Barmouth Sailors' Institute

(Founded in 1890 by the late Canon EDWARD HUGHES B.A.)

Sailors' Institute, The Quay, Barmouth, Gwynedd, LL42 1ET

Registered Charity No. 1057490

NEWSLETTER ISSUE THIRTY

(Edited & Published by Trevor Roberts)

November 2023



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Trevor Roberts.

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Chairman's Notes

When putting these notes together I realised that we had now reached newsletter Number 30 and to remind myself and you the members, I looked back to Number **one**, in November 1999, to note the officers and committee member names that were in post then.

President Rev Paul Flavell

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Secretary Janet Griffith, **Treasurer** Norman Tweedale

Committee Members with various titles and responsibilities:

Jeff Davies, Geoff Holden, Cadwalader Williams,

Ian Drasey, David Griffith, Robbie Hodgson,

Margaret Holden, David Holloway, Colin Walker

Although many of these people are no longer with us having sadly passed away or have left the area for other reasons, it was the efforts of these members in those early days that gave the Institute the strong organisation it is today, managing to ensure the building and its collections stay safe for locals and visitors to enjoy now in the 2020s.

Again this issue has several new stories and articles that I'm sure you will all find interesting.

The one I found to be a fascinating story was about Isobel Jessop (Miss Unsinkable).

Looking to the future with our next newsletter due to be with you during the 1st week of June 2024 the committee are still very keen to hear from anyone with any new articles you would like to share with all your fellow members. Please send them in by the end of April 2024 at the latest.

Following many promises I know several of you would like to read something about the history of the Barmouth railway viaduct and hopefully I will be able to put an article together for the next newsletter.

Again my personal thanks to Janet Griffith for her efforts as Secretary and a special thanks to Alan Vincent who as our treasurer, keeps our finances safe and is also a great help in compiling all the articles into the good read it is today.

And of course my thanks to your current committee members who continue to ensure we are still active and the Institute building is kept in a good condition.

SPECIAL NOTICE

I'm also informing all members, especially the snooker players amongst us, that from the start of 2024 the lock to the snooker room will be changing. As members renew their membership fee they each will be given a new key for the snooker room.

There will be a deposit of £5 payable for each key.

Notices of this change will be put on the Institute notice board shortly to remind our snooker players.

Best Wishes

Trevor



SECRETARY'S CHAT

Good afternoon all on what is proving to be a rather wet day so no excuse not to knuckle down and do my piece, such as it will be.

It's been very quiet since my last writings. Quite a bit of 'behind the scenes' secretarial work has however kept me occupied. I've met up with members who, whenever they come to Barmouth, tell me and we have a catch up over coffee on the quay. It's so nice to keep in touch. All started during lockdown and I managed to help in some way with their maritime family tree.

A highlight in September was the visit of 20 members of Cymdeithas Bro Trawsfynydd. They split into two groups so we could accommodate them in reasonable comfort in both the Institute and Tŷ Gwyn. Unfortunately, our Welsh speaking committee members were unavailable but we were very lucky to have Owain Prichard from St. John's church, step in for the first group in the Institute and our own Rev. Ben entertained the second group. Gareth Williams, a long standing volunteer at Tŷ Gwyn, did both groups at that venue. Unfortunately, the weather was not as sunny as it could have been but at least, it was dry enough for some members to enjoy an ice cream from next door, before moving on to Llandanwg church where Rev Ben explained the history, etc. All in all, everyone said they'd enjoyed their visit and would like to come again individually. They were a happy group and it will be a pleasure to see some of them again.

As they were leaving, one person asked me a question. Having recently endured Storms Babet and Ciarán it has prompted me into thinking of other storm tales over the years.
The first that came to mind was the history of the ***Diamond Apple*****.**
In 1820 the Diamond was the fastest ship on the Atlantic. On the night of 2nd January 1825, Captain Macey misjudged his approach to Liverpool and the ship was wrecked on Sarn Padrig, an undersea reef in Cardigan Bay. The cargo of

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premium apples was washed ashore. Seedlings from these fruit eventually gave rise to the famous Diamond Orchard of Dyffryn Ardudwy. Diamond apples were especially popular in Barmouth Market in the 1850's. Two local men were returning with their fortunes from America, one drowned – dragged to his doom by his Gold. His friend threw his money belt into the sea and was saved, only to die a pauper in Caernarfon. American Gold coins can still be found on the nearby beach.

Another apple associated with this area is the ***Bardsey Apple***

Bardsey Island is a lonely wind-swept island off the tip of the Llyn Peninsular in North Wales. It has long been a venue for pilgrims both pagan and later Christian. A single gnarled old apple tree was discovered near the remains of a 13th century abbey in 1999. Hailed as "the rarest tree in the world" it is perhaps all that remains of the monastic orchard. On the island both tree and fruit are completely disease free.

Then there's the tale of ***Cox Cymraeg***
In her garden at Goetre Bach, near Felinheli, Bangor's first *motorised* milk lady Auntie Annie, had a justifiably famous apple tree. She called it the "Cox Cymraeg". A medium sized eating apple with an excellent balance of sweetness and acidity. It has a distinct Cox-like flavour and aroma. In the 1940's, the council straightened out the A487 and Auntie Annie's house was flattened. She then moved 100 yards to one of the last remaining houses along with her apple tree and her husband Bob's budgies. The tree thrived in its new location until fifty years later, it was buried under the new A55. Fortunately, one daughter tree survived nearby, allowing the continuation of this fantastic fruit tree.

There are 22 known ancient Welsh eating apple trees, 16 cooking apples and 5 pears available to buy, if anyone fancies starting an orchard!

Before I digress further down the maritime horticultural road, that's the end of my lesson.

All that's left to do is to wish you all the Compliments of the Season and all the very best for 2024

Janet Griffith Hon. Secretary



Was there a Barmy in Barmouth?

Sightings of mysterious sea creatures in the Cardigan Bay area have been documented since 1937. In that year, a Mr. Jones of Harlech observed "a crocodile-like creature" walking beside a local riverbank. However, the rumours and stories really started to gather pace in the 1970s, when a series of incidents were documented by the local and national press.

The first incident came from the Menai Straits area, to the north of Barmouth, in the early 70s, and was reported by four fishermen. They claimed to have seen a creature about 10 feet long raise itself out of the water near the kelpie beds, and then submerge and disappear. Their description seemed to match one of the most famous sightings, which was made by six schoolgirls from Barmouth. In broad daylight, on 2 March 1975, the girls claimed to have seen an animal that "had a long neck, and a square face, and a long tail with a flipper at the back, and its skin was black and patchy." Their art teacher was so convinced by their account that he produced a postcard giving an artist's impression of what they saw.

Over the next few years, the frequency of the sightings increased, and the monster was christened **"Barmy"** by the local press. In 1975, a couple on a yachting holiday claimed to have encountered an unidentified sea animal with "double sharply pointed spines" five miles off the coast of Harlech.

They further described the creature as having "a free - moving neck, fairly short, rather like a turtle, and an egg - shaped head about the size of a seals. Its back had two spines, which were sharply ridged, and it was about eight feet across and eleven feet long."

A year later, 2 people, who were staying in a caravan park at Talybont, claimed to have found on the beach one morning the bodies of six "monsters". They described them as having long necks, small heads, and bodies supported at the rear by two legs. There was also an anonymous report of large footprints "as big as elephants" on Barmouth beach, and a bather who found herself within touching distance of what appeared to be a sea monster. She swam to shore as fast as she could.

One sighting, which is more difficult to dismiss, occurred in

August 1976. In a signed statement, a Gwent Solicitor and his son documented how they were drying themselves following an early morning dip by Barmouth's causeway. Suddenly, their attention was drawn by a "dark brown solid object", about 10 feet in length, which seemed to be causing a disturbance in the water. Initially, it was around 100 yards away from them, but after the fifth disturbance, it was a mile away. They were puzzled by the speed of the object, and at a loss to identify it.

Over the years, other sightings of mysterious creatures and disturbances were reported. The vast majority seemed to come from visitors oblivious to previous incidents.



However, in 1988 it seemed that the mystery had been solved. On September 22nd of that year, a leather-backed turtle was washed up onto Harlech beach. Measuring eight feet wide and eight feet in length, it weighed 2,016 lbs., and, to date, is the largest leather-backed turtle ever recorded in the world. At the time, it was thought to have come from the Caribbean or North Africa, and was probably attracted to the

area by the large number of jellyfish. The zoology department of the National Museum of Wales took the turtle away for examination.

Was this enormous turtle the same as the one encountered by visitors and locals, or, was it just one of many different and mysterious creatures that roam the waters of Cardigan Bay?

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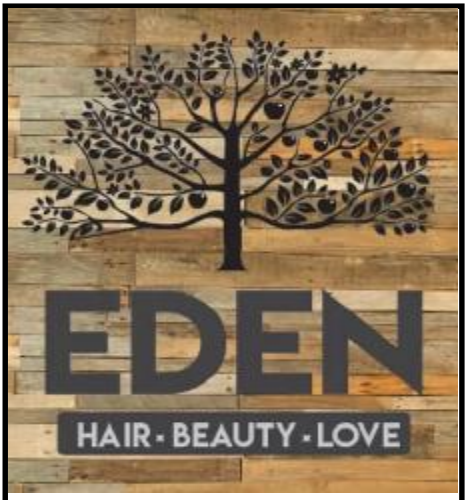
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Storm of 1934 changed Cardigan Island forever

Cardigan Island is a small uninhabited island, situated at the mouth of the Teifi estuary, 130m from the mainland, at its narrowest point, Carreg Lydan. It is 15 hectares (37 acres) in area, measuring approximately 700m from east to west and 100 - 350m from north to south. It is cliff-fringed but relatively level, with the highest point on the south west side at 52m above sea level. The whole of the Island is a Scheduled Monument (CD280), with archaeological features comprising two settlement enclosures, most likely prehistoric (Iron Age) in origin, a possible cairn and later features associated with the agricultural use of the island.

Rats invaded Cardigan Island amid the most dramatic sea rescue ever witnessed on this stretch of the Cardigan Bay coastline.

Four men, the crew of two tugs that were towing the steamship SS Herefordshire from Dartmouth to a breaker's yard in Scotland, were brought to shore one by one in the canvas bucket of a breeches buoy after scrambling onto the island when the ship hit the Island

The ship was a 7,000-tonne liner, a fast ship that entered service with the Bibby Line in 1905. She carried passengers and cargo on the Burma service until 1916 when she was converted into a hospital ship to serve the forces of Mesopotamia, Salonika, and East Africa until the end of 1917. After a refit in 1920 she ran as a cargo vessel until being laid up in Dartmouth in 1933.

On March 15, 1934, she was being towed by two tugs from Dartmouth to the breaker's yard in the Clyde to be broken up. The weather was bad with hurricane winds and high seas.

The tow ropes broke off Strumble Head and the liner went adrift. The Fishguard and St Davids lifeboats searched for the ship in vain before it was spotted from the Penrhys Castle



Coastguard Station drifting in the bay off Cemaes Head.

She first ran aground toward Poppit beach and then broke free, coming to rest on the seaward side of Cardigan Island.

The ship went aground on the rocks at around 7am, and as the waves crashed against the wreck, the four tugmen scrambled onto the island. Hundreds of people gathered to watch as rocket-fired lifesaving equipment at Gwbert was rushed to the shore where a line was shot across to the stricken ship. The men were brought ashore by breeches buoy amid dramatic scenes.

Later that year two salvage ships recovered everything worth saving, including crockery, furniture, luxury fittings, bedding, linen and timber, much of it teak. They were auctioned in Cardigan and many items were bought by locals happy to secure a memento of the area's biggest shipwreck.

But the shipwreck left a more devastating legacy as rats wiped out the puffin colony. It was more than 45 years before the island was once again clear of the pests

The ship now lies broken against a shallow reef 12 metres under water and is a popular attraction for divers.

A large vessel, 450ft long and 55ft at the beam, the wreck teems with marine life including lobster, spider crab, brown crab, anemones, bass, pollack, dogfish, wrasse and bream.

Divers say her boilers and an assortment of metal structures, like bollards, cogs and railings, remain easily recognisable.

(WalesOnline—Nov. 2010)



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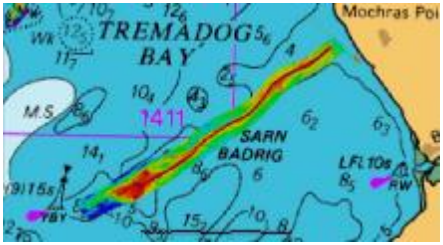
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Sarn Badrig

Sarn Badrig or St. Patrick's Causeway, which extends for about 24 kilometres (14 miles) out into Cardigan Bay, has been mentioned many times in our articles over the years, particularly in relation to local sea disasters.

But we wondered how many of our readers have seen it fully exposed by a low spring tide.



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This photo was taken on Saturday 12Aug 06 at approx 6.30pm looking NE, 4km off shore. The hill to the right is Moelfre, with Rhinog Fawr in the background and Foel Ddu centre.



This shot looking SW. There are five or six sections of reef extending another 8 miles SW from here! This section (Some 2 miles) consists mainly of large pebbles sand and seaweed. Further out it gets rather rocky.

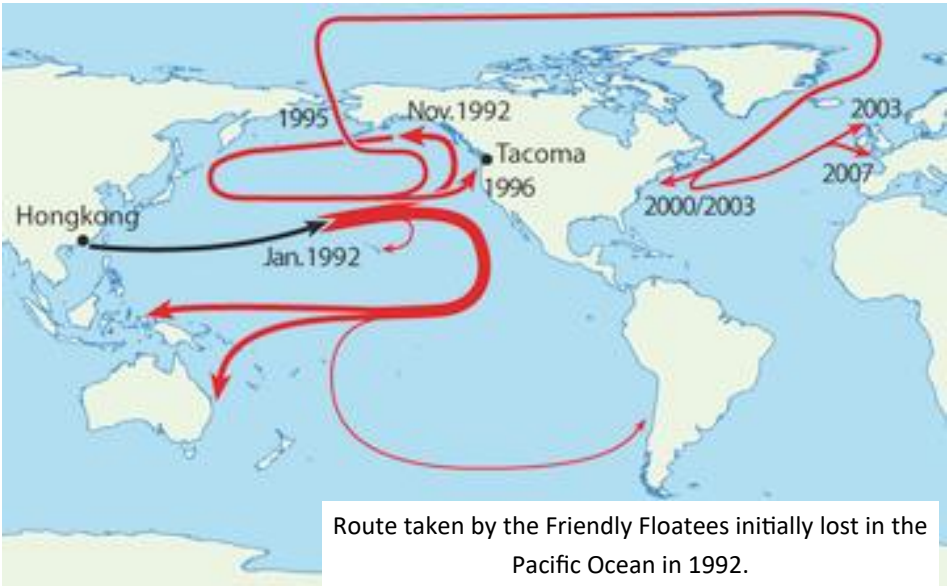
Plastic Ducks
Help Chart Ocean Currents

A consignment of Friendly Floatee toys, manufactured in China for The First Years Inc., departed from Hong Kong on a container ship, the Evergreen *Ever Laurel*, destined for Tacoma, Washington. On 10 January 1992, during a storm in the North Pacific Ocean close to the International Date Line, twelve 40-foot (12-m) intermodal containers were washed overboard. One of these containers held 28,800 Floatees, a child's bath toy which came in a number of forms: red beavers, green frogs, blue turtles and yellow ducks.

At some point, the container opened (possibly because it collided with other containers or the ship itself) and the Floatees were released. Although each toy was mounted in a cardboard housing attached to a backing card, subsequent tests showed that the cardboard quickly degraded in sea water allowing the Floatees to escape. Unlike many bath toys, Friendly Floatees have no holes in them so they do not take on water.

Seattle oceanographers Curtis Ebbesmeyer and James Ingraham, who were working on an ocean surface current model, began to track their progress. The mass release of 28,800 objects into the ocean at one time offered significant advantages over the standard method of releasing 500–1000 drift bottles. The recovery rate of objects from the Pacific Ocean is typically around 2%, so rather than the 10 to 20 recoveries typically seen with a drift bottle release, the two scientists expected numbers closer to 600. They were already tracking various other spills of flotsam, including 61,000 Nike running shoes that had been lost overboard in 1990.

Ten months after the incident, the first Floatees began to wash up along the Alaskan coast. The first discovery consisted of ten toys found by a beachcomber near Sitka, Alaska on 16 November 1992, about 3,200 kilometres (2,000 mi) from their starting point. Ebbesmeyer and Ingraham contacted beachcombers, coastal workers, and local residents to locate hundreds of the beached Floatees over a 850 kilometres (530 mi) shoreline. Another



Route taken by the Friendly Floatees initially lost in the Pacific Ocean in 1992.

beachcomber discovered twenty of the toys on 28 November 1992, and in total 400 were found along the eastern coast of the Gulf of Alaska in the period up to August 1993. This represented a 1.4% recovery rate. The landfalls were logged in Ingraham's computer model OSCUR (Ocean Surface Currents Simulation), which uses measurements of air pressure from 1967 onwards to calculate the direction of and speed of wind across the oceans, and the consequent surface currents. Ingraham's model was built to help fisheries but it is also used to predict flotsam movements or the likely locations of those lost at sea.

Using the models they had developed, the oceanographers correctly predicted further landfalls of the toys in Washington state in 1996 and theorized that many of the remaining Floatees would have travelled to Alaska, westward to Japan, back to Alaska, and then drifted northwards through the Bering Strait and become trapped in the Arctic pack ice. Moving slowly with the ice across the Pole, they predicted it would take five or six years for the toys to reach the North Atlantic where the ice would thaw and release them. Between July and December 2003, The First Years Inc. offered a $100 US savings bond reward to anybody who recovered a Floatee in New England, Canada or Iceland.

More of the toys were recovered in 2004 than in any of the preceding three years. However, still, more of these toys were predicted to have headed eastward past Greenland and make landfall on the southwestern shores of the United Kingdom in 2007. In July 2007, a retired teacher found a plastic duck on the Devon coast, and British newspapers mistakenly announced that the Floatees had begun to arrive. But the day after breaking the story, the *Western Morning News*, the local Devon newspaper, reported that Dr. Simon Boxall of the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton had examined the toy and determined that the duck was not in fact a Floatee.

Bleached by sun and seawater, the ducks and beavers had faded to white, but the turtles and frogs had kept their original colours.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia .



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The Bathing Machines

The following is taken from the Barmouth Advertiser of July 26, 1883, which, in turn, quotes extracts from the Guardian of October 18, 1882.

"The bathing customs are in some respects refreshingly primitive. Advancing civilisation has, it is true, effected a separation between the ladies and the gentlemen's machines - at the request, it is said, of the stronger sex; and an enigmatically worded notice enacts that "No male person of twelve years old and upwards shall bathe within 100 yards of the ladies' machines, and shall wear drawers" But beyond this limit bathing goes on freely from the shore; the process of getting out of ordinary dress and into the said drawers being performed sub divo under the eyes of the ladies , who in some cases sit by and guard their husbands' clothes .

I have also seen before breakfast a lady enveloped in an ulster walk down to a conspicuous part of the beach , and there let fall the ulster, disclosing a bathing-dress in which she walked straight into the sea - My breakfast was ready, or curiosity would have led me to wait and see whether on coming out she simply replaced the ulster on her dripping form , or whether by some sleight of body she contrived to wriggle out of her wet robes into its protecting folds and walked home in that alone.

I am inclined to believe the latter alternative; for I have noticed ladies going towards their machines carrying their bathing-gowns and shrouded in ulsters which obviously concealed little or nothing but the wearer herself. On Sunday mornings the machines are not drawn down to the water, but may be used by bathers."

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Progress is being made on our bridge...







Meet Violet Jessop, the Woman who survived three shipwrecks



The three sunken ships that Violet had worked in are RMS Olympic, RMS Titanic and HMHS Britannic.

The tragedy of the world's most luxurious and largest ship, RMS Titanic is something that the world will never forget. Titanic, went down in the North Atlantic Ocean on April 15th 1912, after head-on colliding with an iceberg. Very few people are fortunate enough to survive a shipwreck. One such person was Violet Jessop, a stewardess on the Titanic. She survived not one, but three shipwrecks. Let us take you through her life story.

Violet's Early Life

A baby girl was born to Catherine and William Jessop on October 2nd 1887, in Beha Blanca, Argentina. They named her Violet Constance Jessop. At a very young age, Violet was compelled to quit her studies and find employment since her father had passed away, her mother was ill, and needed to support her family. Uncertain of her future, Violet pursued her mother's path and took up a job in a ship.

Although Violet applied for job of a stewardess at various shipping firms, she was rejected due to her ordinary looks. Finally, the shipbuilding firm Royal Mail Line employed her as a medical assistant nurse considering her mother's work on their ship (her mother used to work there before she became ill). She received nursing training as a part of her job.

RMS Olympic in 1911

Impressed by Violet's nursing performance, the company

got her a job on a passenger ship. It gave her a position on the RMS Olympic, also called the White Star Vessel, in 1911. RMS Olympic was the biggest luxury cruise ship back then.
On September 20th 1911, the ship sailed from the port of Southampton. Unfortunately, the British warship HMS Kavikke and the RMS Olympic collided shortly after take-off. This accident damaged both the ships. Fortunately, nobody was killed, and the ship didn't go down. Before anything truly awful happened, they arrived at the harbour safely.

RMS Titanic in 1912
It would be natural if Violet never wanted to set foot on a boat again due to this terrifying experience. But that wasn't Violet's case! It seemed she was too brave to give up. The shipbuilding company Harland and Wolff in Belfast intended to construct the Titanic as the biggest cruise ship that could not be damaged. Violet Jessop, a brave 24-year-old, eagerly applied for the position of a stewardess on the RMS Titanic (also known as 'The Unsinkable Ship built by Ten Thousand Irishmen'). She believed she didn't need to worry about another collision.
On April 10th 1912, the Titanic sailed from Southampton port, England, to New York. On April 14th, the fourth day of the trip, it collided with an unexpected glacier in the Mediterranean and began to sink. Sensing the predicament, Violet alerted the non-English-speaking passengers of the emergency and piled them onto a lifeboat.

Violet could board a lifeboat according to the 'women and children first' rule of chivalry. She boarded lifeboat number 16 while holding a stranger's infant in her arm. She was mandated to deliver the baby ashore safely. While Violet and a few other passengers got into the lifeboat, the Titanic sank completely. Fortunately, RMS Carpathia, another ship, soon rescued Violet and the rest. The mother took her child from Violet while they were on the Carpathia.

HMHS Britannic in 1916
You'd think that by this point she'd learnt her lesson and

would be afraid of the ocean. But brave-hearted as she was, Violet took up a position in, the HMHS Britannic of the shipping company White Star Line after surviving the Titanic tragedy.
The HMHS Britannic was transformed into a hospital ship during World War I. On November 21st 1916, the ship sailed away. Violet embarked on her journey as a nurse in the ship. Unfortunately, the unlucky ship only survived for one hour.

While cruising in the Aegean Sea, an explosion caught the ship. The crew began to board lifeboats as the ship started to sink. Within 55 minutes of the explosion, the ship drowned in the sea. 30 of the 1066 people on board of the ship died. Others were extricated from the lifeboat by the British government.

The ship's accidental sinking posed a mystery for several years. Many believed the Germans might have fired their first explosion while the ship was at sea. However, the British government was later discovered to be at fault.

Can you guess what happened to Violet? She managed to survive this shipwreck too! These incidents were among the most significant shipwrecks worldwide. After this, she made two trips around the globe while working for several shipping firms, including the Royal Mail Line and Violet Red Star Line.

Here is a fun yet heart-warming fact from Violet's life. In 1950, when Violet had retired, she received a call one night. "Did you save a baby when the Titanic sank?" the woman on the call asked. Violet answered, "Yes." The caller smilingly replied, "I'm the baby."

Violet's life experiences justify the moniker she had earned,

'Miss Unsinkable'!

*By **HT School Web Desk,** Feb 17, 2023*

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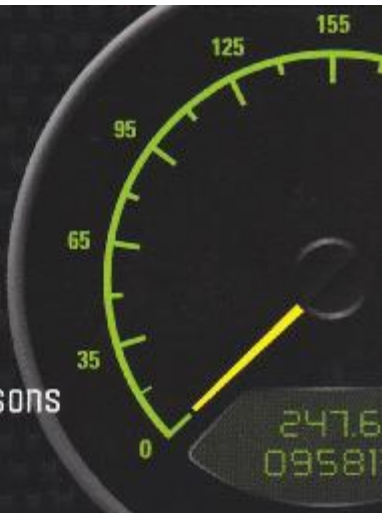
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