him to wonder - if six sequential levels of security protected state monies, could there be a mysterious seventh, which would allow an unscrupulous individual to drain funds without being detected.

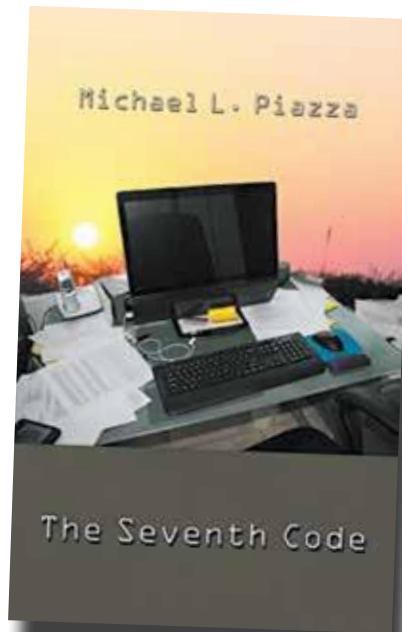
Thus was *The Seventh Code* born, originally a case study in the real world.

It has been read by over 2,000 auditors and sold a thousand copies. The suspense thriller’s plot revolves around the turbulent circumstances encountered by the Mississippi State Inspector General and longtime auditor Matthew Petrocelli. Each day brings new challenges as Matt and his assistants chase a swirling and complex case of fraud and ever-mounting criminal actions.

Petrocelli finds himself embroiled in suspense and intrigue as he battles the corruption behind the state’s Computerized Automated Information Network (CAIN). When one of his chief investigators goes miss-

ing and subsequently turns up dead, Petrocelli discovers the system was painstakingly crafted to drain massive funds from the state, with ties reaching to the highest levels of state government and beyond.

The Seventh Code is an easy read, at just fourteen chapters. But emboldened by the satisfaction of the initial writing and its positive reviews from readers, Piazza launched *King of Rules*, a somewhat more involved work at 460 pages. The last piece of the trilogy, *The Omega Club*, will launch later this fall to resolve the tale of intrepid auditor Matthew Petrocelli.



Unlike former lawyer and Mississippi legislator John Grisham, whose style and initiative Piazza admires, he has not peddled his first books out of the trunk of his car to book clubs, garden clubs, family and friends. No, a fledgling author today must be able to navigate the digital world and be prepared to deal with Amazon.

“I’ve done websites,” he explains, “so the template was fairly easy to use through CreateSpace.” Amazon acquired CreateSpace, an on-demand publishing platform, in 2005. It neither edits nor verifies material, with books being printed on demand; each volume is produced in response to an actual purchase on amazon.com. Piazza’s first two books are available through the Kindle platform or in paperback.

CreateSpace offers tools to generate opportunities for entrepreneurial authors. The process is amazingly digitized, said Piazza, but the writing itself is still primarily a solitary pursuit for the

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Abby Perry & Blake Hearst



Mr. and Mr. Derek Jones of Flora and Mr. and Mrs. Dan Perry Jr. of Madison announce the engagement of their daughter Abby Danielle Perry to Roger Blake Hearst of Clinton.

The groom is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Thomas of Clinton and Mr. and Mrs. Roger Hearst of Bentonia.

The bride is a 2008 Tri-County Academy graduate and is employed by Baptist Heart as a vascular sonographer.

The groom is a 2004 Clinton High School graduate and is employed by Clinton Body Shop as an automotive finish technician.

The couple will be joined in marriage during a private ceremony on October 20, 2018, in Benton, Mississippi. The wedding will be followed by a celebration for the couple at the Flora Gin with friends and family.

The couple will honeymoon in Mexico and reside in Clinton, Mississippi.

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author. Rather than the archaic typewriter, Piazza says he "sits at the computer typing. Then I create everything on a word processor and convert to a web page."

It could be lonely digital work were it not for friends like former Clinton resident and fellow writer Nevada Barr and New Orleans author Julie Smith. There are other writers to compare notes and processes with over the phone and even a long-distance editor recommended by a mutual friend in Ocala, Florida.

If the joy is in the journey rather than the destination, Piazza is indeed a happy traveler in every sense of the word. He has traveled in the U. S. and to Nigeria, South Africa, Istanbul and the Arctic. As he now hones his craft as a fiction writer, he is grounded in the pursuit by the joys of family life, including children and grandchildren; the enviable small-town life that is the essence of Clinton; and his more than thirty years of sobriety, a commitment he takes so seriously that he plans his work schedule around four weekly meetings.

At 68, he's allowing himself time to do the writing well, admitting, "I have

the background and don't have to do much research." But he harkens back to a favorite teacher, Mrs. Lee Mayo, who introduced him to the works of Eudora Welty. "She encouraged me to write, so I'm doing it. And right now, it's a joy, pure creativity."

Yet selling books is still the goal of any once-published writer.

"It's all about positive reviews and generating more." The documented reviews on Amazon currently all compliment his books. One reads, "Great characters, believable twists, and an added bonus of actual landmarks in Mississippi." Another reads, "Mr. Piazza does an excellent job of building a plot that could actually happen."

The immediate future involves the discipline of finishing the trilogy with *The Omega Club* and getting his name and works to a wider reading audience. He camped out in Authors Alley at the recent Mississippi Book Festival, enjoying the interaction with people who do actually read.

Though he admits "You don't get rich in the world of self-publishing," it is, after all, the journey that really matters.



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