



Something Out of Nothing

Elaine Wick Poplin

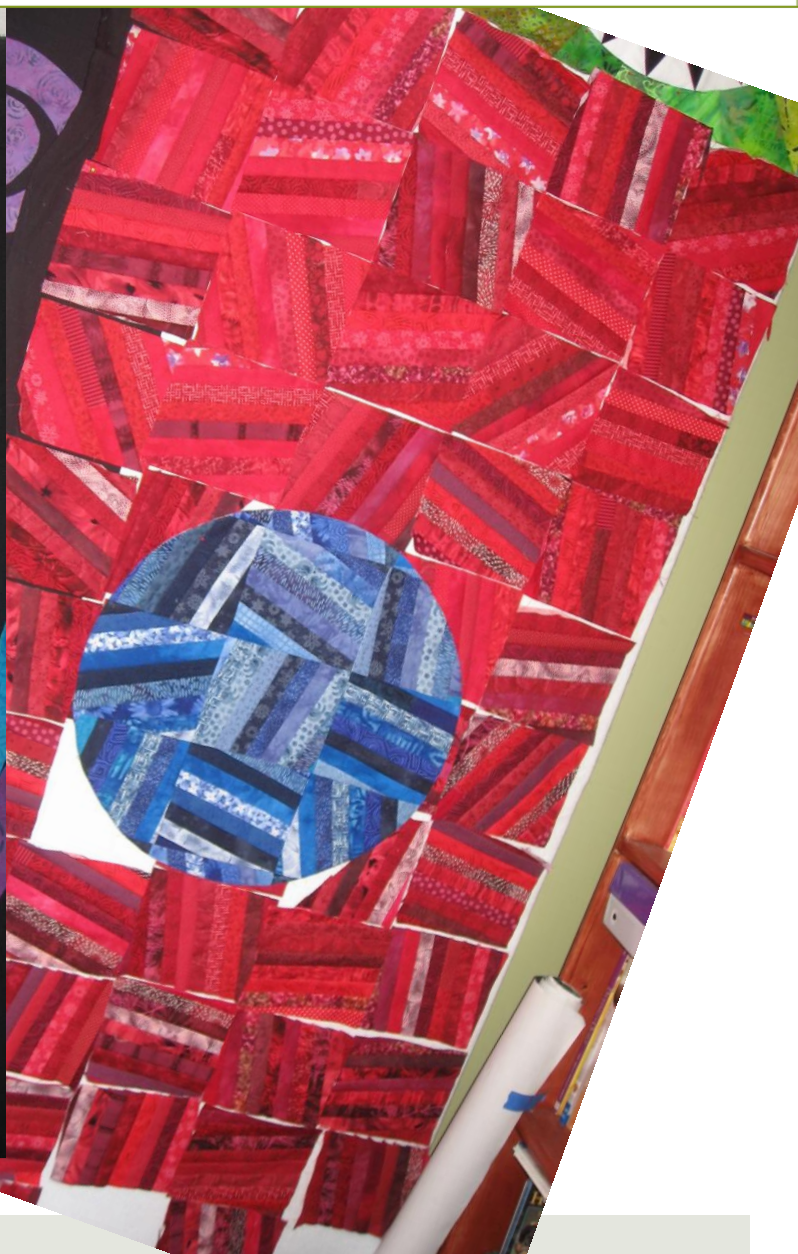
November 21, 2013



Concept
by Louisa
Smith



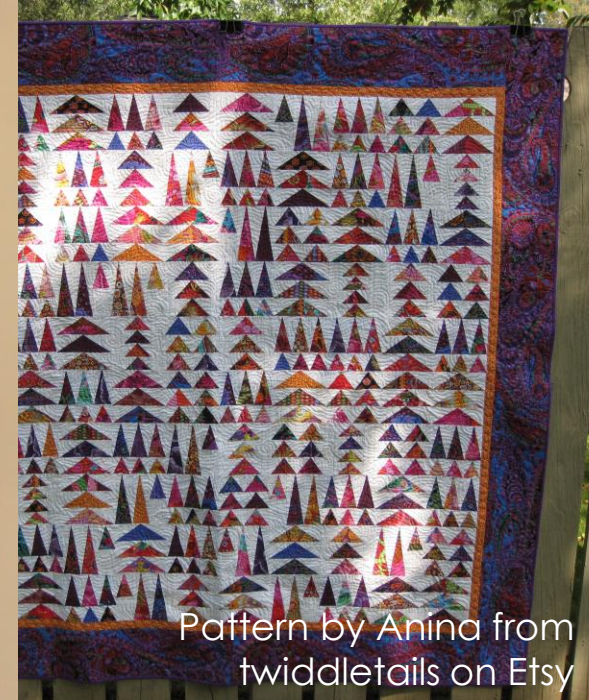
This one....



...led to this one...



Pattern by Linda Ballard



Pattern by Anina from
twiddletails on Etsy

These three quilts generated the scraps for these pillows and mug rugs:





Pattern: "9-Patchtastic" on
Moda Bakeshop



These all came from a single fat quarter pack of fabrics from Moda (plus some yardage of a white-on-white print. I also made a diaper bag and used up every last usable piece.





I love to make pillow covers with leftovers – they're quick, I can try new techniques without committing to a huge project, and they're great gifts.

They're also great keepsakes for ME when I give a quilt away. If I make a pillow cover with the leftovers I feel like I've kept a piece of the quilt.

This piece
is the one
in my quilt
repertoire
that has
generated
the most
offspring.

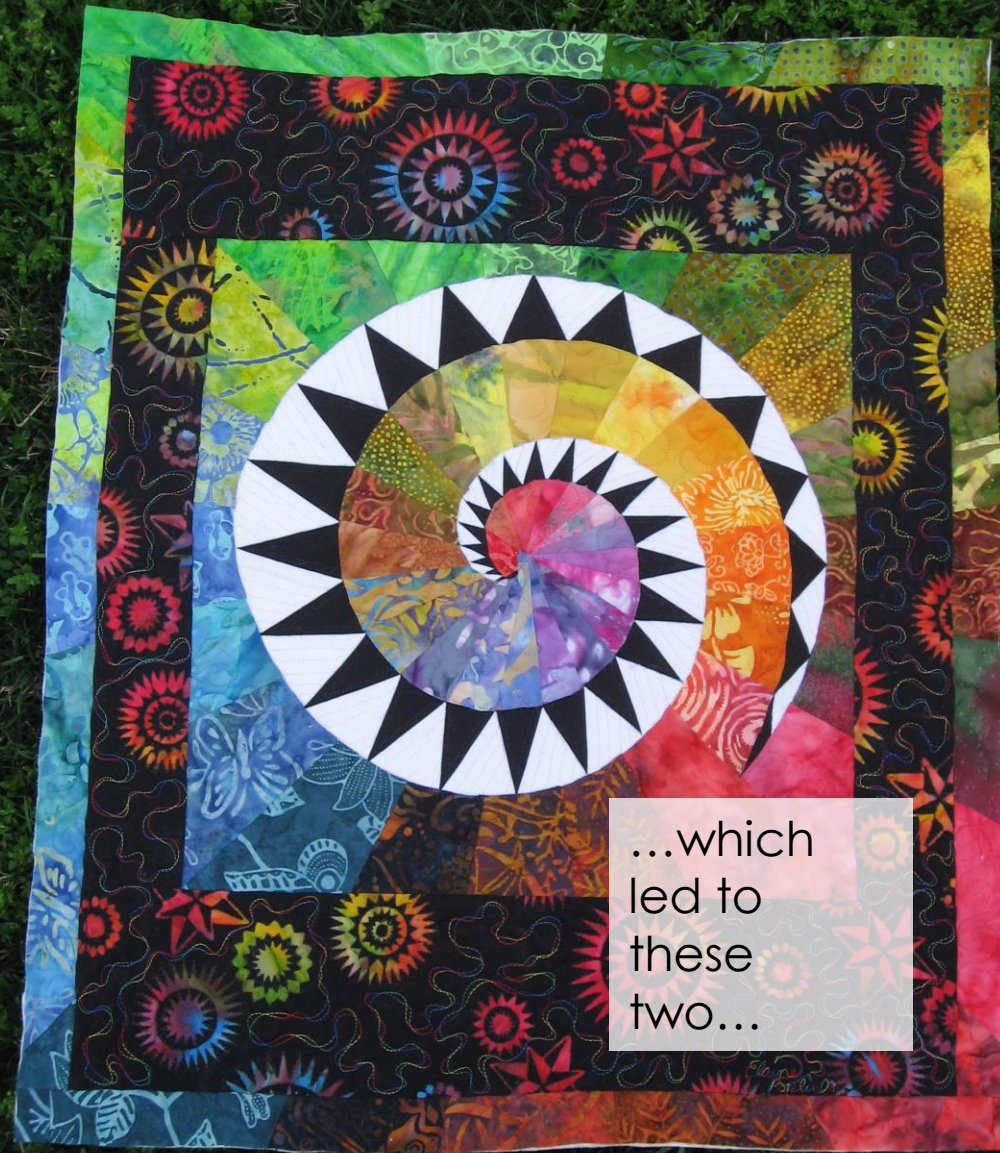
Photo by
Jeff White

Pattern by
Karen K.
Stone





To complete it, I needed lots of fat quarters of really loud fabrics.



Pattern by Barbara Olsen



Pattern by Susan
Purney-Mark

...and this one...



...and
this
one...

and
this
one...





Pattern: Bento Box

...and
this one...



...and
this one...

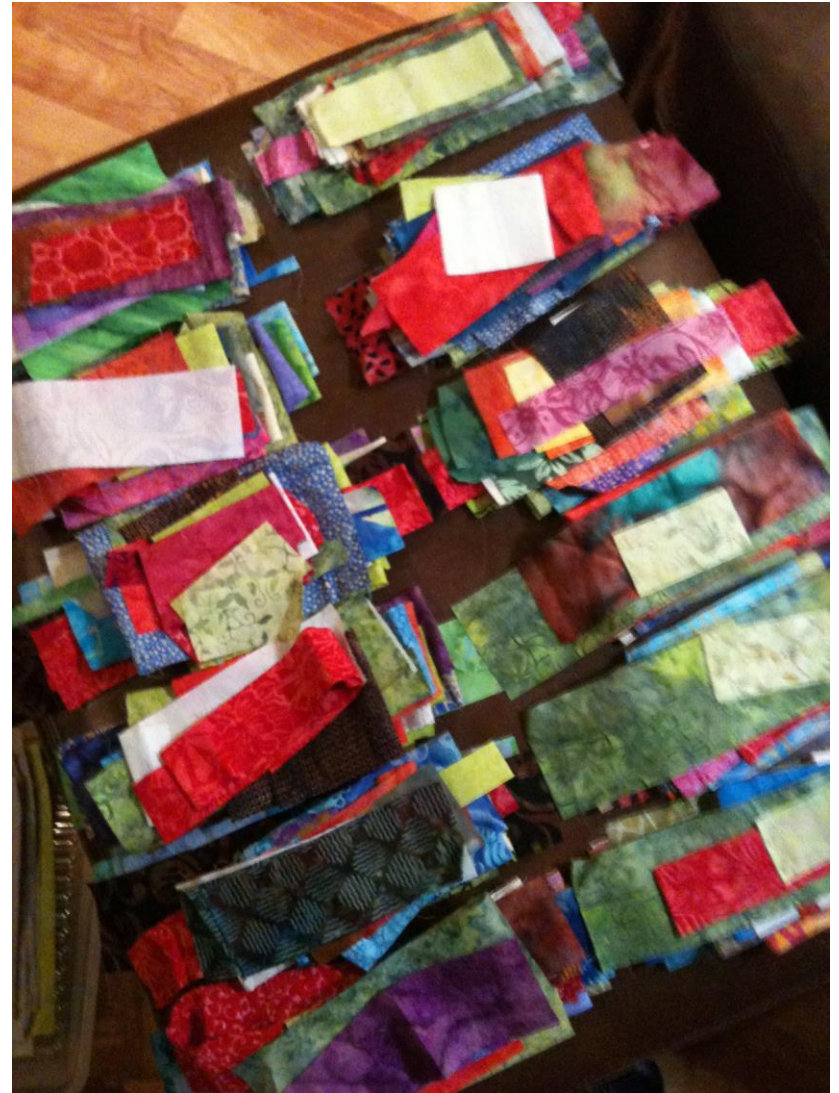


...and this one.

In 2010, to get all of these:



I had sent out packs of these:



And I still had tons left over, just of batiks. These fabric scraps were in a box under my sewing table.



March 18, 2012





Many thanks to Susan Bonwit, Lisa Marshall, Meg Zimmerman, Beverly Penaranda, Susan Nolen, Nancy Morris, Peggy Bridgeman, and the many other quilters who rushed to reach out to us. We were overwhelmed. People washed fabric, brought us food, helped us move... everything.



Three
Weeks
Later...



It took over a month to go through the 52 boxes of mixed laundry.



And the socks.
I'm pretty sure that "sock matching" is part of the seventh circle of Hell.





The quilts that had been in the gallery came back, tattered shadows of what they had been before.



This quilt made by my mother Diane Wick, fell apart when I touched it. It had been less than five feet from the fire.




Fabric colors and textures changed, plastic buttons melted off, and the oil paints and foil transfer details were all very damaged in this little experimental piece that had been made entirely out of scraps.



Without a binding to protect the edges of this faced quilt, the heat and smoke caused it to shred and the batting underneath to disintegrate.





This one broke my heart. It was my response to 9/11, and I wasn't finished talking to it. It was the first quilt where I had used a contrasting thread color for my free-motion quilting. The restorers said that it crumbled when they cleaned it.




I kept the flag label, though I'm not totally sure where it is.

I took photos of the other labels, and then threw all of the quilts in the trash.

My husband dug the Freedom quilt out of the garbage can when I wasn't looking because it was his favorite.

He still has it.



A close-up photograph of a large pile of colorful fabric scraps, likely batik, scattered on a light-colored surface. The scraps feature various patterns including polka dots, stripes, and abstract designs in vibrant colors like orange, green, pink, and blue. A semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.

So three weeks after the fire, I went to a retreat at the Red Rooster. My quilting friends hadn't brought back my fabric stash yet, so all I had was four gallon-sized Ziploc bags of the batik scraps and two non-consecutive yards of Kona white fabrics that I had found in all of those boxes from the restoration company.



I decided to make a string quilt. So I found a tutorial online and just started sewing. If a piece wasn't large enough, I sewed it to another one to make it large enough.



It was difficult for me to talk very much that weekend, so I just sewed.




By Saturday night I had made an entire quilt top, and I felt like I had truly made something out of nothing. I made the blocks the largest that I could with the materials that I had, and stopped when I ran out of white for the foundations. When I measured the finished top, it was the exact same size as the Freedom quilt, down to the half inch. I will hang it in the same spot.



At home, our house had been gutted and primed to get rid of the smoke smell before they started rebuilding.



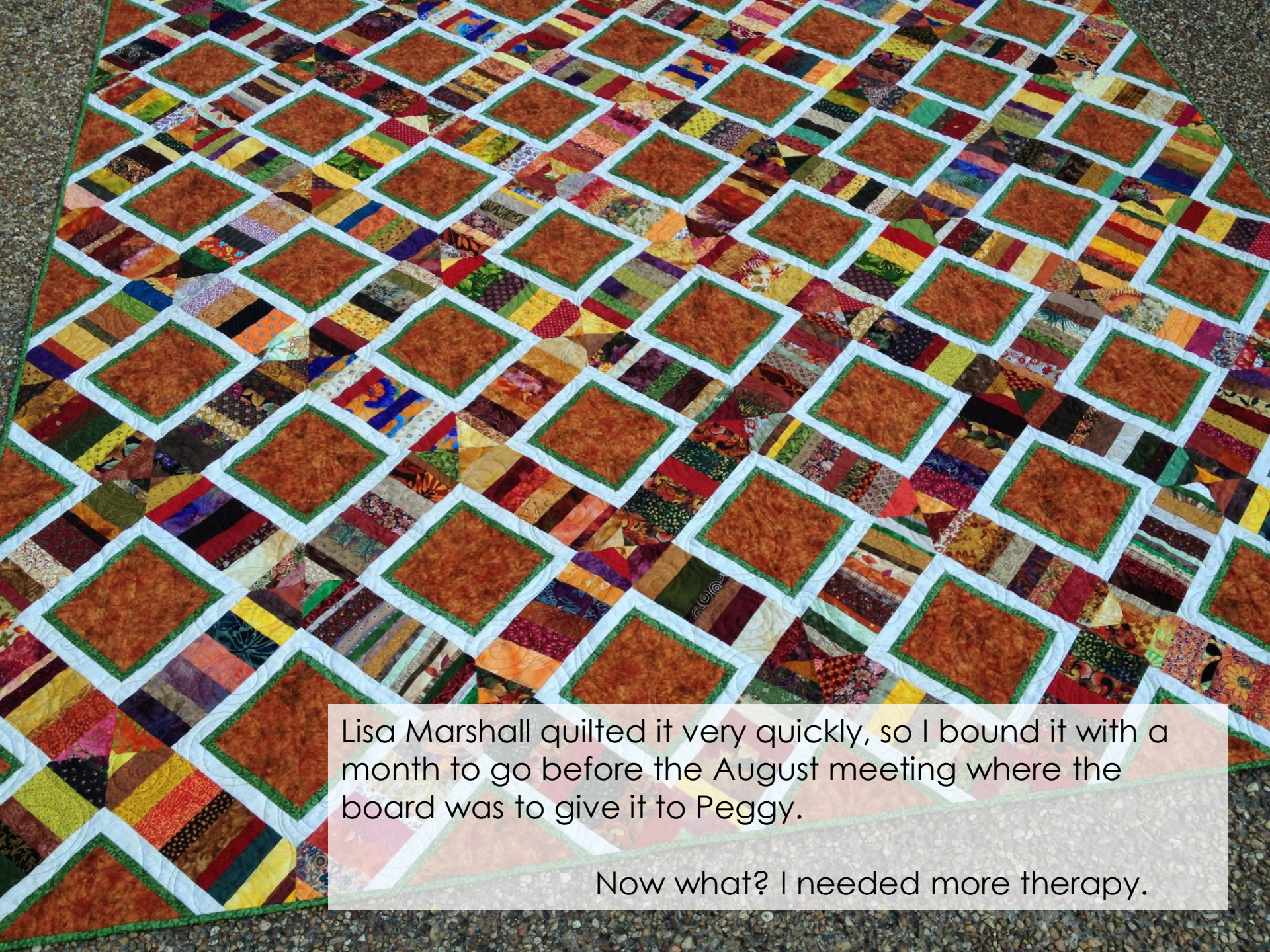
It is very strange to see one's house in this ghost-like state after living in it for ten years. In one particular spot in the foyer, I could see every single room at once.

A close-up photograph of a large pile of colorful fabric scraps and strips, including various shades of yellow, orange, red, green, and white. The scraps are scattered on a green cutting mat with yellow grid lines. A semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

I needed more quilting therapy. I finally found all of the stripsets that the board made for the President's Quilt for Peggy, so I got to work.



The blocks went together really quickly. It was a fantastic project for a sewing area without a design wall, because it was so scrappy that the block placements didn't really matter.



Lisa Marshall quilted it very quickly, so I bound it with a month to go before the August meeting where the board was to give it to Peggy.

Now what? I needed more therapy.



Next, I made "Smoke Damage," which is still unfinished. This little quilt, made from scraps and charm squares, represents my impressions of my walls on my first viewing the day after the fire. Ultimately I will heavily embellish it with buttons and beads, but it's still emotionally challenging to work on it.



I needed what I call "prescription sewing," where someone else tells me what to make. So I signed up for the 2012 Designer Mystery Block of the Month at Fat Quarter Shop. If I was careful with my cutting, I had enough fabrics to make an extra block each time.



And I made little pinwheels from the scrap cuttings of the flying geese units.

A-HA!

I had found my quilting niche again.

TRUTH:

When I get truly
invested in a project, I
don't want it to end.



So I take the little bits of fabrics that are left and try to make something else with them, just to enjoy those fabrics a little longer.

The pieces I used in this Dresden were just 1.75"x2.5" trimmings. Tiny bits.

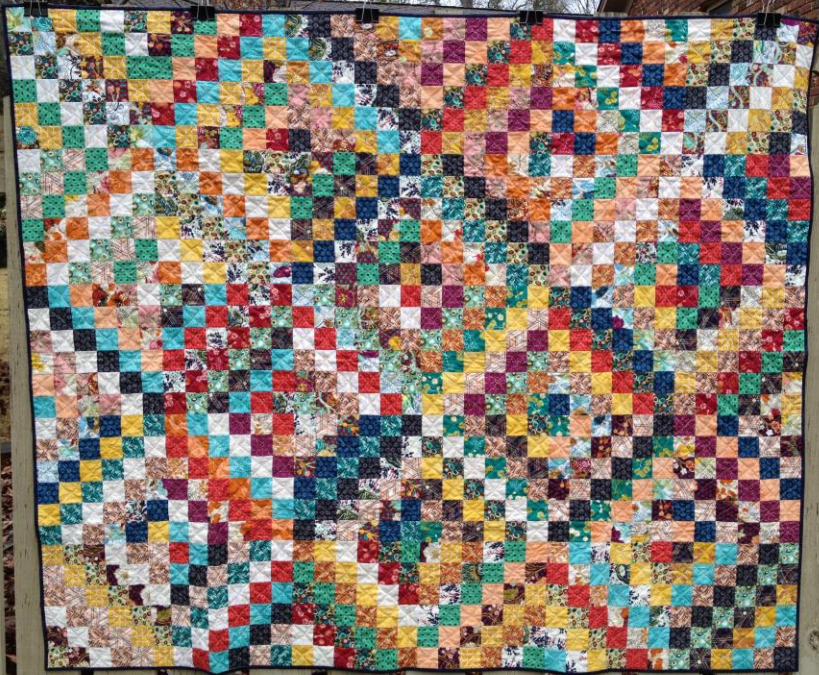




It became a pillow for a swap on Flickr.



This is the room where the fire was. It is now my sewing room, away from the main living areas of the house so my mess isn't immediately visible to visitors.



Most of my quilts now have what I call a “Trash Backing,” where I use up fabrics that either match or coordinate with the ones on the front. I usually just improvise on these backings rather than trying for any particular design.



Longarm quilters may not appreciate this approach, though. So do be sure to ask your quilter before you start using up your fabric this way.







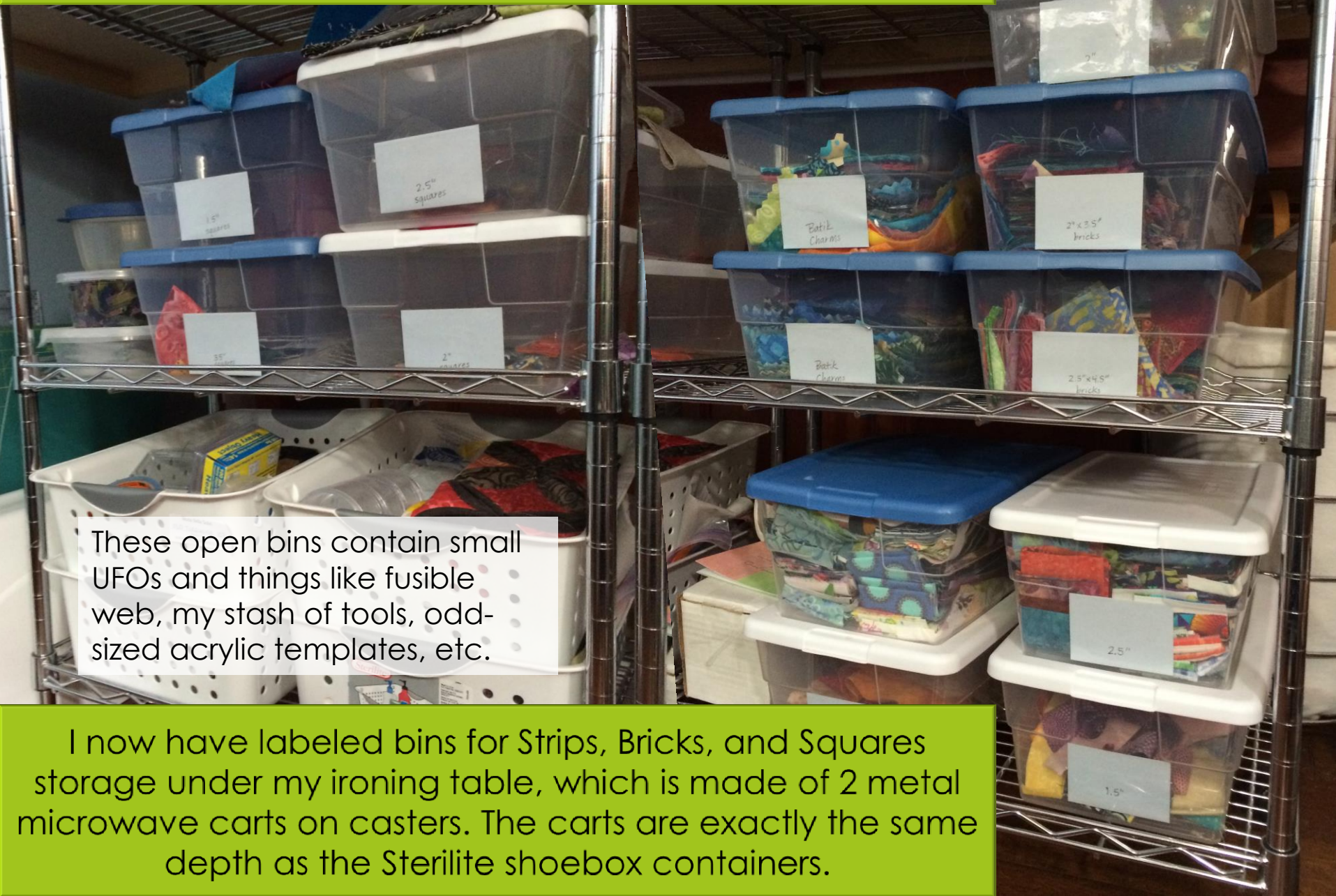
Doing Trash Backings out of leftover squares makes it very easy to keep your quilt lined up while you're basting it because of the seamlines.

But even the trash backings don't seem to use it all up...



Friday disapproves of the fabric mess.

Inspired by Bonnie Hunter, Wanda Hansen, and others:



These open bins contain small UFOs and things like fusible web, my stash of tools, odd-sized acrylic templates, etc.

I now have labeled bins for Strips, Bricks, and Squares storage under my ironing table, which is made of 2 metal microwave carts on casters. The carts are exactly the same depth as the Sterilite shoebox containers.



I also have this little rolling laundry hamper under my cutting table so that while cutting for other projects, I can drop irregular scraps into it until I have time to trim them to strips, bricks, or squares. When it's full, I make time for trimming.



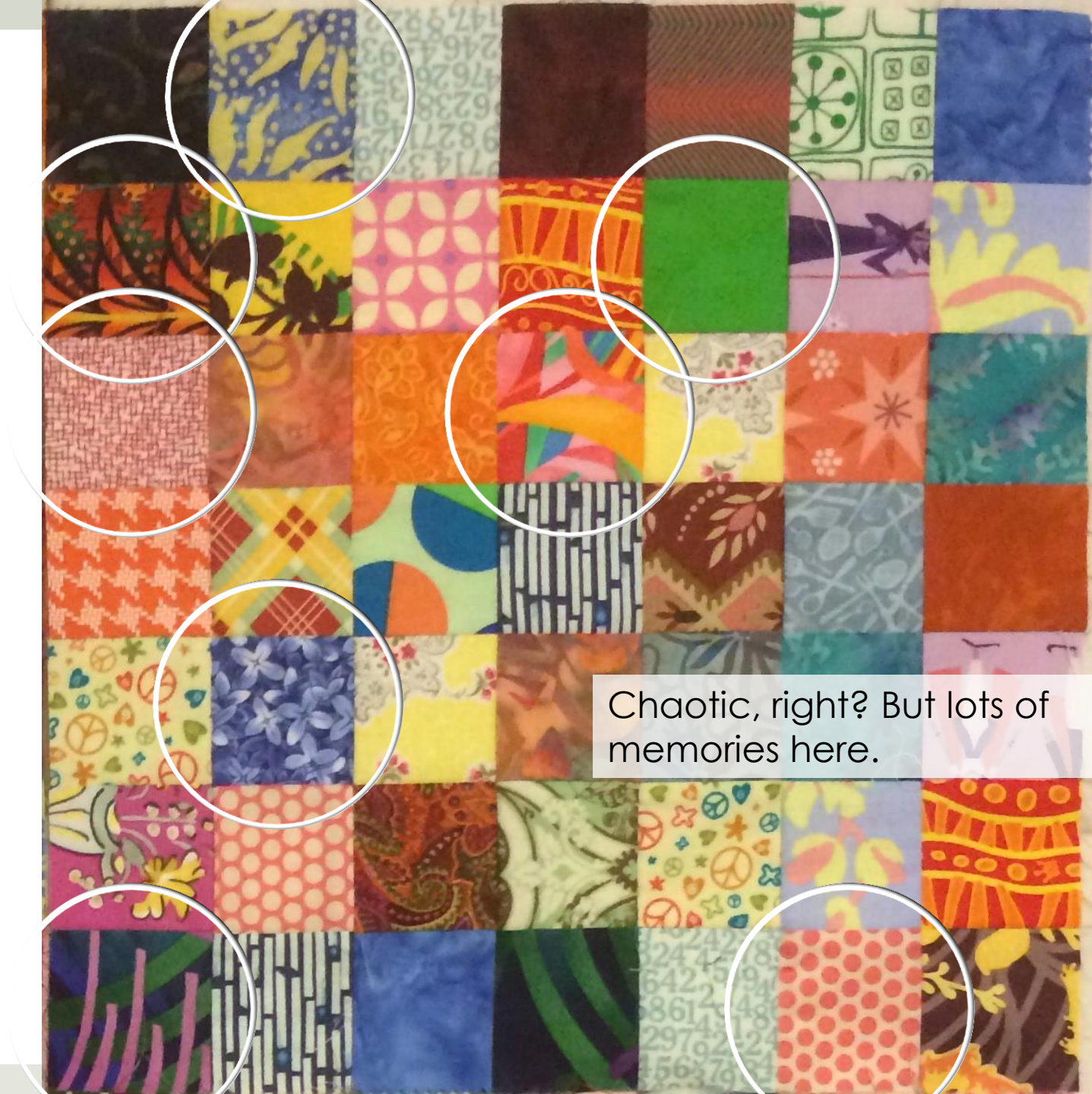


I started to cut strips out of all of the fabrics in my stash that have already been used in projects and that I know I don't otherwise have plans for. If I had less than half a yard of it OR if it's a wild or novelty print, I chopped it up.



Pinning squares together is a perfect mindless activity for when you're sitting in front of the TV.





Chaotic, right? But lots of memories here.



Sometimes I'll have a question and make something.... And then realize that some questions are best left unanswered.





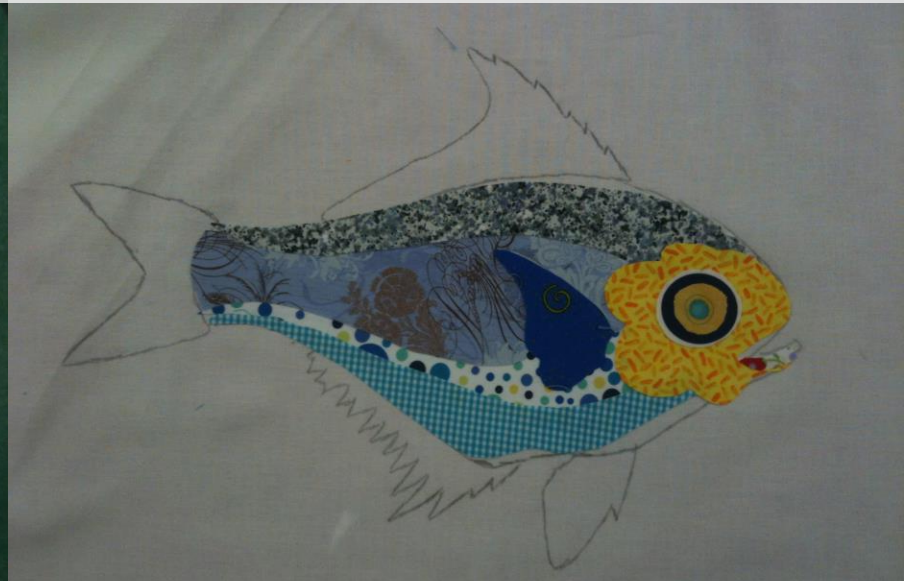
And sometimes the questions lead to further exploration.

A "Cutting Loose" fabric collage fish using a Susan Carlson tutorial that was featured in *Quilting Arts* in 2010. I had always wanted to try this, so I did. It's still unfinished.





Credit for the fish pattern: Susan Carlson and *Quilting Arts Magazine*, 2010



Fish created by four teenagers in an impromptu instead-of-a-field-trip class.

More Gift Ideas Using Scraps and Leftovers



Pattern: "Pockets to Go" by Atkinson Designs



Hand towel
using a
4.5"x18"
scrap of
fabric and a
fat quarter of
linen, just
because I
wondered if
my idea
would work.



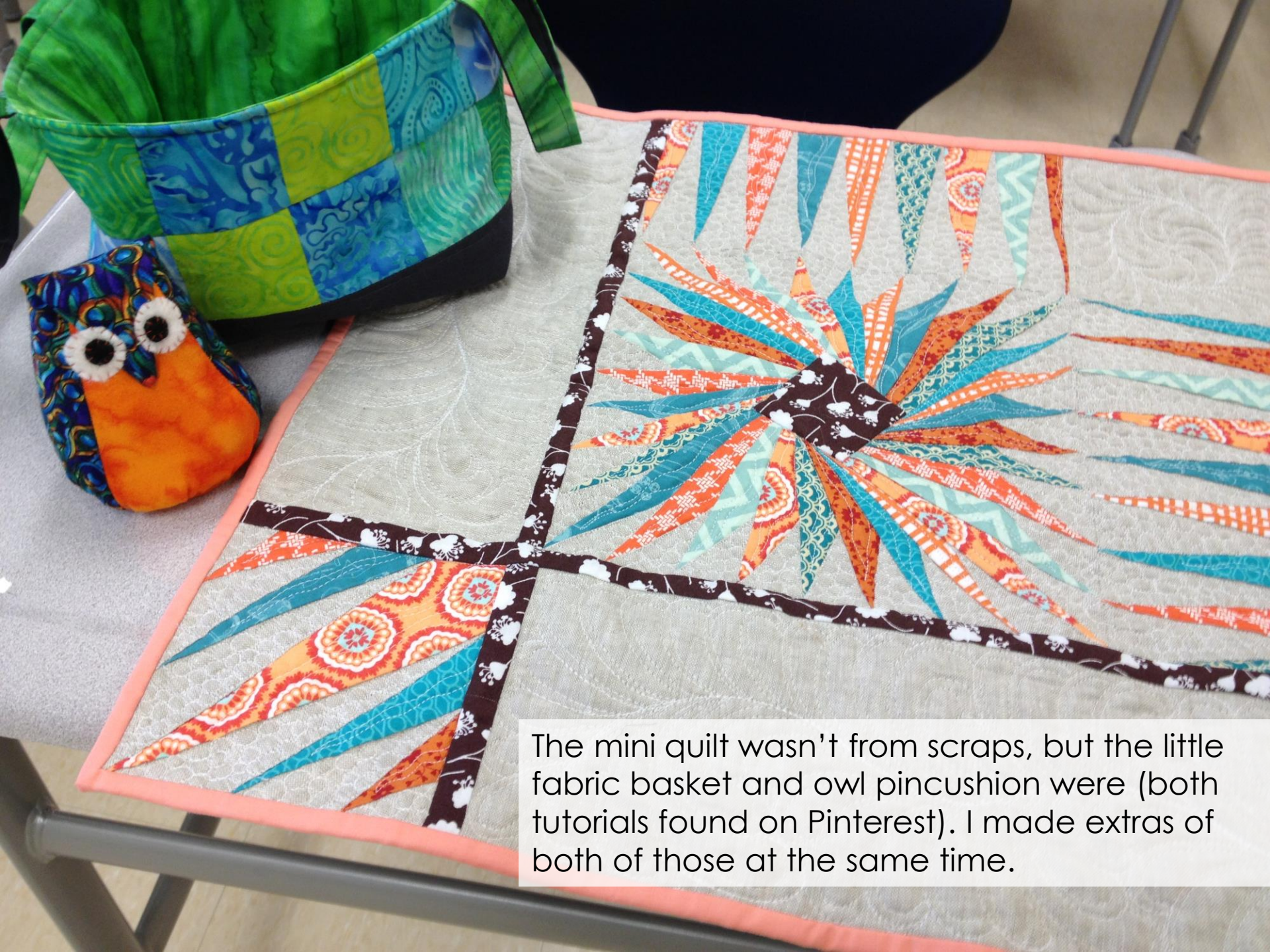
Coffee Cozy sent to me by a swap partner. Tutorials can be found online.



Self-mitered holiday napkins made from a stack of fat quarters that didn't have a plan. I found the tutorial on Moda Bake Shop.



Bento-style Casserole Carrier (idea found on Pinterest) and coordinating kitchen towels made from scraps from the Christmas quilt I'm trying to finish in time for this year. This was a \$10 wedding gift – I bought fluffy kitchen towels on sale at Bed, Bath & Beyond.

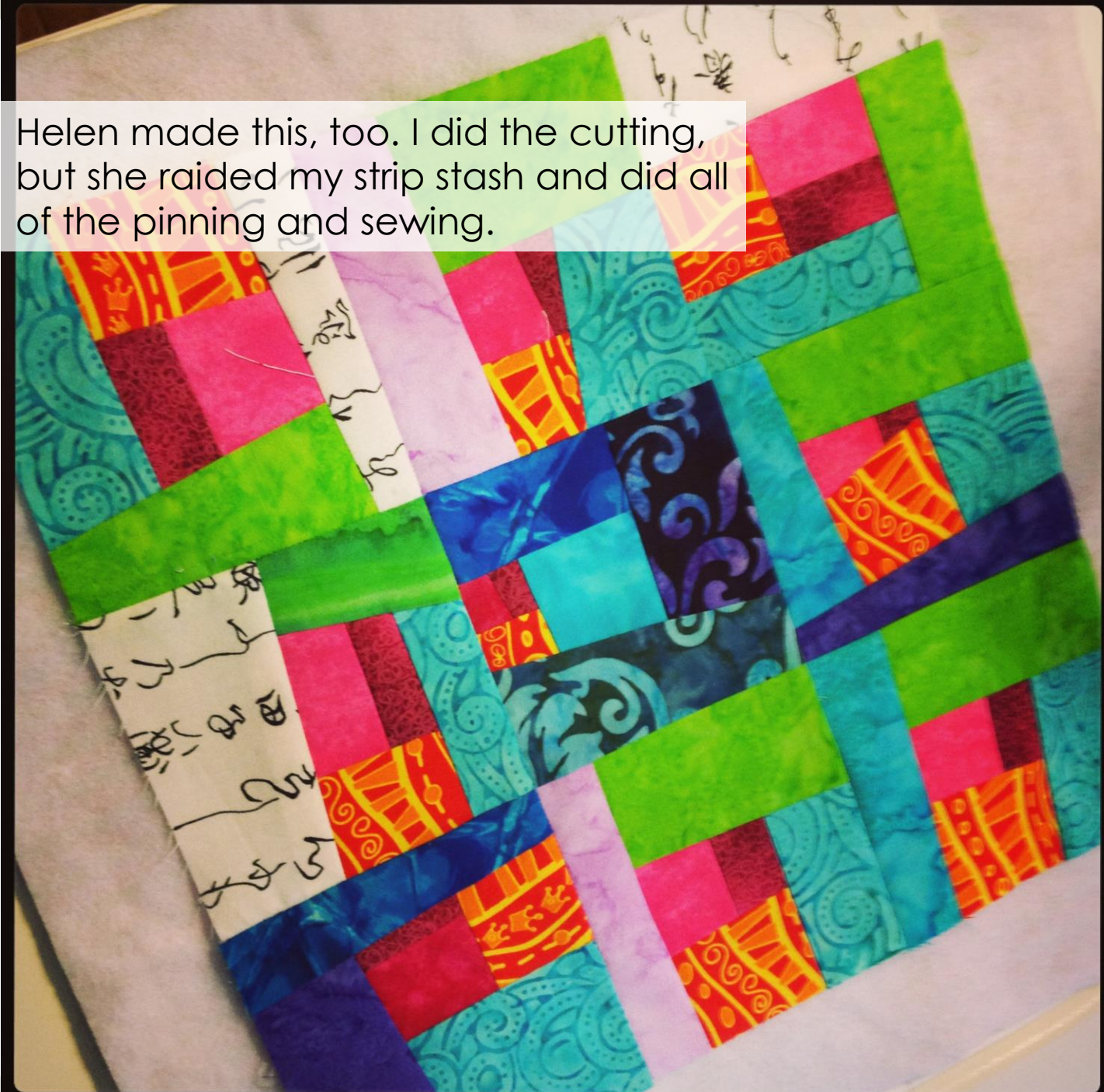


The mini quilt wasn't from scraps, but the little fabric basket and owl pincushion were (both tutorials found on Pinterest). I made extras of both of those at the same time.



Helen has started asking to sew. This year she wanted to make her Halloween costume. And SHE wanted to make it.

Helen made this, too. I did the cutting,
but she raided my strip stash and did all
of the pinning and sewing.



Online Resources

Inspiration

Etsy.com

Pinterest.com

Bonnie Hunter's site: quiltville.com

Wanda Hanson's site: <http://exuberantcolor.blogspot.com/>

Patterns and Tutorials

Nine Patchtastic Quilt Free Tutorial: <http://www.modabakeshop.com/2009/05/9-patchtastic-quilt.html>

Gnome Paper Piecing Pattern: <http://artisania.bigcartel.com/product/mr-gnome-8-x-10-quilt-block-pattern>

Geese in the Forest Quilt Pattern: <http://www.etsy.com/listing/98385399/geese-in-the-forest-quilt-pattern-pdf>

Mad as a Hatter Quilt Free Tutorial: <http://messygoat.com/?p=1074#content>

Swoon Quilt Pattern: <http://thimbleblossoms.bigcartel.com/product/swoon-pattern-142-pdf-pattern>

Scrap Vomit Quilt Free Tutorial: <http://imagingermoney.blogspot.com/2010/10/care-for-some-scrap-vomit-aka-quilt.html>

Pockets To Go Pattern: <http://www.amazon.com/Atkinson-Designs-Patterns-Pockets-To/dp/B003OD3GR4>

Coffee Cozy Free Tutorial: <http://www.skiptomylou.org/2011/09/20/fabric-coffee-sleeve-tutorial/>

Accent Mitered Edge Dinner Napkins Free Tutorial: <http://www.modabakeshop.com/2009/10/plates-for-your-table.html>

Casserole Carrier Free Tutorial: <http://www.northerngirlstamper-shannon.blogspot.com/2010/11/recipe-gift-giving.html>

Fabric Embellished Dish towels Free Tutorial: <http://www.incolororder.com/2011/12/fabric-embellished-dish-towels-tutorial.html>

Fabric Basket Free Tutorial: <http://ayumills.blogspot.com/2008/05/tutorial-fabric-basket.html>

Owl Pincushion Free Tutorial: <http://efemera-ink.blogspot.com/2010/06/wise.html>