

EDITED TRANSCRIPTS 2012 -13

The Hospital met with the artists individually these are excerpts collated into the following groupings:

Collections & hoardings

how much is too much - a parent's prerogative - The Hospital reminisces over the smell of cream of tomato soup

Clearouts

a 70's white jumpsuit – paranoia concerning bin men - really super anal catalogues vs. piles of ephemera

Decades and journals

Da Vinci takes his time – painting mutations – work that almost never works

Private & public dialogue

the bucket or the National Gallery - a tearful visitor in search of some real painting – accountants can f*** off and die – solitude and exchange

As the bedside manner of *The Hospital* was informal, we have used the artists' first names. THFDA collectively refers to questions and responses from Iain Sturrock & Delia Baillie

COLLECTIONS & HOARDINGS

Amy: I do hoard things although I'm not as bad as I used to be. When I opened up those portfolios, and even though I had decided not to resurrect anything from the past, I did not throw one thing away. I put them all right back - there must be a timeframe after which it's ok to start throwing things out. For ages I still had my portfolio from high school, it was full of bad self-portraits etc. etc. and I maybe kept it for so long due to sentimental reasons. Eventually I did chuck it out but then I still had all of my portfolio from college. So there's a timeline to keeping work. Now I have just a few things lurking from Duncan of Jordanstone but not much, it's mostly from 2007 and onwards.

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Amy: (talking about an obsessive hoarder)...it was crazy, you could not move in his house - it was like a cave. Totally obsessive, he had filled his whole life space with memorabilia.

THFDA: Collecting or hoarding - it's an investment isn't it? A psychic investment or a mental health investment/over investment. You can look online for an angora sweater from the 1950s and get it for 50 bucks but if Marilyn Monroe wore that sweater for half an hour then it's 300 bucks. There have been studies looking at how children invest in a teddy bear and there's a certain age at which you understand that it's just a teddy bear but that it is also something else. And there are theories that adult obsessiveness and collecting, that impetus for over-investment is a hangover from being children...the thing isn't just a thing it's simultaneously something else.

Amy: Actually I still have a collection from my childhood but...

THFDA: You don't want to tell us what it is?!

Amy: It's really weird. I'll tell you but I don't want to...

THFDA: Come on we can turn the mic off...

Amy: Well, when I was wee I really liked...

(recorder turned off)

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Andrew: (talking about paintings his family had kept) A whole load of my work just got kept - it was put in the attic, there was

no decision about it although quite interestingly sometimes things did end up on the wall. But horrendous things, know what I mean?

After his death, I was going through my Dads bedside cabinet and there was a bizarre collection of stuff: an array of pills, learn to speak French books, millions of watches *and* a painting of a haggis from my foundation course. I had a phase where I painted what I ate, so before I cooked it I'd make a wee painting of it. So there it is - this haggis sitting on a plate in with some clippings about me but also with a backscratcher from Spain. So I was grouped in with this weird collection.... I always thought that my Dad keeping a hold of this work was kind of arbitrary, you know it wasn't like he was attached to it as such.

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Ellie: I've got a close-up painting of a kebab. It's massive; it's off the stretcher and rolled up and under one of the beds in my parents' house. I did that in my foundation - god knows what I'm going to do with it.

THFDA: I think I discarded a lot of college work when I had to have a clear-out. Although I couldn't throw out the really bad drawings from secondary school that I did of birds to design a stained glass window panel. I just couldn't do it. I suppose that's just sentimental isn't it. So it's like a song or the smell of cream of tomato soup - a Proustian thing - it's not the art, it's what it represents.

Ellie: And I guess because you didn't have the skills that you have now, or that you acquired later, it's almost like a different person. You don't look at it with the same critical eye.

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Ellie: When I was a child I used to collect...everything. I had pencil collections, postcard collections, a collection of Beans and Dandys - the little ones. I used to have collections of mugs, rubbers...I just had all of these collections and then at some point I think I decided what have I got all of this crap for? And just got rid of it all. But then I realised that you could collect information digitally.

THFDA: So that's what you are collecting now, it just doesn't take up any space.

CLEAROUTS

Amy: I had a suitcase full of clothes from charity shops and ebay. I would have a pile of clothes that I intended to alter or use in some way but I never would. So they became this suitcase of clothes that followed me about and we've moved quite a lot as well so you're actually physically humphing this stuff around and then I kept seeing it on top of the wardrobe and it was actually my partner that got really annoyed about it, *What are you doing with that suitcase?*

But it was a similar scenario with the portfolios; I'd think I don't want that in my life, I don't need that. But as soon as I got the suitcase down and opened it up and saw the things inside and then I'd start trying it all on and *look, a 1970s white jump suit!* When am I going to wear that? I'm not going to wear that! But I'd try it on and think I'll wear it to a fancy dress party or I'll wear it for a performance. I might need this for

some....reason...that never arises so then I just pack it all back into the suitcase. And that's what I did with the portfolios.

I will have to make decisions about chucking stuff out soon if we move but at the moment it's easy and the more space you have you don't need to make these decisions. You just shove it back in - have a laugh at the stuff that falls out and then shove it back in. Or maybe I want to burn it all or shred it - I wouldn't want to put it in the bin just in case it blows out or something and the bin man finds it!

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Anna: I normally get rid of things or reuse them. I don't really have any finished works in the studio anymore - I try to give them to other people. I prefer that if somebody likes a work for

them to have it rather than for me to hold on to it in a damp studio. So these are pretty much the only things that I've got.

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Anna: After my degree show my big boots piece was one of the first things that I chucked out. And then a couple of months later I got an email from somebody in London and they wanted to show that piece and I thought, *Fuck I've chucked it out!* So then I had to try and find everything again and rebuy them and it ended up costing me more than just that original pair of boots that I found in a charity shop.

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Emma: I do have a few drawings that I've kept a hold of but nothing that's of this scale; they are all smaller detailed things.

THFDA: And when you say that you regularly clear out your work - you're obviously getting rid of things that you like as well?

Emma: Because a lot of the work that I make is ephemeral, I have to. And so I'm used to that and if it's not going to last that long then I know that eventually it has got to go. Drawings will sometimes hang about but I feel it holds me back if I've got them. I do keep hold of buttons and things that I've had for years. I'm really bad for hoarding stuff; just not the artwork. I don't know if I'd like to be in a studio with all my old stuff around me.

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THFDA: Do you ever rent a space or a workshop for a temporary period?

Emma: I did a few times when I was at the Scottish Sculpture Workshop to do bronze casting but other than that I just do it in the studio space I've got. It's not ideal if I want to do something bigger. But because I don't really plan what I'm doing - I will start something small and then it just grows from there. Then it goes in the bin again. I've worked with polyurethane and it doesn't break down so even if I chuck the object out it is probably going to be lying around somewhere. Even if I smash it up with a hammer it's still going to be there.

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Ellie: Another project that I've been meaning to do all year is to go through flyers and private view cards and press releases and press cuttings - the archive of stuff that I've got in my flat. I just

started piling it in the corner of a room with the intention of sorting it out soon, but it's just getting bigger. It started in quite an ordered little box but since I've had it in my head that I am going to sort it out I've just been piling it on, but that's been a year and a half now. I'm going to do it really thoroughly and I just need to know how many copies, of say a program from an exhibition, that I should keep in the archive.

I'm going to do an inventory for the archive as well. I've got an open source archiving program that allows you to catalogue everything...so it's going to be really super anal. I'll be able to type in a year, say 2005, and I'll have a list of every single bit of ephemera that I have. I think it's important to look after all that hard-copy ephemera because it's not going to exist for that much longer.

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THFDA: How long do you want to hold onto the chairs piece?

Ellie: The massage chairs? I guess I feel a bit sad that they're not going to be shown again and that's why I'm holding on to them because people enjoyed it.

THFDA: Could there be another opportunity to show them? Where did you exhibit it the first time?

Ellie: I showed it in Brentford in London, then at the Edinburgh Arts Festival and subsequently in Newcastle - so I've shown it three times. So those chairs have been around the block and now they're back in my studio. But they've now been stacked up in my studio for the whole of 2013.

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Ellie: This year when I was sorting through my studio I was also sorting out at home; I just had this fantasy of being able to take account of every single object. I don't mean an inventory but just to make sure that you valued everything that you had and were aware of everything that you had; at home and in the studio, so that it wasn't a massive excess...but I haven't quite got there yet. That's the dream!

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Ellie: I would like to gather together all of the artworks that are at my parents house. Everything. And go through it all and just pick key things that I'd like to keep and get rid of everything else. Because I think you appreciate things more if you have less. If you have less left - just a few choice items. There's a portrait, it's my first....

DECADES AND JOURNALS

Oliver: (discussing the book *Leonardo* by Sigmund Freud) It seems in this book that there's this weird latent homosexuality that's in Leonardo Da Vinci - manifest through this kind of relationship to objects; the fact that he doesn't finish things or that things take a long time. It's really interesting because Freud is writing from this super humanist perspective, and he is seeing Leonardo as an icon of humanism, so of course there's this discrepancy between the humanist mind-set of going forward and always completing things and getting things done. So I guess it's contradictory that this man, who seems like he is part of that movement but in fact has a very relaxed attitude towards working, or an intimate attitude towards objects - so it's not just about finishing them and getting them out there...really

spending time and actually maybe leaving things for a super long time and I love this vibe of Leonardo's - being commissioned to do something but then taking ten years to get everything right.

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Oliver: But I think there has been a really interesting shift in funding in the last year. All of these new Creative Scotland bursaries, I think they are realising that artists aren't just factories that keep on...So I made two pieces of work this year but I think the two pieces that I made were really great.

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Sara: When I was at college I did so many different things, seeing it as a chance to try this, try that and I just moved on all the time. Splashing paint around one week and then the next doing something else entirely. I used it the way I wanted to use it - very much as a discovery of what I enjoyed doing or what I could make work. So that for me was a good use of my time at an art college. I didn't come out with a body of work and a gallery to show my work...It just looked all over the place.

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Amy: It's that thing of how you make stuff and then quite quickly you go off the idea, or your ideas move on to something else quite quickly and that does become quite embarrassing. I've done that before in an exhibition situation, having to leave the work in the gallery for a month with my name on it...sometimes stuff just fails or it just doesn't work.

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Anna: I think my work has changed or I have changed - I'm not sure. My work used to be a lot more humorous and I think that that is what I really liked about it. I have maybe lost that sense of humour in my work and I think I'm kind of sad about that. And I think now I can see that it's not about the drawing either. It's not about how well it's drawn, whereas I think a lot of my new work is about the structure of something and the depth and playing with the perspective. So it has to be well drawn to a certain degree, in as much as I can actually draw! But I don't think my earlier work was as concerned about these things.

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Del: (referring to small-scale works in his studio) I keep quite a lot of stuff because I do a lot of playing and I really like working on this scale as a way of keeping it fluid. And then they'll hang around for a bit and I'll think there's maybe something in that piece, maybe I can scale that up to a larger work. These are just small doodles in a way but I often see their potential as larger works. Keeping things allows me the possibility of regrouping, seeing how they work together in different ways.

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Sara: Why do I still have this drawing? There is something that intrigues me, something that I like about it - the lightness. I suppose keeping it reminds me of the marks on it. I would just

forget, I would seriously forget what I'd done. I'm not very good at keeping a tidy filing system of photographs either. But the importance of actually seeing the work and seeing the size of it rather than an image of it that is backlit on a computer - the materiality of it is different.

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Andrew: (on retaining work) It sums up something really important for me because I've learned to keep things for long enough until I come round to them again. But I think the biggest thing that I do is that I try to make a painting and it almost never works, it's just a complete failure and it does go in the bin (or it gets painted over). And then years later I find a way to do it - some method or some way, I can now do it. I can now paint that painting. It's fertilized with something else, like another image or something has come in and I couldn't do it the first time round.

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Andrew: (on creative block) I was scratching my head for a few days and then I went through some old sketchbooks, I saw things from ten years ago and I thought that's a really good ideal! It's sort of like ripping yourself off. Because you know you had a sense of belonging but complete detachment from it as well, you could see what to do.

THFDA: Yes, because the heat and obsession had gone.

Andrew: Yes - or the wrong sort of urgency to do it had gone. You could see how to make it because things had happened in-between.

THFDA: You were saying that paintings almost always don't work the first time you try them. Does it ever get to the stage where you know it's not going to work when you start painting?

Andrew: I think I've a belief that I could do it better and for some reason I need to get rid of the thing in order to resolve it...

Andrew: I tend to work in versions of things so the failure rate, or the failure element is different because I have almost mutations of things... I've done a couple of paintings twice but then they didn't turn out the same. I thought *god what are you doing* but then it mutated into something that was more interesting.

PRIVATE & PUBLIC DIALOGUE

Andrew: There's a really nice bit of Francis Bacon talking to David Sylvester saying something like you try and get this thing working and it gets to the point where you might as well just do anything. And you know at that point of *fuck it just do anything*, something starts happening. So it's almost the point of collapse, the thing is almost in the bin. The first time I remember that really happening to me was during a painting I'd been working on for about two months - there was this soldier going through a swamp with a camouflage jacket, a big painting. It was terrible to me and I used to like thick surfaces so I thought that by painting over the thing I could make use of it. I covered it in this black/brown paint, just to get rid of it, and went away for an hour and when I came back the paint had run all down around the figure, it was perfect. That's all it needed - this drastic.... I remember getting a rag and just taking a little bit

more of the paint off and that was it! At that point I thought - that's the best painting I've ever done. It really was like that Francis Bacon thing where he talks about something like it's either the National Gallery or the bin. Those extremes where in fact the works that you are most attached to are the ones you've somehow considered killing.

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Ellen: I know I went off and started making other stuff - I wasn't making art I was just making in a craft sense. Although I was using many of the same aesthetic judgements and trying to produce items to a high standard when I was making for Etsy under my Night Owl label. I was really considering the packaging, considering how it was presented on a table.

I was making stuff that had a purpose and I found the difference refreshing. So many more folk saw, and got to own, things that I had actually made. It's not that I think about going out and getting customers as an artist but I know that there are more people walking about now that have got something that I've made than will ever own one of my artworks. That's absolutely guaranteed! Not that that is what I envisioned as being important but it was quite good to have had that experience - you make this for a purpose, it's purpose is to be worn as a brooch, it's purpose is to be worn as a pair of earrings, it's purpose is to stop your hair getting wet when you're in the shower. It doesn't come with the baggage of an explanation or the turmoil of, you know....it's a product and it's meant to function and that's it.

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Ellen: Maybe none of us have either a vision of what we're doing or are letting it go where it may. It could be that it's just a perception of what it is you are doing - I want to believe I'm in control of what the work is going to look like at the end so I imagine that I know. But the reason that I can't draw it in my sketchbook is because I don't actually know. I just have some idea. Whereas somebody who allows the work to be shaped more by the process perhaps does know.

THFDA: There's something here - one of the problems in medicine concerns the study of pain because although the researchers can say there's a scale of one to ten what does that actually mean, someone's saying 3 while someone else is saying seven. So three artists sitting at a table could say actually I feel my practice is too controlling and we're all at an individual level talking about too much control or the three of us could say it's all too intuitive but again this is like the pain scale - how does that actually translate, you can't quantify this.

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Ellen: And actually as artists we don't know what one another does!

THFDA: That's it - it would be really odd if I invited you into my studio and said *look just sit at the back and watch me*. For me not to be self-conscious and for you not to be equally self-conscious would be just too weird. So nobody knows what we're doing at the best of times and in spite of the fact that what we do is visual, visually we are inert. It's just dead, visually dead watching an artist make something. So talking is a vital way in which artists can convey to one another what the biz is like from the inside out. I think part of this project is about being brave enough to just actually talk about, well, problems. How did you surmount them? And again this wouldn't come across visually so you've just got to talk it out.

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Anna: I think I find it difficult, not being in amongst others with the opportunity of learning... through exchange. By myself in my studio I'm not getting that. Sometimes I'll maybe talk to my family or use their experience for feedback, we might talk about a certain painting but when you're not surrounded by that it can be really difficult.

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THFDA: It's a solitary thing to be doing though, going and locking yourself away.

Del: I quite like that though, that's one of the things that I really like and I miss in a way because you come in here day after day but there are always people around and machinery and I do like the solitary nature of an individual practice. Where I lived in Ireland was in the middle of nowhere and my nearest neighbour was half a mile away at least.

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Del: That's when things are working to the optimum - when my public practice starts to feed through to my private practice.

Working on a public commission: it is a very different practice in a way. There are so many practical things that come in to it that affect it and you have to work with and then obviously there's the community engagement so it's a very different to a private practice.

It's the community engagement in these projects that really interests me because it is a really important aspect of public art - that advocacy side of the process can only be beneficial in bringing up peoples' understandings of what art is and what public art can be. Rather than going for the obvious thing - a statue looking off in the distance or leaping dolphins or whatever. So it can only help, I think, to build people's understanding and openness towards the possibilities of public art. So I think that's one of the things that I really enjoy about working in that context, working in that way. And, you know you have to win over a lot of people when you commit to a public commission.

I think that often commissioning bodies want you to approach research by going to the library and digging out old things ... which is really useful but so can just being in the community and imbibing a feel - just walking about and getting a sense for the spaces that are there and thinking well what could work here and what couldn't work here and just slowly starting to follow those little lines as well as the other stuff.

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Oliver: (on community based projects) I think the problem was that everybody thought that because I was getting paid for something I would just drop any kind of criticality and just get the thing done and that was very much the attitude.

THFDA: Like a hired gun?

Oliver: Yeh kind of. In the final lead up to them firing me when I was having meetings the real feeling was like, *look we've only got two weeks to do this we just need to come to a conclusion...*and I was like well we can't just come to a conclusion!

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Sara: (on the experience of Graduate shows) It is exciting and also scary. For every other university course your going to sit a final exam and you're just going to get a mark, and it's all very private, but for art college students it's just, *There you go public!* I remember at my MFA show someone trotted through the door and said *Where's the paintings?* and I said, *Well you're kind of in it, this is the MFA so it is a bit various but painting's upstairs* and she just about burst into tears. *But where's the painting, the real painting?* and I said *We kind of do different things now.*

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Sara: My practice is all over the place... I did 3 things one year and 10 the next. This is what I am as an artist - as somebody who's had kids, had another profession and this is how it fits into my life and so why should I try and fit it into anyone else's? I would like to have done it for longer and be much more practiced but actually what works is when I use my own voice.

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Sara: (referring to The Suburban Pavilion – an 18m² shed in her back garden used variously as a studio, gallery & teaching space) The space lends itself to these odd themed nights that we host - we make films from them. People do their thing and we edit something together that was done only once. So I would not give that up to have the shed to myself. I can't help myself; I have to be sociable. I want to see what comes from getting people together when you have no expectation of what's going to happen. I love that kind of working as well as my solitary practice of drawing.

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Del: I think a lot of exhibition and artistic practice has changed - exhibitions aren't as risk-taking as they could be or used to be. I think everyone is too busy trying to impress now. They're trying to showcase what they can do rather than explore interesting things. It's not because people are trying to make money out of it, which you can completely understand, but it just has a really profound effect on what is done in those spaces. Rather than really playing with things and testing things out and having an exhibition space exist as a forum for ideas where things can go wrong. I think the expectation for artists now is that every show has to work otherwise no one will take you seriously. I think part of me really wants to reclaim the exhibition space as a space to make mistakes.

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Oliver: I was doing this really naughty thing, taking conversations that I'd had with people that were really personal and just putting them out there. And also it's a bit facile but because I felt so bad about the fact that I'd done that, and particularly with this one person, over the last year and a half I was really like *Oh I have to change my life a lot* and the thing that I chose to blame, other than myself, was this idea of having to interpret the work for other people or making sure that other people knew what was happening. Because actually, if I'd been making the work about this guy or whoever, but had made it in a very abstract way, then it probably would have been fine.

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Oliver: I think when I was at school I was making quite esoteric things and I sort of didn't give a shit about who understood it.

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Emma: I was super disappointed with aspects of the exhibition at The Steeple in Newburgh but I thought maybe I'll define it as 'work in progress' but maybe that would have been a bit lame.

THFDA: But then stand up comedians do that don't they? You know, trying out material.

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Amy: I once had to build something in the gallery space - I couldn't try it beforehand - so I wasn't making something and taking it in. I had to accept that if it turned out to be a failure then that was just part of the process. And then it was! I just had to leave the next day - it wasn't shockingly bad but I knew that it hadn't really worked. But fuck it that's what happens if you're going to take a risk.

THFDA: You've gone in with that foreknowledge of risk, and this is something that we're unearthing through The Hospital, the kind of weird privacy - the quality control. You are bringing what's at the back of the shop: all the performance, art and books and music and your Degree and your Masters; that personal and professional background that informs all of our works. But when it comes down to it, to release a work to the public, you don't have a box-ticking questionnaire that you can go through tick-by-tick, cross-by-cross. So it's a strangely private thing and this gets to what constitutes good work in someone's consciousness. Your feelings about that work are utterly personal to you because you'd have had a sense of what it could have been and maybe a sense of car crash afterwards of what it wasn't but you know, the other 5.9 billion people on the planet don't have your sense of that.

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Sara: ...I often have people asking me what I do. And when I tell them what I do they say *Do you know so-and-so*, who'll be a landscape painter from up north. So I say *No, sorry I don't know* and then I'm asked *Oh, which artists do you like? I'll bet you like Tracey Emin*. And then they tell you all about Tracey Emin and how awful she is. And then I'll say *and what do you do?* and they'll say *Oh I'm an accountant*, and I'll think, would I do that to you? Would I really rip your profession apart and say – *well, what kind of accountancy do you do?* And then, Don't you think you should be doing tax accounting instead of governmental accounting...Have you heard of my friend such-and-such, she's an accountant as well? She's really high flying - she did my books really well...!