Love Lines

by Wendy Pettifer, with illustrations by Jeff Stewart. 47 pages, the book is available for £6 including postage from Lovelines.net or via Wendy on Twitter @WendyPettifer.

All proceeds from the book will be donated to two charities: Hackney Law Centre and the Hackney Migrants Centre.

Wendy Pettifer is well known to members of the Haldane Society as a stalwart member of the Executive Committee. She has also recently helped to establish an active Refugees Subcommittee of the ELDH (see the international report in the news section of this issue, page 12).

Wendy is an active member of the Hackney Labour Party, a socialist internationalist, and best known as a Legal Aid solicitor who fights for Migrants Rights. She believes that anything is possible. And she is a cancer survivor.

She has 25 years experience as a Legal Aid Lawyer working across the private and voluntary sector on housing and destitution cases for migrants. She has worked in Cairo, Calais and Athens with refugees on asylum applications and Dublin III transfers.

Wendy is also a poet, and I encourage all Haldane members to acquire a copy of this moving and important volume.

In her introduction, Wendy tells us that her poems speak directly about emotions: love, fear, lust and empathy. She started writing poetry aged 13, but only now has the opportunity to publish. Her book has five sections: Hackney; Calais; Cancer; Travel and, with 12 poems, Personal. Which is a fair summary. Each section has its own short prose introduction, and there are splendid strong illustrations by Jeff Stewart on the cover and throughout the book.

The very first poem celebrates a walk with her grandson Nye in London Fields: a celebration of London, England and its ley lines, her grandson – and this special ‘ancient changing space’. The second poem records the closure of Shoreditch County Court in 2006; and the third is a hymn to Hackney – ‘So I’ll stay here and keep the faith/ Of all I know in this safe place.’ ‘Calais’ is a poetic engagement with her work as a volunteer lawyer from May to September 2016 at the ‘Jungle’, an experience which was terrifying and inspiring. Two poems in ‘Cancer’ are her response to her experience of bowel cancer in 2019: thankfully she is in remission.

‘Travel’ starts with her passion for France – Wendy is one of a handful of Haldane members who speak French – starting in 1969, and when she was 17 she got a scholarship to the Institut Francais in London. She has travelled all over the world, and three poems convey her love for ‘that feeling of stepping onto strange land…’

Finally, ‘Personal’ starts with her childhood in Lincolnshire, where her dad was a fireman and her mum a housewife. There are poems to her partner Nick on his birthday, a poem about getting laid, a must-read poem ‘My Tongue In Your Cheek’ – ‘Lake of need in an ocean of lust/ unravelling the cobwebs, disturbing your dust’. The most moving poem of all is ‘Our Gentle Gardener’ which she read at her father’s funeral. ‘The tender tendrils in the garden of my father / Bind our hearts together to soften this last loss.’

Bill Bowring

In my Karavan

In my Karavan I keep tisanes to tempt the tired and troubled Teddy bears for lost children, plasters for scratches A table; Calais kitchen dinners Ghostly teenagers rest in my Karavan: talking, Smoking shisha hoping for a better life Trying to forget that when night comes They will lacerate their hands on lorries That riot police will burn their eyes with teargas, Break their bones with truncheons As they did mine.

In my Karavan I am many things. Brother, father, never lover, Strong man, weak man, angry Syrian I lock the door No lights to finish the day And think of my family and my home. Modest women, soft starlight, roasted almonds And know who I really am. In my Karavan I keep my mind