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**Dr. Scholl's Zino-pads**

## Rip Van Winkle Couldn't Sleep with Nagging Backache

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# The Sailboat That Wouldn't Die



# and the Man Who Wouldn't Let Her



*It took skill and 140 secondhand inner tubes to raise the Emerald—but Wibberley prevailed.*

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

THE 55-FOOT YAWL *Emerald* was returning from the open sea to California's Redondo Beach marina. But as the boat approached the shore, her owner, Frank Wynn, suddenly realized she was headed directly toward the breakwater!

Hurriedly, he took down the sails and started the engine. It sputtered, then quit. Foundering helplessly in the swell, the *Emerald* crashed into the rocks and sank in less than four minutes.

One of the first to hear about the accident that Sunday afternoon last summer was Leonard Wibberley. He's an Irish-born ex-reporter, violinist, construction worker, ditch digger, dishwasher, pin setter, and jack of many other trades until he made a name for himself as author of the successful novels, *The Mouse That Roared* and *The Mouse on the Moon* (both of which were made into popular movies).

Wibberley, a sailing enthusiast since childhood, was repairing his own 30-foot boat a few miles away when the accident occurred. He promptly jumped into his car and raced to the scene. The four persons aboard had been saved, but all that was visible of the *Emerald* were her masts sticking out of the water.

The following day, Wibberley learned that the insurance company wanted to sell the boat as quickly as possible because the wreck was a hazard to navigation. "I offered \$500 for her. She had new dacron sails and stainless-steel riggings which alone were worth that much," Wibberley told me later. But he got a lot more out of the deal than that—thanks to his ingenuity and the help of three friends, Don Siberts and Bob and Bill Meistrell, who run a diving outfit nearby.

The four of them made a dive to check the sailboat's condition. "It was pathetic to see the *Emerald* struggle, trying not to die," Wibberley recalled. "As the water swept around her, it looked as if she were trying to sail. We just couldn't break her up when she seemed so determined to go on living."

**B**UT HOW COULD THEY RAISE HER? The usual sling-and-hook method wouldn't work; the boat would fall apart on the way up. "We thought of stringing 100 pounds of ping-pong balls on nets under her decks and bringing her to the top that way," Wibberley explained. "But that would have taken an awful lot of swimming. It was Bill Meistrell who thought of using automobile inner tubes to raise the boat. Of course, we weren't sure it would work, but it was certainly worth a gamble."

There was a great scurry to buy secondhand inner tubes until they had amassed 200 of them. Then Wibberley and his friends dived with the tubes, girdled the anchor chain around her bow, tied the inner tubes to the chain, and inflated the tubes with an aqualung. "The 140th inner tube finally brought her to the surface," Wibberley said proudly.

The *Emerald* had been submerged four days, and she looked bad. The bow, stern, decks, and keel were sound, but there was a hole in one side so large that Wibberley swam through it on a mattress. There was also a smaller hole on the other side. The men patched up both of them with plywood, then pumped out the water.

The *Emerald* was towed 15 miles to a San Pedro boat yard where she was replanked and had new ribs and a new diesel engine installed. The total cost: \$4,000—for a boat that had been insured for \$50,000!