Susan J Katz - First, Do No Harm

"The first thing you have to do with an aggressive patient is tell him that his reality is wrong, and your reality is right." Those words, spoken by a renowned psychiatrist to a young psychiatry student, were the final confirmation for me that psychiatry is dangerous and that any mental illness I may have had was manufactured by an industry that is based upon, and feeds upon fear, conformity, and 'fitting in', at any cost. I spent over 20 years in a chemical straitjacket, diagnosed with a brain chemistry 'imbalance', by spurious and dubious use of the DSM. My emotions, moods and ideations were evaluated and managed by male psychiatrists, doctors, and with their encouragement, my husband. I am just one woman of my generation who was medicalized and demoralized in this way. Two women, my new case manager and psychiatrist, then took my file. I was encouraged to drop the fear and stigma that kept me prisoner, embrace new peer relationships, trust myself as my own manager, correct underlying health problems, and see therapists who taught me that every cell in our bodies can learn, and that we create our own reality. With the disfiguring legacy of tardive dyskinesia as a constant reminder of my years of compliance with the patronizing system that told me housework was all the exercise I needed, I successfully left the fear-based system of psychiatry that had required me to be completely dependent upon them. I now have a stimulating and meaningful life as a writer and musician. I mentor others' self-expression in a successful writing program for mental health consumers. In 2009 I was nominated for a prestigious Voice Award in recognition of my impact as a journalist in creating public awareness for inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable people.