



Mental health, grief and family ties The Dr Ross Ingram Memorial Essay Competition 2006

The 2006 Dr Ross Ingram Memorial Essay Prize has been won by Dennis McDermott for his essay *Unknown family at the taxi stand*, published on page 519 of this issue.

Dennis is a Koori psychologist and conjoint senior lecturer in Indigenous health at the University of New South Wales. He is also a published poet, including a collection entitled *Dorothy's skin*, published in 2003.

Unknown family at the taxi stand uses stories from the author's own family to flesh out some of the complexities of mental ill-health in Indigenous Australians. Dennis wrote and submitted the essay in the belief that

... narrative can carry a complexity that epidemiology lays out as so many bones. Coolly useful as data are, when statistics have real human faces there's a chance that a lost emotional resonance might return. For Gubbas (non-Indigenous Australians) to come to grips with what's happening in Indigenous health in this country doesn't require a bleeding heart. It does require new means to "de-Other" Indigenous Australians — to

situate us, and our experiences, inside the national consciousness. Blackfella health won't change until we are no longer the exotics of our own land.

The Dr Ross Ingram Memorial Essay Prize is awarded for the best essay by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person on Indigenous health. It carries a prize of \$5000 (donated by the Australasian Medical Publishing Company). For details on how to enter next year, see our website (www.mja.com.au).

Thanks to our external panel of judges and to Dennis, as well as our runner-up Marshall Watson (whose essay *A journey of Indigenous identity* will be published in the MJA later this year) and all the other entrants who shared their stories of sorrow, discovery, joy and hope with us.

The universe is made of stories, not atoms. (Muriel Rukeyser)

Ruth M Armstrong, Deputy Editor
The Medical Journal of Australia.