

During my senior year at Mahomet-Seymour High School, Coach Jim Risley (Riz) worked with me and my throwing techniques. We decided to move to the over-sized women's shot put to allow for more surface coverage with my hand, thus creating more impact in my throw. I went all season throwing this shot put - it was my "baby."

The time had come for the trip to Charleston; I was geared up to be a contender for the championship. We arrived for the 1989 Girls' Class A State Finals practice time, we began practice with the traditional Bulldog warm-ups and then it was off to the throwing area for me. I took my warm-up throws, feeling great about the day and the competition, then I thought my state dreams had literally sunk.

THUD! My shot put hit the ground and the plug sunk to the center of the shot and it could no longer be used....I was devastated! This meet was instrumental to signing my scholarship to Southern Illinois University, how was I going to go back to throwing the traditional shot put???

This is where the true spirit of Gill Athletics made a difference in my life.

After Riz got me calmed down and focused on working through such situations, he made a phone call to Bob "Moose" Handlin for some advice and help. Moose made a call to Gill and they went to work at making me a new shot – keep in mind that we started competition at 10:00 a.m. the next morning and it was now early evening. How was this possible???

I moved on to discus practice and just prayed that this would all be a positive thing and that there was a plan bigger than me that would take over. We closed practice that day and ended our day as a team, together and excited for tomorrow.

Friday morning, walking over to the track (and field) – still no shot put. Trying to stay focused and positive, I continued to pray through. We did our team warm-ups and then it was off to the shot put ring....still no over-sized shot in site. I greeted my competitors and turned towards the ring....here came Riz with a small box in his hands (and a huge smile on his face). I ran to him and said, "Is it really here??" We opened the box that was burnt on the inside where the shot was still hot from the factory. In fact, we had to roll the shot in a puddle to cool it enough for me to throw.

The unbelievable customer service, dedication and love for athletes shined through this event and led me to a top finisher in the state in 1989. I also went on to join two other state competitors as teammates at SIU with a throwing scholarship.

I will ALWAYS be thankful for the efforts of your team at Gill to take what I thought was a sunken dream and turn it in to a life long story that I will tell my children and grandchildren with great pride.

Always a Bulldog,
Cindy Grammer Essex