



Branded

How Maine became synonymous with 'the way life should be.'

Maine: The Way Life Should Be." The expression, found on welcome signs at the state's borders since the late eighties, is as deeply rooted in our collective consciousness as the much older (circa 1936) license plate slogan "Vacationland." So it comes as a bit of a surprise to learn that the guy who created it is from New Jersey.

To be fair, Michael Townsend had been living in Maine for two years when he came up with the tagline for the Maine Office of Tourism, but it was his memory of being a New Jerseyite vacationing at a friend's house in Lubec that inspired the phrase. "We saw a friend of his pulling up lobster traps in Johnson Bay," Townsend recalls. "We got in a rowboat, bought some lobsters, and boiled them up. We went out on the deck and ate the lobsters, throwing the shells over the railing into the bay. And that was the feeling: this is the way life should be. I felt like I could breathe for the first time in my life."

Not long after, Townsend, who had been working for a Manhattan advertising firm, landed a job with a Portland agency whose contract with the Maine Office of Tourism was about to expire. "We had one more campaign to go, and we thought if we can come up with

a killer line, it will be easier for us to retain the account," Townsend says. "I was thinking about it every day for two weeks, when suddenly it came to me."

In the recesses of Townsend's mind, a line from *Bye Bye Birdie*'s "One Boy" – "That's the way it should be" – converged with his Lubec memory, and a slogan was born.

Townsend says his boss didn't immediately embrace it – he favored "America's Only Got One Maine" – but he soon came around, and the agency's contract was enthusiastically renewed. "That was November 1987," Townsend says. "The following February my boss called me into his office and laid me off. It hurt, the irony that things are not really the way life should be."

In time, life improved. Townsend is now the director of creative services at Perry & Banks in Portland, and his famous bit of copy has taken on a life of its own, popping up on t-shirts, as book titles, even as the name of a Web site supporting same-sex marriage. Townsend receives no royalties for these reiterations of his work because the phrase was never trademarked. "Think about it," he persuaded Office of Tourism officials back in 1987. "Do you really want to say 'Maine: the way life should be™'?" As soon as you do that, it's no longer the way life should be."

— VIRGINIA M. WRIGHT