

Poet reveals himself as astute observer of life

by Doris Penner

A LEGEND in her own time though never in her own mind . . . is how Sam Reimer described his grandmother in a poem he read at the launch of *gray matter graffiti*, a book of recently-published poetry.

This poem on Maria Friesen Reimer, who lived all her life in Steinbach until her death a few years ago, forms the core of the section entitled *Family Affairs and Other Folk*. This is the section Reimer chose to begin his reading at the book launch and signing at Mennonite Heritage Village earlier this month.

The audience of 25 listened enthralled as Reimer sat on a stool and serenely read other tributes—to his mother, his wife and their children, and to friends—giving bits of information about the settings of the particular poems.

One could only speculate that family means a great deal to this 59-year old man who has lived in British Columbia for the last three or four decades.

But then, as he picks up on other themes—urban life, country back roads, birds and “other critters,” love and faith, it is evident he cares deeply about all aspects of life, and is an astute observer of all that goes on around him.

Editor of *gray matter graffiti*, Robert Peters, describes Reimer as “an intimately private person, all the while driven by a paradoxically unrequited urge for broader self-expression which drives the penning of enthusiastic observations.”

Thus he notices the “morning glories that run in packs” beside city sidewalks, the lilacs clutched in the hand of an unkempt man “like a treasure” and the bald eagle which forms a “black and white spiral” in the sky.

He deeply feels love (as in *Fair Weather Evenings*), pain (as in *Knock Knock Knockin'* written on the death of his cousin) and respect (in tributes to Mother Teresa and Corrie ten Boom). A thread of merriment runs through some of the poems, bringing relief to what would otherwise be a tragic ending. At times, an entire poem is nonsensical, written, it seems, on a whim when the poet feels especially upbeat.

Peters notes Reimer's poems are mostly rooted in a sense of place. While the reader doesn't always know what “place” has evoked the images word images on the page, it isn't necessary in order to understand the image itself.

Reimer spent his early years in



DORIS PENNER-THE CARILLON

Sam Reimer signs copies of his recently published book of poetry *gray matter graffiti*.

Steinbach raised on “the Bible, hymns, porridge, *Borscht*, home-baked bread and prayer,” as he puts it, then moved to Meade, Kansas in 1964 with his parents, John and Leona Reimer who pastored a church.

Sam Reimer hastily retreated to Canada when the Vietnam draft was declared, and spent a few years in Winnipeg before settling in British Columbia, first in the rural part of the province, and then in Vancouver.

Over the years, Reimer has written thousands of poems, a “prodigious assemblage,” as Peters calls it. As the title of the book (*gray matter graffiti*) suggests, the poems have “percolated” in Reimer's brain long enough. Two hundred or so of the vast collection have been culled to form the book of poems which range from

the “profane to the sacred, and en masse err on the side of oddness.”

“This is a fairly large collection for a first book of poetry,” Reimer suggested to the audience at the launch. He noted he often starts to write an idea as a story, then stops and thinks, “I can do this better as a poem.”

“After I have completed a poem, I frequently think ‘that's the poem I wanted to read but couldn't find anywhere,’” Reimer said, noting this is similar to what C.S. Lewis said after he finished the *Narnia* books.

Gray matter graffiti is available at Mennonite Heritage Village's bookstore in the Village Centre.

Practice is the best of all instructors.