



ART BY KATHY RUDIN

PREFLIGHT

Sara Whitestone

I had felt it coming on for weeks, like false labor spasms that warn of pain and an uncertain future. But those small pangs were not enough to prepare me for the force of what came—the knife that cut through the covering of my soul.

I was exposed.

This casting off of my old skin meant I could never crawl into it again. So I tried to pull that shroud back around my shoulders. To cling to that dark protection—to that pretended safety.

Anger would stop the fear. Anger would end this tearing of my soul.

But I could not hold that either. My rage burned away into the night air.

After the fear, after the rage, there was a clearing of mind. Whose hand was directing this knife? God's? But I could not be angry with Him—had never been able to be. In hurt, in incomprehension, and yes, even in fear, I had trusted Him.

Standing on the edge of a lake, the full moon high and tender in the night sky, I let go. Like crumbling pieces of a cocoon, my old life fell away into fragments at my feet. Reaching up with empty hands, I wished again for real arms to hold me—for human fingertips to smooth away my tears. But in that reaching it was as if I felt wings—wings heavy and wet with afterbirth—emerge from my un-shrouded shoulders.

And unnamed hopes—throbbing and filling—rose again on unseen wings.

Sara Whitestone's students in NYC introduce her to the mysteries of the world. Whitestone discovers writing through travel. Her works appear in book anthologies and popular and literary magazines including *The Portland Review*, *Word Riot*, and *Literary Traveler*. Her book-in-continual-progress is a fictional autobiography entitled *Counting to 100*.