

Maine has made me a better person

BY ROBENSON SAINTARD
SPECIAL TO THE BDN

They say life begins at the end of your comfort zone.

It's easy to stick to things you know and an environment with which you are familiar. Although it may be risky to step out of it, taking that risk can change the way you look at life, at people and even yourself.

I lived in Florida my whole life until I came to college to play football in Bangor. In my city, Boynton Beach, you probably aren't known if you don't play sports or if you're not a dope boy. The people are blunt. If you are unfamiliar, they're not very friendly. The environment is hostile,



Saintard

and you have to carry yourself in an appropriate manner in order to stay safe from little acts of bullying and bigger dangers, such as getting shot.

Never having been to Maine before enrolling at Husson University, I knew the state would be populated almost entirely by white people. When I first got up here, it was obvious that I stuck out. I saw people laughing, and I saw others go completely silent when they saw me as if they were scared of me. I've had people completely turn around when they saw me coming. I have even had people tell me that they had never before seen a black person. That was shocking.

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My first year in Maine wasn't too bad. I usually hung out with people on the football team, and I was pretty comfortable with them. Whenever I was around people I didn't know, I was quiet and really observant.

Where I'm from, we don't reach out to people much. People I met in Maine told me that I looked angry, that I made people uncomfortable. I never really bothered me because I was just sticking to what I knew.

It was also really difficult communicating with people here. I've been asked to repeat myself multiple times or slow down. I've even been told to "talk white." People always told me I had that heavy Southern accent. I even had trouble with the girls, as if I didn't even know how to speak to them.

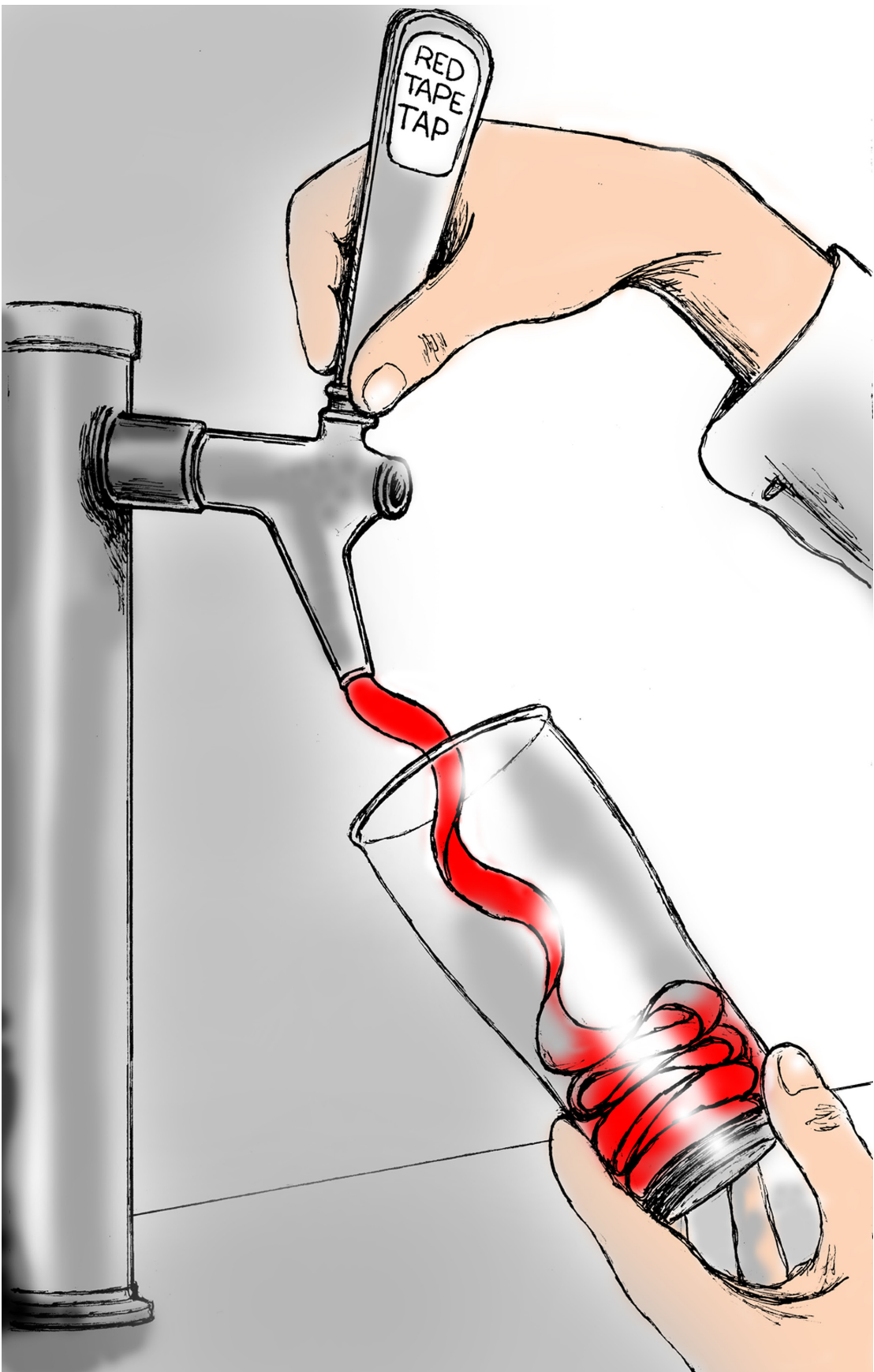
The culture of Maine is so simple that it is complicated. Back home being too friendly makes people question your motives. It makes people distance themselves from you. In Maine, people are friendly just because. The more friendly you are, the more people like to be associated with you.

I also noticed that people in Maine are self-conscious about almost everything — how people talk, how they dress, how they act. It's almost as if everybody is supposed to be the same. I think the reason is the lack of diversity. Diversity not only provides different perspectives, it also brings new ideas.

During my time here, I have managed to trick people into thinking I was completely adapted to the culture, but internally there was a lot of conflict. I wasn't happy at all in my first year, but I pretended to be.

I was excited to go back home for the summer after my first year. I saw my friends and family and enjoyed life the way I knew how to. But after some time went by, I noticed I was doing the same

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GEORGE DANBY | BDN

Craft beer boom

Industry spike challenges Maine's antiquated alcohol laws

BY CHRISTOPHER BURNS
BDN STAFF

Craft beer has been a bright spot in the Maine economy. Breweries across the state employ about 1,500 people, source hops and grains locally and attract beer tourists to the state, according to a 2013 study conducted by the University of Maine School of Economics.

The state in 2014 ranked sixth nationally for breweries per capita, and seventh for their per-capita economic impact, with \$430 million pumped into the local economy, according to the Brewers Association, a national trade group.

Yet lawmakers passed on the chance this month to eliminate a regulation that requires Maine's 27 brewpubs (a restaurant plus brewery) to build separate rooms with separate entrances to sell six-packs or larger cases of their own beer to go. Brewpubs, however, can fill growlers of their own beer to go without that same restriction.

With people tipping back more glasses of locally brewed beer than ever, legislators in Maine and across the country are increasingly revisiting alcohol regulations, many of which have sat on the books since just after Prohibition, limiting the growth of the lucrative craft beer industry.

"The whole legislative rubric under which we operate envisions a much different world," said Heather Sanborn, president of the Maine Brewers Guild and co-owner of Rising Tide Brewing Co. in Portland. "It envisions very large breweries, which was all there were in the 1970s, not a world where there is beer tourism or where there are 70 fast-growing, local Maine businesses making great beer."

Antiquated laws

For example, an obscure Maine law passed in 1937 — four years after the end of Prohibition — prohibited bars from "advertising" the alcohol content of beers on draft menus out of concern that it would encourage people to drink stronger beer. It wasn't until 2014, when a state liquor inspector informed a Belfast bar owner that posting alcohol content on his menu violated state law, that this law came to legislators' attention.

The craft beer industry has flooded draft menus with a variety of beer styles that often exceed the average 5 percent alcohol content of Budweiser, Coors and other beers produced by megabrewers. With an ever-changing rotation of craft beers, bar owners argued that patrons rely on the alcohol content printed on their menus to make informed decisions about what beer to drink.

"It promotes responsible consumption of alcohol by giving the customers a gauge by which they can make informed choices," Eugene Beck, owner of Nocturnum Draft Haus in Bangor, told the Veterans and Affairs Committee in 2014. "A customer has the right to know how strong the product is that they will be consuming."

Lawmakers in 2014 pushed through a law change that resolved the problem for breweries and bars.

While lawmakers chose not to ease restrictions on brewpubs this year, they passed a bill earlier this month to allow sales representatives from breweries that produce more than 50,000 gallons of beer a year, such as Shipyard, Geary's, Baxter and Rising Tide, to give samples to retailers who are considering stocking their product.

Sales representatives from Geary's and Rising Tide could give a presentation to retailers about new beer varieties hitting the production line but could not provide samples on request from the retailer. A wholesaler would need to distribute samples, which depending on the frequency of sales visits could take a week or longer. In a growing and competitive industry, any delay could result in potentially lost sales, Sanborn said.

Drink it where it's made

The explosive growth of Maine's craft beer industry came about as a result of a 2011 reform in the state's alcohol laws that allowed brewers to sell "samples" in their breweries, a change that gave rise to the tasting room.

Before the reform, brewers could only offer samples of their beer as part of a brewery tour. But many small brewers operating on thin margins chose to forgo the tours because it was not financially feasible to divert employees to guide

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Death, taxes and death taxes

Everyone knows Ben Franklin's quote about "the certainties" of death and taxes. We're all going to die, and we all are supposed to pay taxes. And sometimes, dying itself creates a tax burden. We call it an "estate tax."

By a 7-6 vote last week, a majority of the Maine Legislature's Taxation Committee voted to repeal this tax at the state level. It has the support of Gov. Paul LePage and several others, trying to keep Mainers from fleeing our state. But what would Franklin and the other founders think?



MICHAEL CIANCETTE

Since taxes have changed so much from the earliest days, it is hard to say. The Continental Congress, made up of some of the wealthiest men in the colonies, believed they should contribute more toward the revolution, as they had the most to preserve. At the same time, Franklin's hypothetical "hard government" would levy a flat 10 percent tax.

Whatever their thoughts, the founders did not make death a taxable event. Those taxes came into being in the late 19th century in the states, while making a permanent federal appearance in the early 20th century. With something so longstanding, why are Maine and other states considering repeal of the "death tax"?

One reason is the federal government; like Lucy, it moved the football. Since at least the 1950s, federal estate tax liability was reduced dollar-for-dollar for every dollar paid in state-level estate taxes. Thus states would not increase the deceased's overall tax liability by having their own estate tax — they would simply deny Washington part of the cut. If you died a resident of Maine or Florida, your bill would be pretty much the same.

Beginning in 2005, the federal law was repealed. The credit was replaced with a deduction. Like your income tax deductions, it reduces your taxes owed but does not replace them dollar-for-dollar. Now, there can be a significant difference in your tax bill depending on where you live when you die.

"So what?" some will ask, since this tax normally applies to estates exceeding \$5 million in value. Understandable. However, there are two reasons why this presents a problem for our state.

First, talk to lawyers, accountants, financial advisers and others who advise those with significant assets. They tell their clients — mostly empty-nesters and retirees — to establish residency in states without income and estate taxes. When they move out of Maine for a majority of the year, they take a significant portion of their charitable giving, sales tax paying, consumer spending and angel investing with them.

But secondly, the estate tax incentivizes people to liquidate their hard assets. If you own a Maine business, it makes sense to sell out and take your payment in cash or stock. You can easily move paper across state lines to tax-friendly jurisdictions, even if the new owner shuts your business down and leaves your employees out of work. Meanwhile, if you are a capital-intensive family business trying to continue operating — think the big farms in The County or earthwork contractors with lots of heavy equipment — you get whacked. You can't really move your land, cold storage, trucks and tractors to other states.

That is the perverse reality. If you decide to sell your business to the high bidder, you will ultimately get favorable tax treatment by fleeing Maine. If you continue to invest in our communities and run a business creating jobs, the state's tax man cometh upon your demise.

This is not an argument for a complete abolition of the policy underlying the estate tax. One of the benefits of the tax is a "step-up" in basis. If a family inherits \$10 million in assets, the deceased

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