

CITYSIDE

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The tribulations and pleasures of reading verse

Poetic license as UC Berkeley series begins

By William Brand
STAFF WRITER

BERKELEY — Ken Goldberg, a scientist who is an expert in robotics, worried all summer about what to read. Adon Tejada, a police officer, worried all summer about what to read and what to wear.

Both the scientist and the patrolman conquered their fears and shared their favorite poetry Thursday in the opening session of UC Berkeley's fourth annual lunchtime poetry series. The reading — held every few weeks — brings major national and international poets to campus.

But organizers invited UC Berkeley professors and staffers to the series opener. Readers Thursday included Alex Pines, professor of chemistry, who read Yeats; Lisa Alvarez-Cohen, a professor of environmental engineering, who read a passage from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner"; and Southeast Asian Studies professor Hamda Chopra, who read a selection in Pakistani.

Billy Curtis, who heads campus lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender services, read a piece called "Start the BBQ," by Rory Buchanan. The

premise was that if one is gay, one be consigned to hell and fry forever. If so, Buchanan wrote, "start the barbecue."

Organizers thrive on the unusual, so a robotics expert and one of Berkeley's top criminal investigators, qualified nicely.

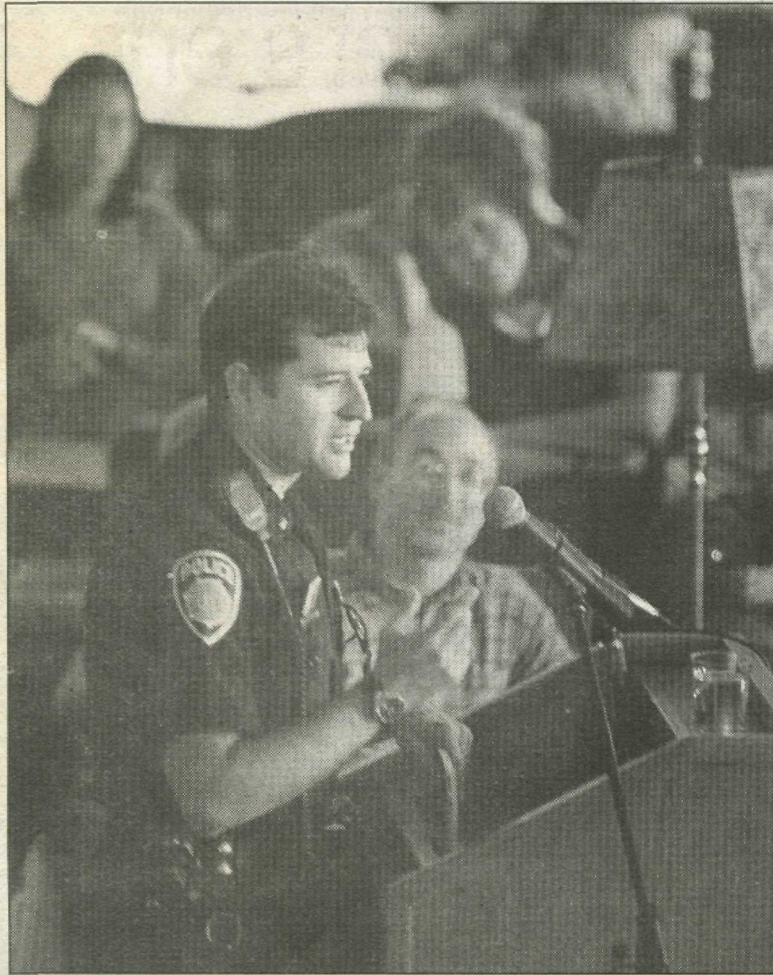
Goldberg — who specializes in robotic creations that can be directed through the Internet — faced the audience of more than 150 crammed into the ornate Morrison Library in Doe Library and confessed he had stage fright.

He noted that to be a scientist is to be a skeptic, to scoff and dig at everything. "Your gut may say, 'false.' But if

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ARLEEN NG —Staff

University Police lieutenant Adan Tejada reads from an anthology of Pelican Bay prisoners for the lunchtime poetry reading at Morrison Library at UC Berkeley Thursday afternoon.

Poems: Popular readings help to promote freedom

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the math says 'true' you need to follow that," Goldberg said.

"We scientists are taught never to gush," he said. "But now, approaching 40, and falling more and more in love with my wife, I thought I'd read this."

He read a poem by modern American poet James Galvin that begins, "In all the airports, in all the propane dawns, in time past, in time lost, in time yet to be... weren't we something."

Tejada, who chose to wear his patrol officer's uniform, read three poems written by inmates of the most secure area of Pelican Bay, the vast, ugly institution in far Northern California

that houses the most violent prisoners.

"Freedom is a state of mind," one prisoner wrote. "We are all readily spending time. It depends on how we look at it."

Zack Rogow, an organizer, said the program gets only a few turndowns and readings are popular. "It provides a proper break in the day and poetry allows you freedom," he said.

Readings coming up include Oakland poet Ismael Reed on Oct. 4. On Dec. 6, Pulitzer Prize-winner Gary Snyder, who has made his life in the Sierra, will read in Zellerbach Playhouse. For information, call 642-0137. Poems are posted on the Web at www.berkeley.edu/calendar/events/poems