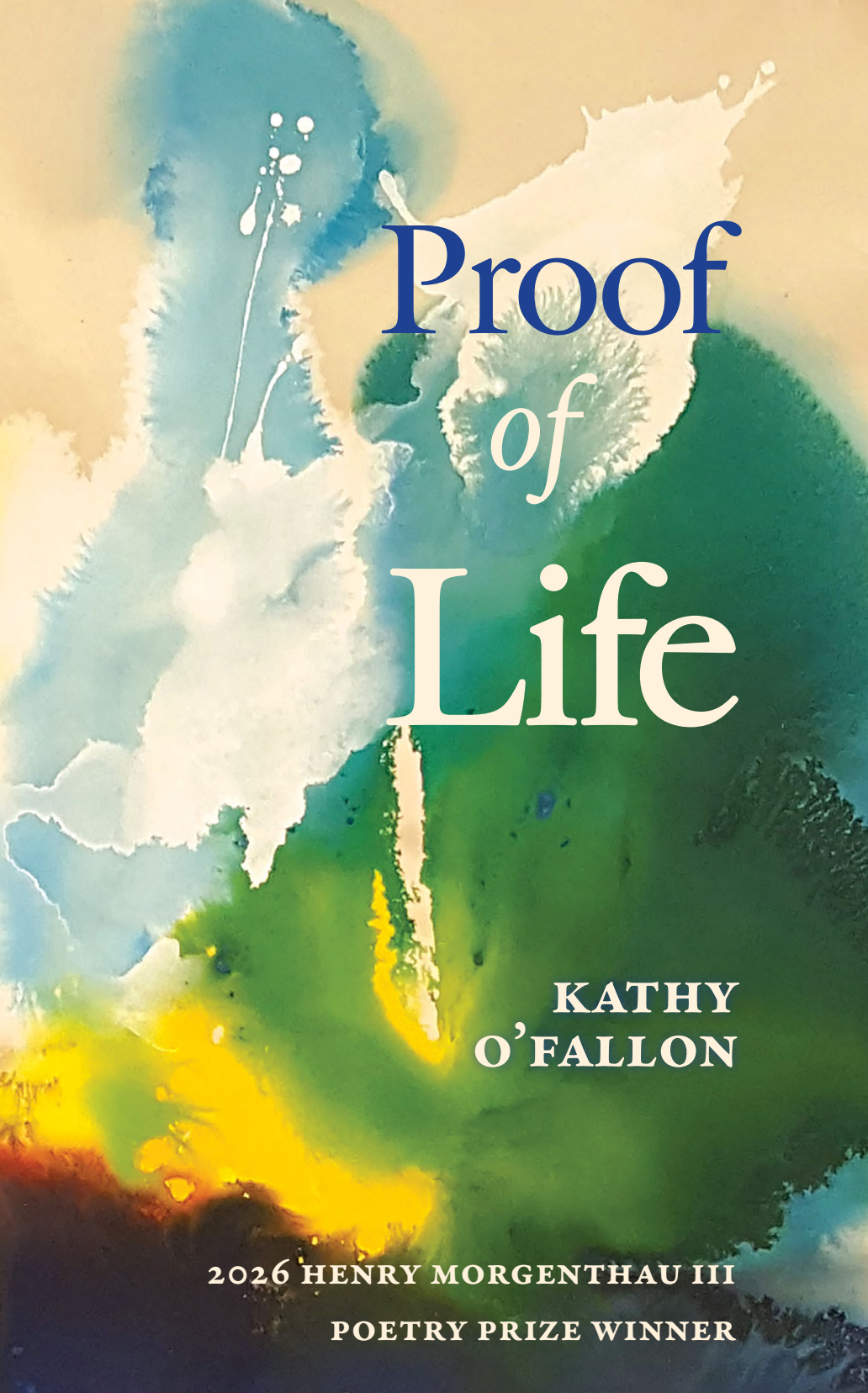




Proof *of* Life

KATHY
O'FALLON

2026 HENRY MORGENTHAU III

POETRY PRIZE WINNER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Passager Announces Winner of National Poetry Prize for a Writer 70 or Older

Kathy O’Fallon has won the Henry Morgenthau III First Book Poetry Prize, awarded by Passager Books to a writer 70 or older, the only prize of its kind in the United States. With this national prize, Passager continues its mission of bringing the compelling writing and insight of older people to the public.

O’Fallon’s winning collection, *Proof of Life*, addresses themes of family love and trauma, divorce, climate change, beauty, and the power of music. A clinical psychologist living in southern California, O’Fallon said that “a yearning I felt in 1998 found expression in poetry, not the fiction that I was writing at the time.” She said she finds poetry infinitely challenging and intriguing, both as an art form and as a therapeutic tool that she uses in her practice.

Nationally acclaimed poet and Morgenthau Contest judge Alicia Ostriker praised O’Fallon’s work, saying, “Philosophical, conversational, and sharply observant, O’Fallon’s manuscript surges through a lifetime of energy, experience, and wisdom—everywhere a pleasure to read.”

Passager editor Rosanne Singer agreed, noting that “O’Fallon’s rich and beautiful language creates immediate emotional

resonance. The poet has a deep awareness of the fragility of the world around her.”

Awarded biennially since 2018, the Henry Morgenthau III First Book Poetry Prize includes \$2,000 and publication. The prize was named in memory of Henry Morgenthau III who published his first book of poems at age 99 and was transformed late in life by what he learned about himself by writing poetry. He inspired audiences young and old with his powerful readings and conversation until his death at age 101.

In its 36 years, Passager has shared the work of more than 1,500 writers, many in their 80s and 90s, in its 80 journal issues, 30-plus books, videos, and podcasts. In doing so, this nonprofit press has gained a reputation for longevity in a field in which few magazines and journals last more than a handful of years.

Proof of Life is scheduled for release October, 2026.



Kathy O'Fallon, the first born of nine, was raised in the postage-stamp community of Levittown, Long Island, and in a bedroom community in northern New Jersey. A self-described part observer, part detective, O'Fallon never expected to become a psychologist, but a prior career in a law office/library left her lonely for human connection. Meanwhile, she began writing fiction. Grad school, work, divorce and two toddlers kept her busy with real life too. A writer's conference lured her into poetry after her mother's death—she credits her mom with the nudge—and she put prose behind her.

O'Fallon has published several chapbooks—*At Higher Elevations*, *Underbelly*, *When the Moon Spills Her Milk*, and *Variations on a Theme of Love*. Her poem, “Last Request Lest I Forget: No Cemetery,” was nominated for Best of the Net Anthology, and “Listening for Tchaikovsky” received honorable mention in Passager’s 2024 Poetry Contest. Her full-length manuscript by the same name was a finalist for the Henry Morgenthau III First Book Poetry Prize in 2024.

O'Fallon is a pen name that Kathy finally legalized after trying on several others, to protect the not-so-innocent.

PRAISE

“Early in *Proof of Life*, in a poem called ‘Ballad for What’s at Stake,’ Kathy O’Fallon remarks, ‘Don’t we live on the same playground?’ It’s true. Soon after, I savor the phrasing of ‘Land ahead, warns the lighthouse:/solid ground and graveyard,’ a father depicted by ‘the slingshot of his tempers,’ a remembered childhood scene containing ‘the pond and swans that look like churchyards,/frogs like gods.’ Then comes the woman’s voice: ‘Everything’s the tango of love/hate if you live long enough.’ At home there are piquant family portraits, love for music, dogs, horses, where ‘the nicker of a horse in the next field calls my name,’ an unforgettable small granddaughter describing her ‘superpowers,’ and the question, ‘How long till the well stops giving?’ Philosophical, conversational, sharply observant, *Proof of Life* surges through a lifetime of energy, experience, and wisdom—everywhere a pleasure to read.”

Alicia Ostriker

Poet, critic, activist, two-time finalist for the National Book Award, and author of 19 collections of poetry

“Kathy O’Fallon’s *Proof of Life* is a love letter to a world that bursts with her magnificent attention, deep awe, and humble tenderness. But O’Fallon is also brave—willing to write about the hurt and danger of being alive and imperfectly loved. As if that wasn’t enough, her sonic attunement to language is breathtaking. In ‘Plum,’ she writes, ‘Not since Neruda have I tasted fruit/this juicy, sweet and spunky as a kiss/on a cliff above the surf at St. Tropez./ Mouth sucking magenta, 1812 Overture/from the waves, its finale exploding, down my lined and weathered chin,/begging to be licked . . .’ This collection is that kind of fruit: juicy, deep, begging to be carefully savored.”

Julia B. Levine

Author of *Small Disasters Seen in Sunlight*,
winner of the Northern California Book Award

“After reading Kathy O’Fallon’s *Proof of Life*, I wanted to read it quickly all over again for every delicious word and tongue’s turn of phrase. She ‘puddles’ through the rain, ‘breeze anoints the sky’s thurible.’ O’Fallon attends keen-eyed to all that grows in nature, every bloom and ravage, every seed spilled, the wren nesting, each child and grandchild born, all proof that when everything seems to be shrinking, life is transforming. ‘I can’t write fast enough’ she says. ‘I see now my death could be boisterous.’ Like a lighthouse she has blinked on and off to save what can be saved and warn others away. A dynamic realist and romantic, her book turns a long, ordinary life into an extraordinary adventure not to be missed.”

Perie Longo

Santa Barbara, CA Poet Laureate Emerita

FOG HORN

Not a cloud in the heavens over the Bay of Fundy,
the only verticals, balsam fir, and live wires
scalloped on poles. The highest tide on earth.

A barn, red-roofed, Huck-Finn-white-washed
siding, stands alone at the cliff's edge, down
from my friend's brother's cottage where I sit
in the blue, blue calm. She wants to buy the barn.

From his porch I can watch what may blow in
off the horizon, and wonder what songs whistle
from the gusts that stir up the currents, simmer
the fog into summer treachery.

Driftwood slaps the shore—body parts of ships
gambling with the weather. My friend is drawn
to desolation, prone to spikes of genius, late night
poems, the rage of fire.

We all live at the razor's edge, I suppose,
from how we're raised and what the fates dictate:
impulse death's great temptress, timidity a bargain
we can't win—moth to the flame at the end.

Where do I fit in? The sizzle of electrical wires
burns the unsuspecting vessel into a ghostly shadow.
Land ahead, warns the lighthouse:
solid ground and graveyard.

ORDERING INFORMATION

Proof of Life by Kathy O'Fallon

Paperback: 112 pages

Publisher: Passager Books

ISBN 978-1-7355148-9-5

Product Dimensions: 5.375 x 0.3 x 8.625 inches

\$18

Bookstores: Order through Itasca Books at

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