

Harold Bo Strong interview – December 5, 2018

Harold “Bo” Strong was interviewed in 2018 by Dan Rothman and Don Grosso, with help from Nancy Strong, in the Strongs’ house on Riverdale Road.

Bo was born in 1930 in the Moore General Hospital in Goffstown, and he has lived in New Boston all his life, except for his time serving in the US Air Force.



*Bo Strong, his eldest son Nathan, and his father Cecil
4th of July, 1990 or 1991*

DAN: Your parents were Cecil Henry Strong and Barbara Davis Strong. How did they come to be in New Boston?

BO: My father lived on the farm here, in New Boston.

DAN: His father, George, was from Vermont originally?

BO: He come down from Vermont. Lots of people in that area come down from Nova Scotia; my grandmother come from Nova Scotia.

Notes about Bo’s grandparents:

Bo’s grandfather **George M. Strong** was born in Eden VT in 1876 and died in New Boston in 1933. His first wife **Mamie L. Melvin** 1881-? of Weare was Cecil’s mother and Bo’s grandmother. It was George’s 2nd wife **Laura J. Swinimer** 1888-1971 who had a father born in Nova Scotia. Bo helped his step-grandmother Laura on her New Boston farm for many years.



Henri Archibald, his wife Charlotte (Laura's sister), **Laura Swinimer Strong**, **Cecil Strong** (in front), **George M. Strong**, and a man who may have been named Frank Mudge.

Notes about Bo's parents:

Nancy gave us newspaper articles dated 1925 from *The Union* about the engagement and first marriage of Bo's father **Cecil H. Strong** 1904-1992. Cecil married Hazel Wilson 1894-1979, at the New Boston home of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur C. Wilson. "The wedding took place at dusk, the room being lighted with candles."

Rev. Louis Swanson officiated, and Cecil's brother Maurice was best man. According to *The Union* article about the newlyweds, "After a motor trip through the White mountains they will make their home with the bride's parents."

This marriage did not last long, Nancy explained.

Cecil Strong later married **Barbara Davis** 1913-1989, with whom he had five children, the eldest of which was Bo. We have no details of the wedding of Cecil and Barbara.

DAN: The Strong farm was on this property?

BO: Yeah, right. My grandfather was working it.

DAN: What kind of farm? Everything?

BO: Little bit of... mostly cattle. A few hens. Whatever it took to make the farm go.

[In a 1999 interview in the *New Boston Bulletin*, Bo told the editor Brandy Mitroff that his grandfather George was a mailman and a dairy farmer, and his step-grandmother Laura raised hens. "My grandmother got rid of the cows when he (George) died. She used to tell him she had 300 hens and he had a barn full of cows, and her hens were making more money!"]

DAN: You were born 1930-something?

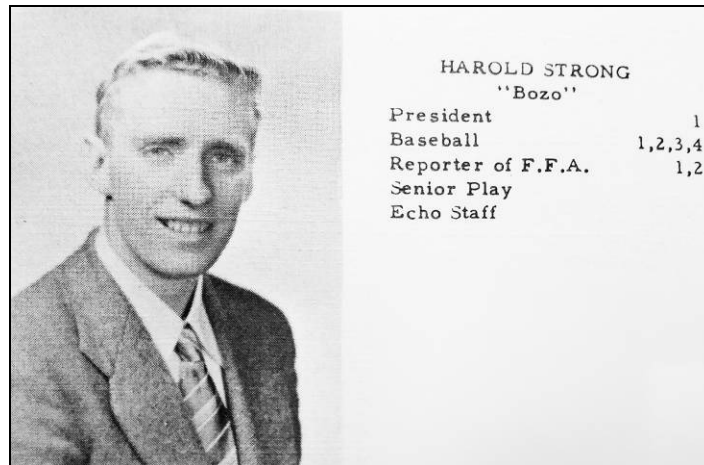
BO: 1930, period!

DAN: There were five children in the family?

BO: Five.

DAN: Were you the oldest?

BO: Yeah. Then George, then my brothers Jack, Michael; Jean was my sister. [Jean was about a year younger than George.]



New Boston High School yearbook photo

DAN: You went to school in town.

BO: Yeah, I started like everyone else, in first grade, at the Village School. I graduated from there, too – the High School, twelve years later.

DAN: Did you go through any of the vocational or agriculture classes?

BO: Yeah, there was an auto shop in High School, and we used to repair cars, for the elderly or whoever.

DAN: Your dad would have had trucks and tractors on the farm?

BO: No, he had a pair of horses, for a while. We had a friend that did our haying, cut our hay in the summertime, he lived in Weare, and used to bring his horses down, eight of 'em, and mow our hay.

DAN: The farmhouse – is it still here?

BO: Yes, it's on Lull Road.

DAN: When did you move here, to this house?

BO: '85.

DAN: The old farmhouse, did it always have electricity and plumbing?

BO: I can remember water running into the house, from the hill. I don't remember if we had a pump or not. Spring fed. And that used to water all the cows and horses.

DAN: Do you have any particular memories of your mother and father? Did your mother cook anything you liked?

BO: We always had sit-down meals, at home.

DON GROSSO: Breakfast was probably early.

BO: Yeah, my father'd be out there probably by 5 o'clock, take care of the hens. I just had hens to take care of.

DAN: So you graduated from high school. Then what'd you do?

BO: Enlisted in the Air Force. Four years in the service.

DAN: Why did you pick the Air Force?

BO: 'Cause I'd see airplanes, flying overhead, during the war [World War II, when Bo was 12-15]. I used to go up on the hill to watch 'em. Dive-bomb the New Boston Bombing Range. We used to go up and stay all afternoon, watch 'em dive down and hit some of the target area [around Joe English Pond].

DAN: Where did the Air Force send you?

BO: I went all over. I ended up in Japan; that was toward the end of the war. That was quite a while ago.



Bo is on the left in this undated photo.

DAN: What kind of work did you do in the Air Force?

BO: Radar mechanic. I'd go from plane to plane, working on 'em. I went in, in '49, to '53, four years.

DAN: During the Korean War.

BO: Yeah.

DAN: Had you ever left home before?

BO: No, other than to Goffstown and back! [Laughter.] No, we'd go to Manchester quite often.

DAN: How did you get to Manchester?

BO: Most of the time, by car. You know, like a Model A or Model T, stuff like that. I remember driving into Goffstown, then into Manchester. That was really a day trip.

DAN: Why would you go into Manchester?

BO: Grocery shopping! Everything we need; supplies for the week.

DAN: Stuff you couldn't get in New Boston?

BO: It was cheaper! We got to know the store owners pretty good, and we got some good deals.

DAN: You were in the Air Force until you were twenty-four, and then you came home here.

BO: Yeah. Came home, ran the farm. I also had my own business, septic tanks, anything anybody wanted me to do.

NANCY: You worked at the cemetery.

BO: Yeah, I worked for Tom Mansfield. I ended up driving a bus for him.

DAN: I'd forgotten that Tom ran a fleet of school buses.

DON GROSSO: You were a Selectman, and a member of the Fire Department [1957-1997].

BO: Yeah, active in that. Saw a lot of changes there, in the Fire Department.

DON GROSSO: Do you remember how many terms you served as Selectman?

BO: I think four. [Bo was Selectman from 1956-1975, except one year, per the 1975 Town Report.]

DON GROSSO: I think it was 16 years on the Planning Board, as Chairman.

NANCY: He was Overseer of the Poor, many, many, many years ago.

BO: That was part of the Selectman's job, take care of the needy.

DAN: You've seen a lot of change in town.

BO: It hasn't changed as much as you think it has. Even today, I recognize the old buildings, Dodge's Store, the church. Changed physically maybe; somebody's made things a little bigger or better – hopefully better!

[Dan asked about New Boston's First Settlement c. 1740 and the cellar holes beyond Cecil Strong's house.]

BO: They were building a church, but they never finished it. Everybody moved away.

[Discussion about the old farm on Lull Road... from Bo's driveway, go right on Riverdale Rd then right at the triangle onto Lull Road. Don't go up Helena but continue straight; not passable except by four-wheeler or horse. When you get to the river, there was a bridge there to Lang's place.]

NANCY: When you had your hens, you were still in high school. You worked for Don Byam, and milked his cows. Were you living with your mother and father?

BO: Nope. [Just before he went into the service, and after he returned from the Air Force, Bo lived with his step-grandmother at her farm to help with the farm work.]

DAN: How did you get to the village for school?

BO: School bus. Had a small school bus; there was about twelve, fourteen people. He used to take us to school, and back.

DAN: What stores do you remember, from when you were a child?

BO: Just like you see now. Hasn't changed that much. There used to be a fellow, Paul Saltmarsh, used to do a small business, you know, but there wasn't too many. Merrimack Farmers Exchange; he'd sell grain.

DON GROSSO: Bo, when you said you raised hens, how many hens are you talking about?

BO: Started off with three or four hundred, and ended up, when I sold out I had six thousand.

NANCY: And you'd collect eggs.

DAN: Six thousand hens sounds like a lot.

BO: It *is* a lot.

DAN: Were they noisy or smelly? What was that like?

BO: No. Not that I remember.

NANCY: They were up in the field.

DON GROSSO: Free-range?

NANCY: No, they had houses, up in the field where Pothier lives now.

BO: We'd build shelters for the hens, so they could get out of the rain. It was open so they could go through the door. Sometimes we had trouble with wild animals, fox and stuff like that, so we'd have to close the screen doors. The buildings were only four by twelve; small. They'd hold about a hundred hens, at night.

DAN: Who bought all the eggs?

BO: A guy would come around once a week to collect the eggs. I'd have to grade 'em, get 'em all graded, and then he'd come once a week, pay me for it.

DAN: How do you grade an egg?

BO: We had egg graders. I've got one here, somewhere.

NANCY: It's a little scale. By size: small, medium, large.

BO: At the end, I had an electric sizing thing, the eggs would come down a track, a little motor pushed the eggs along, round and around.

NANCY: When the grain costs went up, they couldn't sell their eggs for any kind of a profit. It was like a depression of the egg industry.

DAN: When was that?

NANCY: Bo, when were you living with your grandmother at the farm?

BO: I'd been in and out of the service. I'd say 56, or 57.

NANCY: So you helped your grandmother with the hens. When did she decide that it was no longer profitable?

BO: She could see that every time you went to the market down there, a dozen eggs would be, say 40 cents. And when the guy comes to collect your eggs, he was only going to pay you 30 cents, so you know it wasn't a good deal.

DON GROSSO: I saw a picture of you in a baseball uniform.
BO: That was high school. I used to play the outfield.
DON GROSSO: Could you hit?
BO: Once in a while. [Laughter.] Not that good. Walter Kirsch, he was a star player.
DAN: What else did you do for fun?
BO: Didn't go to many dances. Sometimes the school would put something on, and we'd go.
Like I said, we'd go to Manchester to do our shopping, and sometimes we'd take in a movie.
There was three theaters in Manchester. One of them was the Rex.
NANCY: Do you remember going to the Puritan Restaurant on Elm Street with your grandmother?
BO: Yep. Now there are eight or ten restaurants.
[In the 1999 New Boston Bulletin interview, Bo told Brandy, "My grandmother would take some hens to Provost Meat Market on South Elm, and he'd give us butter and sugar in exchange. We'd always go up to the Puritan restaurant for lunch. That was always a joyful trip 'cause we'd get ice cream."]

NANCY: He went from working on the farm to working for Merrimack Farmers, delivering grain.
BO: They had a manager down there, his name was Paul Nadeau, he got me a job at Merrimack Farmers.
NANCY: After that, when did you buy your first backhoe?
BO: From a fellow in Concord, I'd say 1960, 64.
NANCY: When did you start putting septic systems in.
BO: Weren't probably 10 years later. Because before, we didn't need all the permits.
NANCY: You did septic systems for a lot of years.
BO: Probably 18, 20 years.
NANCY: When we were first married, we'd take a ride through New Boston, and he'd point out all the... [laughter] Oh – and in the wintertime, you'd plow for the State of New Hampshire. And you plowed for the Town of New Boston.
[Don remembered that when Bo left the Air Force, he was interviewed by General Curtis Lemay.]
BO: I got a letter from him when I was being discharged, saying that he wished that I'd reconsider and re-up for another four years. He said, "You can take the boy off the farm, but you can't take the farm out of the boy." [laughter]
[Inaudible conversation.]
BO: There was a guy named Art Boulter. He was a handyman could do 'most anything. Rebuilt the dam [at Gregg Mill] that's there now.
DAN: How about Roger Babson?
BO: I worked a lot for Roger. Backhoe work.
NANCY: We went to a party at Roger's one time, and he had this big swimming pool.
DAN: Was that the nephew, Roger Webber?
NANCY: Oh, yes, I'm sorry. Bo, did you use your backhoe to put that rock?
BO: Well, he had this pool, and Roger Webber felt that he needed something, so he hopped on my backhoe and said, "I'm looking for a rock, to put in the bottom of my pool." And we finally found one, and we carried it up to the pool, and had to set it in there just right. Far as I know, it's still there. No, I don't think it's there now... I think somebody told me

somebody took it out. You'd go up there and do work for him, and he'd be right behind you. He wanted it just so. Very particular about the way the rock went in the water.

[Bo drove a school bus for Tom Mansfield's father Paul, too. Paul Mansfield owned the house on Hooper Hill Road which later was owned by Babson and his nephew Webber, who added the swimming pool.]

BO: Paul was kinda quiet. I don't remember him flying off the handle. He used to work with Saltmarsh, and they grew watermelons [on Hooper Hill]. A whole hill, covered in watermelons!

[Don Grosso thanked Bo for all the work he's done for New Boston over many years.]

BO: I'd do it over again!