

# HOLYOKE Plus

*South Hadley  
and Granby*

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## Author's talk to explore mental illness

By ELIZABETH R. LaFOND

**HOLYOKE** – Gail A. Hornstein of Holyoke, a Mount Holyoke College psychology professor, will discuss her latest book, "Agnes's Jacket: A Psychologist's Search for the Meanings of Madness," when the Friends of the Holyoke Public Library holds its Annual Meeting at 6:30 p.m. on May 20 in the library's Community Room.

Many years of intense, international research brought Hornstein to discover Agnes Richter, the subject of her book. Richter was a mental patient in Germany in the 1890s. Before Richter was placed in an institution and kept there for 23 years, she was a seamstress. Like prisoners, mental patients had to wear uniforms. Richter took her uniform apart and reconstructed it into a beautiful jacket – the entire surface of the jacket contained her life story that she carefully embroidered.

"The complexities of being able to tell what Agnes had to say to me is a kind of a model for talking about how people today experiencing disturbing states of mind, like terror, paranoia or depression, want to tell us about

### IF YOU GO

**Event:** Friends of the Holyoke Public Library Annual Meeting

**Speaker:** Gail A. Hornstein, author, "Agnes's Jacket: A Psychologist's Search for the Meanings of Madness"

**When:** May 20, 6:30 p.m.

**Where:** Holyoke Public Library Community Room

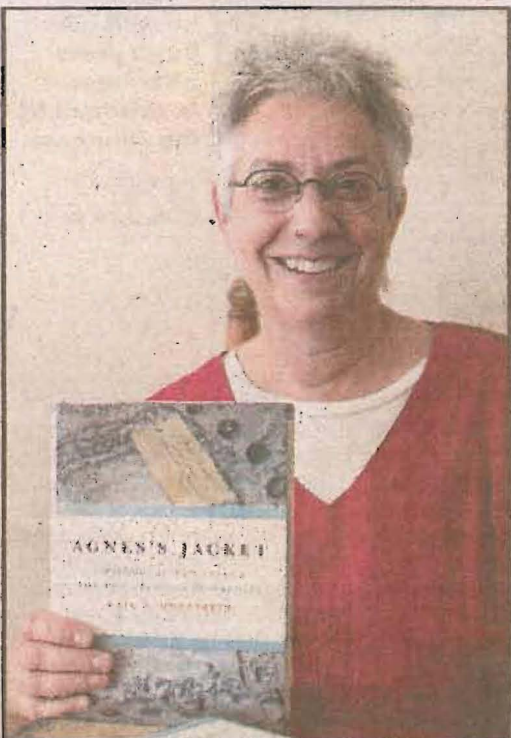
**Cost:** Free

what they're experiencing, but we often have trouble understanding what they're trying to tell us," Hornstein said.

"Agnes's Jacket" is historical and contemporary because it focuses on the experiences of people in Western New England, as well as in Holland, England and Germany.

"I talk about the more than 700 published written accounts by people who have suffered from various kinds of emotional difficulties

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Staff photo by DON TREGER

**Author Gail A. Hornstein will be speaking before the Friends of the Holyoke Public Library in two weeks.**

# Talk: Author explores mental illness treatment

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collected from the 15th century through last year," Hornstein said.

Much of Hornstein's book highlights the support groups that contemporary patients have formed all over the world, including in the local community. According to Hornstein, support groups provide an alternative to the mental health system.

"My book is very optimistic and it conveys the sense that if you are a patient, a family member of a patient, or just interested in how the mind works, it's exciting to learn how patients have come together on their own to tell their stories and created alternatives to live a life without isolation or suffering."

Hornstein is trained as a personality and social psychologist, having earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Pittsburgh and her master's and doctorate degrees from Clark University. Visiting fellowships brought her to Berkeley, Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford and London. She now divides her time between Holyoke and London.

Apart from teaching at Mount Holyoke College and writing books and scholarly articles, Hornstein is an active member of the Western Massachusetts Recovery Learning Community, with its central location in Holyoke, and other locations in Greenfield and Pittsfield.

The organization supports individuals finding their own paths to mental health recovery within local communities by offering trauma-sensitive

peer support and a regional peer network.

"The most important message I have is that no matter how serious a mental illness or how long someone has suffered, they can get completely better," Hornstein said. "We should never give up on people. We should have an optimistic attitude about mental illness, and the patients working together to help each other to listen to each other's experiences is inspiring."

Hornstein recently talked about her book in Denver to a group of mental health organizations. She's also spoken in London and has conducted some local talks.

"Since I live in Holyoke, I want to give more local talks," she said. "The Holyoke Public Library event will allow people a free event to learn about something very different."

Hornstein also is scheduled to speak in Switzerland, London and Washington, D.C., this year.

Hornstein is also the author of "To Redeem One Person is to Redeem the World: The Life of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann," a biography about psychiatrist Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, the German-Jewish refugee analyst who accomplished what many thought was impossible. She successfully treated schizophrenics and other seriously disturbed mental patients with intensive psychotherapy instead of medication.

For more about Hornstein, her published articles and books, and her upcoming lectures, visit [www.gailhornstein.com](http://www.gailhornstein.com)