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## **Patchwork Improv: Working with Strips** with Sherri Lynn Wood

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### **Chapter 1 - Patchwork Improv**

#### Overview

(gentle piano music) - Hi, I'm Sherri Lynn Wood. I am an artist and an improviser and an author and a quilt maker and a teacher. I've been improvising with patchwork for over 30 years and one of the things that keeps my attention and keeps me coming back is because making quilts and working with patchwork is all about making patterns. And in this class we're going to work with strip piecing or sometimes called string piecing. We're gonna talk about how to curate fabrics and how colors work together. We're gonna learn how to cut strips without a ruler and how to piece them together. We're gonna learn how that there's no mistakes in improv. Finally, we'll learn how to troubleshoot if your patchwork doesn't lie flat. If you've never done improv before this is a great place to start. You're going to learn about color. You're going to have fun with the technique and you're gonna end up with a piece of patchwork that you can use in any kind of project.

#### Materials

- The great thing about improv is that you can use any kind of materials you have on hand. So I like to work with just about anything. A lot of times I use cotton, sometimes I use other types of fabrics. You can use old clothing. What I have here are just scraps from my stash, they're mostly cotton solids. I have some yardage here, I have some old hand-dyed things, I have some shot cottons, I have stuff that I found at the dump that I rescued, old pieces of curtains, some real pretty little prints, some of these are vintage, but anything you have on hand. You don't have to go and buy anything for improv. I like to have a range of values and different colors and a lot of diversity in my choices. The other tools we'll be working with are a cutting mat and a rotary cutter, but no rulers please. And a scissors, sometimes I actually cut things with a scissors instead of a rotary cutter. A seam ripper just in case and some kind of a marking instrument, I like tailor's chalk, and straight pins. We'll also use a sewing machine with neutral thread, and an ironing set up here.

#### Selecting and Sewing Blocks

- So the wonderful thing about working with strings is it's a great opportunity to explore your relationship with color and different relationships and aspects of color. So, I look at each string set as an opportunity to explore a different aspect of color. Nothing has to actually go together, I can just create strings freely and then see how they go later. So I might choose things according to my mood for instance. I might decide, well I'm kind of nervous and excited about being here today in front of you and I'll pick out colors that represent that. Or I may have a picture that I like that I want to pick out. Or I might think of the rainbow and I'll think of colors for the rainbow. I also can do things more formally like lights and darks, high contrast and low contrast. Brights and muted colors together, so a bright for instance might be something like this bright yellow, and a muted color, well obviously gray would be a muted color, but a muted green color, something like that. And I like to work with a lot of different contrasts. To demonstrate the cutting techniques and actually do a string piece, I thought I would play with the concept of value. And so value is the difference between, it's like the greyscale. It's like if you took a black and white photo of all these colors, you would see which ones were lighter value and which were with darker values, they were all in a black and white photo. And so I'm gonna work with green colors and put them with gray fabrics and try

to match the same value. For example, I'm going to have this dark greenish-blue color, and this clearly is very close in value, and I can squint at it, looks a little bit lighter, this blue looks slightly lighter, but it looks very close to the same value. This green, this bright green, and I put it next to here, I can see it's much lighter when I squint at it, so let me look for a gray that's going to be closer in value to it. I think this gray, now grain is, this grain has a high intensity, which is how much light it reflects, but its value when I squint at it is very similar, so let's test these out and I'm going to take a picture. Okay, now I'm going to go to my Edit Version, and I'm gonna go with the black and white scale, and I have to touch it. So I can see that this green and gray are almost exact same value. They look like the same fabric in the black and white photo. I can see that this dark green, teal green is definitely lighter than the gray. So let me see if I can find something that matches a little bit better. This might be a better match, so let me take my photo again and see what happens. Yeah, that's much closer. Now that surprised me, 'cause I thought that the darker gray would match it better. But that's actually the match for that grain. Let's see if I can find something that's dark enough to go with this. Maybe this grain will go. So I'm gonna take a picture with my camera again and test it. Okay, now let's go back into the edit, and I pick the black and white. I tap on it, and you can see that indeed they look like the same fabric on the greyscale. So we have three matches here, and now we're going to piece them together and get ready to cut them into strips. The main thing is, is you want all of your strips the same length, whatever you decide that could be. It could be selvage-to-selvage, it could be fat quarter length, it could be even longer than selvage-to-selvage, but all your strips need to be cut the same length. The width of the amount of fabric you have in them doesn't matter. I'm gonna do about maybe 28 inches here. Let's see, and I'm gonna start with just cutting off a piece of green, okay. Alright, now I'm going to piece together this gray to it. And I'll go ahead and cut it and then piece it. Sometimes I piece it and then cut it, but I know I want it to be about 28 inches, 'cause that's just gonna be my set amount that I decided on. So I will cut a little more, and I can always cut it down. We're not using any rulers here. Okay, so now I will flip them right sides together and sew my quarter inch, and then I'll have my sheet will be ready to cut for strips. Okay, if right side's together, there's no need to backstitch, and your quarter inch does not have to be perfect. So now, I'm just going to press this, and it's ready to be cut into strips after I get it pressed. I'm just pressing my seams in one direction. I'll just press some of the wrinkles out. We want to press as much as you need to press to support your best sewing. So now this is ready to cut into strips, and you can make more of these with different values in segments, or you can just cut some fabrics just as whole pieces. So again, to cut this I want to make sure it's the same length, it doesn't matter how wide it is. And my length is this way, so I'm gonna cut off a piece and I might just even rip it, and I don't need a lot of this, I'm not gonna have as much. Okay, and then I'm going to cut this the same length. Again, you can see it's a different width, but it's the same length. Okay, now you're ready to start curating the different fabrics that you need for your strips. They can be whole, they can be segmented at different amounts of segments, as long as the whole piece is the same length. I've made some others with different values, so these are going to be my all on the same string set. So this is where you want to do your curatorial, these are a little bit shorter, so I'll probably go back and trim this a little bit. I'll trim these two down to the length of these, 'cause it ran, I want them the same length. Approximately the same length, they don't have to be exact, nothing has to be exact in improv. It's not about perfection. So you can see some of the different segments. You could even do some of these with three segments, or you could make a striped segment that you could then cut across. So these are all my different amounts, and you can see how I have different values going from light to dark. So now I have several blocks to work with, whole

pieces, pieced pieces that are all the same length that I can cut into my strips. Now, how many do you need? That's up to you, you can have as little as two different variations, black and white. You can have many more, just work with the colors that you want. If you feel overwhelmed, then you need to limit your palette. If you feel constricted and it's not interesting, then you can expand your palette and add more. So you might not know where to start, so start with three, that's a good number to start with.

### Creating strips & using the Random Choice Method

- Okay, now we're ready to start cutting our fabrics into strips. I have about eight different values of fabrics here, ready to go, and I think they'd all look wonderful in one big string set, but also think they would look good if I curated them down. I wanna have three distinctive values, so I'm gonna have a darker valued strip, a medium valued strip, and a lighter valued strip. I mean, these three are kinda nice together, so I'm gonna go with, I'm gonna try this one. That's pretty light. I'm experimenting with color. This is pretty bright. These two grays were kinda the same. Meh, I'm just gonna go with this and see what happens. Now we're gonna cut them. And you can play with the width of your strips. They can be anywhere from as small as half an inch to, I'd say, I wouldn't make 'em any wider than maybe four inches, or three to four inches, because once you start getting beyond four inches, you're starting to work more with shapes. If you do have a lot of wider strips, it's okay as long as you have narrow strips to go with it. It doesn't matter if the cut is perfectly straight. It doesn't have to be straight, it can even have a little bit of a wiggle, and you can choose to make it wiggly, awkward, crisp, that's the beauty of working ruler-free, is you can have so much expression in your line. Okay, when I cut now, I'm gonna make one confident cut all the way through, and I'm not gonna pause, I'm just gonna go for it, right? So I don't wanna do the real careful slow thing, I like to just kinda (cutter whirs). Of course, you wanna put a little pressure, okay? And you can see I don't have to cut them perfectly straight. I might even put a little bit of a wiggle in a few of them. 'Kay, let me cut some narrow ones. These are really narrow. You can see it can go pretty fast. You can also use wedge shapes if you want, and you can cut your strips different widths at different ends. So these two I'm just gonna stack together and cut them at the same time. And I'm gonna make these a little thicker. So it goes pretty fast! So now I can mix them all up. Now I can say to myself, "This is an interesting "palette of strips. "Do I want another color in there?" But it might be fun to have a little surprise of this green in here, somewhere, 'cause it's so bright. Okay, that seems pretty good to me. I'm gonna go on to thinking about choice. So there's different ways of choosing your fabric and choosing your strips and the order. It might be fun to try all three ways. The first way is planning, or one way is planning, and that would be a matter of, you know, I'm going to lay my strips out. And you might even decide you want to lay your strips out in a particular order, like the same order over and over again. This would be like an ABC pattern right here. Then once you've got a whole bunch laid out, you decide, "Okay I like that. "Oh, maybe I'll switch this one around," whatever. "Do I like that one? "Okay, now I'm gonna sew it just like this." And then I can just chain-sew them right around. Okay, that's one way of choosing, is planning. Another way of choosing is spontaneous choice, so you just go very quickly, "I'm gonna sew this one, "and then I'm gonna go sew this one." And then I'd sew it, and then I'm like, okay, I'd look at it, and "I'm gonna sew this one, "and then I'm gonna sew this one." So it's like first choice, but you're doing it really quickly, right? You're just, one at a time, you're just at the sewing machine sewing them. That would give you most likely your normal habit and interaction with color, okay? The third way which I think is a really fun way to do this process, and that would look like putting all of these in a bag so that I cannot see it, and it's

important that you can't see it, because even if you're saying, "Well, I'm just gonna, I'm not gonna have it in a bag, "but I'll just pick 'em without looking." Well, you can still see it, usually, in your peripheral vision. Now we're gonna go to our sewing machine and start sewing. Okay, now this is the fun part. I'm gonna start pulling out strips randomly. So let me pull out the first strip. I can't see in the bag. All right, this is my strip. Now I'm gonna pull out my second strip. I can't see in the bag. What did I get? Okay! All right. So later on, when we start to, when we have the string sheets made, we'll be cutting them into other shapes, and we'll be cutting them to match, but when you do ruler free with strip piecing, you don't have to cut your strips to match, as you saw me earlier. We're just cutting them randomly. But you see how these are not cut to match, they curve in different directions. It doesn't matter, you're gonna sew a lot of these together before you start, at least six to eight inches of strips together before you iron them, and when you go to sew them, of course you're gonna turn right sides together, and then you're gonna pretend that these were cut with a ruler, and you're gonna line up your edge exactly, even though they're not cut to match. Right together, just like a normal quarter-inch seam with the precision piecing. Now we're going to bring it into the machine and again, we're gonna line that up just like it was cut to match or cut with a ruler or a template. (sewing machine motor whirs) Okay, so now you can see I just allowed the cross seams to go in one direction as I sewed. Again, pull out my random strip. What did I get this time? Okay, I got this one. Okay, I can decide to sew it in either direction. I could flip it if I wanted to, to have my purple go in a different direction. So even with this random process, I have little decisions I have to make each time. (sewing machine motor whirs) Let's see what we got. Oh! Okay, I got one of the few bright green ones. That's exciting. Okay, I'm gonna sew this one together. Now, you may have noticed that my quarter-inch isn't exact all the way through, and that's okay. As long as you have enough of a seam so that it doesn't unravel, you're okay. So, I'm gonna go ahead and pull out my random strips. I will continue to sew them on, but just to see what we get as I pull them randomly, so we get an idea of what comes out, and then I'll sew them. So let's go ahead and pull out some more random ones, and again, I'm gonna sew them exactly the way that I pull them out. I'm not gonna rearrange them. All right. So this one will go next. Okay, let's see what comes next. Ah, two of these in a row. Okay, I do have the option of sewing them this way or this way. But I am making it a rule that I only add from one end. Obviously you could have add from either end, but that gives you a more choice and less random experience. Okay? The first time I get that dark one. Whoops, got a whole bunch here. Okay. All right! Go this way? More of my yellow, I mean my light. Okay, and on this one I notice, these are a little wedge-shaped, so because I have a fat wedge on that one, I'm gonna put the fat wedge down on this side this time. Just to balance it a little bit. Got a lot of these skinny strips. So, I love the random thing, because a lot of times I would never sew two things in a row. Our tendency, if we're used to doing fixed pattern patchwork, which that is patchwork that is based on symmetry and perfection, that's planned out, typically colors are spread evenly, and everything's very balanced. That's part of the symmetry. But with flexible pattern work, those types of design rules don't really hold as well, and actually having things be a little less predictable can often work better design-wise in improv. So I almost wish I would get three in a row. (chuckles) but now we're getting a pretty balanced pull. When you do random, that's what happens. You just don't know what you'll get. This is actually coming out quite symmetrical. (chuckles) Oh, here's another nice thing. So this looks great as is, so I'm gonna sew it up just like it is, and then we'll iron it and see what it looks like finished. So I see this is a very narrow strip, and I wouldn't be afraid, if you have a narrow strip, or even if it disappears in the seam it's just a whoopee moment, it's an added bonus when something like that happens. So you wanna make sure that your seam is going

away from your presser foot. Don't be afraid if the seams get close. So sometimes I notice, as I start to sew in a row, these strips, I start to get a slant upwards. You see how it's slanting. It's okay if it does, it's not a big deal. If it bothers you, you can offset that by remembering to just start a little lower each time when you sew, than right at equal, you can just start your seam a little lower. Or, doing this random thing, I'm sewing them all in one direction. But if you weren't doing it that way, or let's say you were doing random, and you were just gonna switch from side to side, that's another way to do it. You would sew on this side, add a strip, and then you would sew on this side and add a strip, and then you'd sew on this side and add a strip, and this side, add a strip. So whoopee! I just made a mistake. I sewed my strip on the wrong direction. So, I came all the way down here and you can see that the right side of the seam's facing up. It should be facing down. So once I get it sewn on, my seam is gonna be on the front side. But whoopee, it doesn't matter. I'm not gonna mess with that. And who knows, that could get cut out later. Even if I left it in, nobody would pick it up. Because the thing about improv is since the goal of improv is not perfection, when there are imperfections, nobody sees them, because nobody's expecting perfection, so nobody's looking for perfection. These types of little mistakes where seams are sewn in the wrong direction or maybe you've sewn a print fabric inside-out, or something like that, that's all going to be just part of the finished beauty of the piece. (sewing machine motor whirring) Okay, let's take it to the ironing board, and we'll see what it looks like after it's been ironed.

#### Ironing & evaluation

- Now that we've got the strips sewn, it's time to iron. Now there's lots of different ways to iron in improv. Improv is all about variation, so there's no one way to do anything. There's no one way to use a tool, there's no one way to iron, there's no one way to pin. In all your improv, whatever you do in improv, the main thing you wanna think about is how does it support your goal. So, there's no right or wrong, but you have a goal and you wanna work towards the goal. If you were somebody who cuts more precisely, crisper lines, you may want to press all your seams in the same direction, because that will give you a crisper, cleaner edge to your finished piece. If you're a person who is concerned about, if you're using high contrast fabrics, light and dark, and you're concerned about the judges saying, "I can see your dark seams through your light seams," then you may wanna take the time to press your dark seams towards your light. I personally don't care about that, so I get little points taken off for that all the time when I enter my stuff into jury things. But if it's important to you, that's when it's important for you to iron in that way, so you might iron your darks toward your darks and your lights toward your lights. If you're like me and you naturally cut a little curvier and you want to have more of a lyrical line in your finished piece, then one way you can press is by just putting your piece with the seams down towards the ironing board, with your top up, and then you just mash it from the center out and steam the heck out of it. And that allows your seams to go any direction, and that will increase your curviness with your lines. So again, there's no one way to iron, there's all these different ways, you wanna iron towards your goals. I never, ever iron seams open, but if there's, I'm not sure that works that well with improv, but you can always try and do that if that's something that's important to you. Maybe you're a machine quilter and for some reason that is important, then you can try pressing your seams open. So, whatever your goal is, that's what you wanna try to work towards. So let's take this to the ironing board and I'll show you my mashup technique. First I like to have steam in my iron, so I'll make sure I've got some steam going, and then I see how I've got this centered on the thing, and I'm just gonna start, and I'm gonna just mash it from the center out. I have my seams down, and I'm just gonna pull and tug. Again, you wanna have



at least eight inches or your whole string set sewn together before you do this. Because they're cut at different widths and they're not cut to match, they'll have a lot of give and take. So where one thing bows out, another thing'll bow in. And so that's why you wanna do this at the end, 'cause if you're doing it between each strip, the bowing is gonna get so extreme, it'll be hard to sew the strips together. So it's best to sew all your strips together, or at least six to eight inches of your strips at a time before you do this. And you see I'm working all the way out to the edge. Okay. And I'm not worrying where my seams are going, I'm just trying to get it as flat as possible. And I am pulling it so that they're completely ironed out, that there's no folds, folded seams, they're ironed out. Okay, that's it. It's so much faster than ironing in one direction. The front looks pretty good, let's take a look at the back. And you can see my seams going everywhere. (laughs) But that, like I said, helps make it look a little curvier by having those go in every direction. And when I do improv, I like to evaluate in between strip sets. It's not so helpful to say I like it or I don't like it, it's helpful for me to identify what surprised me, what did I learn, or discover, what was satisfying, and probably what was dissatisfying, and what I would do differently next time if I were to do it again. So, when I look at this, I'm surprised that the randomness, even though it was random, it has a very regular kinda rhythm to it, and that just is the way it came out. Another thing that I notice about this strip that I didn't notice while I was sewing it is that I tended to congregate all my neutrals on one end and most of my color on the other end. There's some exceptions where I have the neutral, the neutrals up here, but you see how I have most of the grays? Also notice how purple my grays look next to the greens. So, that's an interesting color discovery, and I think these grays did have some purple or red tints to them, but with the green, that comes out even more. So that's something that I learned about color. Another thing technique-wise that I notice is that it doesn't lie flat. I mean, it wasn't cut to match, so you see there are some bubbles. This is a whoopee, yay, an opportunity, because it gives me some guidance on where I wanna go next. And the first thing I'm going to do with this piece is to cut through the bubbles so that it lies flat. All right, so I'm gonna seize my scissors to cut right through this bubble, and, you know, I think it's a design opportunity, actually, it'll give me some guidance in where I wanna go next. So to cut out a bubble, I'm going to look and see where it bubbles the most, and I really wanna cut it this way, 'cause I wanna keep my strips, I don't wanna cut it lengthwise with my strip, I wanna cut it the opposite direction. You can see where the biggest part of the bubble is, right here, so I'm gonna cut right through the center of that bubble. All the way across. Whoopee! There we go. And you see now there's no bubble. See how nice and flat it is? I notice there's a little bit of a bubble on this side, right on this edge. There's a couple things, I could take darts to take them out, but I'm not gonna do that. I will probably just cut a strip off right here again to release that bubble. Part of improv, to be a really good improviser, I think, you need to look at your patchwork as a collaborator. So I made this patchwork, but it has a life of its own. I didn't plan the bubbles, they happened, and now I have to work with them, and so it's already given me some design direction, because I've got these pieces now. Another thing I'll do with this is I'll go ahead and clean this edge off. This edge is pretty clean right here, except for a few strings, so if that bothers you you can trim those off. Okay. This side, though, has all of these little different angles, I mean, different tails. So I just, when I do this I try to do it minimally. Cut as little off as possible from point to point. So sometimes a little natural curve comes in. This gives me a little curve right here that I really like as a design element. Again, this patchwork is talking to me, this is the classic Yes And. The patchwork is saying, "I wanna curve on this edge," and I'm going yes, and I'm gonna build right onto that curve in some way. And here our other pieces are pretty flat. And so now we're ready to make something with this. Now, of course, these strings can just be used in anything. I

could take a pattern for a handbag, perhaps, and lay this over and cut out shapes for a pattern or use it as a trim on a pillow or whatever. I also can piece it into patchwork in any way that I want. I'm gonna try to compose something with these three pieces.

### Creative composing

- Piecing strings can be a meditative process to its own end. Like it doesn't even have you don't even have to have a focus for what you're gonna use the strings for. A lot of times to get into my improv if I'm unfocused or I'm just not feeling inspired, I may just pull out my collection of strings. Sometimes I have them in light and dark or I might have brights or I might have neutrals or I might have some prints. And when I have extra strings I can just throw them in here and I will just make some string sets just to get my flow going. It's very meditative to just sew strip after strip. And then I can have a collection of strips already pieced to use in compositions at any point in time that I might want to use them. So not only do I have scraps that I keep but I have pieced scraps that I keep. So let me show you some of the string sets that I've done recently. This one here is these are mostly salvage to salvage and this one here is brights and lights. So I've used very bright colors and light mostly neutral colors in this string set. I like to explore color through these. So you know I might be in the mood to do lights and brights. This one is darks and brights and again it just feels great to just sit down on the sewing machine and play with color like this and see what I get. And I don't have to make them with any purpose in mind just for the the discovery itself. This is... one I made that is high contrast. As you can see I have like dark light dark light dark light dark light and I could either you know I can put those in bags like I have all my lights in one bag and all my darks in another bag and I can just pull randomly light dark light dark. Another thing I could do, which I didn't do in this case, I could put a whole bunch a handful of lights, a handful of darks and just mix them up in one bag and pull them randomly and see what order they would come. They wouldn't come in the same rhythm. So making strip sets in diverse ways you can actually mix them together and have them stand out. So they don't have to match. And you may create diversity in your strip sets through the colors; light in the dark or the muted in the bright. So you can also change it up using thick strips and thin strips for example. So the width of your strips can create a different rhythm. So you want to try to get different rhythms, different contrasts and your strip sets to make something more interesting and engaging, they don't have to be all matchy-matchy. Like you don't have to use like pinks and browns and everything or they don't have to have even the same fabrics in them. The diversity often makes it more interesting when you're doing improv rather than having things be kind of symmetrical and matching. So that's something to think about when you're making these strips but again you can just make them up and set them aside and then who knows someday they may come out and be just the right thing for another project that you're working on. Today though we're going to work with maybe some of these strips, maybe some of this I pulled out a few neutrals scraps from my small scrap bin, some neutrals lights and darks. But these are gonna be the main focus of my piece. When you start composing with improv, it can be really daunting because I don't work with sketches or anything like that I mean sometimes I might have some idea but I work with more with just the pattern and what evolves out of the process of doing it. So I don't think ahead too much but I'm listening and responding. And so like we talked about before there's a nice curve here I like the way these look. So right now I'm just going to play around with these sections, I'm gonna look like you know that kind of cool if I just stick that in the middle and turn it in the opposite direction. I could slice these up into little strips and repeat them that could be interesting. I mean there's so many directions I could go in and I could see about you know what happens if

they're going in different ways. I can throw in also other fabrics, other strips and so maybe I will let's see what will I do. We'll figure this out. I'm going to lay over some of my other strips and see what they look like and how they interact. And the whole time I'm going to be listening to an internal voice to say oh I like that. That's kind of exciting or that's kind of scary. And so I either going to go with something that's scary if I feel like I have a challenge or I might go with something that's really delightful and exciting or I might be like this is really comfortable I know this will work. And you can always stay in a comfort zone but your real growth areas are going to be either on your edge where you're like a little bit scared but also curious and or where you're just feeling pure joy about something. I mean I could do this infinitely right. I could lay these out infinitely to see what I like best. And I wish you could tell me right now what you like best and maybe we could collaborate together 'cause there's so many different directions to go in. So at certain point I just have to choose. I really like this piece here. So I'm gonna just go for it and I'm gonna I actually like this little gold square and I'm just gonna cut this right here. And I'm gonna cut this to match. And I'm going to be careful not to cut through the layers. I could actually just pop this open flat. And again now that I have this open, every time I ship things I can look and see what I have that's different. And I'm just going to layer this in a way that just feels kind of natural. Now when we were doing strips, remember I just cut things willy-nilly. I didn't worry about cutting to match. When you start to cut and sew shapes together with improv you do something a little differently and you cut things to match like two puzzle pieces butting up together. This is the basic ruler free technique that you need to know and basically all you have to do you can use your scissors or you can use your rotary cutter as long as you can still fit the piece on your cutting mat, you can use your rotary cutter. So you're gonna cut layer right sides up and then cut to match. So you see how I'm going right through that curve and I can even clean it up a little as I cut it. And I've got a slight curve in there and so I'm gonna take this piece out and you see how these are really fit right up to each other like a puzzle piece. You see how their butted up. Now I'm also going to notice things like where things start and end, because this is good because this actually I'll probably trim that away. I don't have to add anything. I don't want to have any insets or partial seams. So if this was extended more let's say it was like out to here I may wanna think about adding something and actually that's kind of cool seeing it kind of out like that. So it makes me wonder maybe I might want to add a chunk of something here. I'm gonna do something like that. I have cut this to match already but this is still kind of in the flow of it and I wouldn't have to recut it too much. So just in terms of responding to the moment, I mean a big part of improv is being present and paying attention to everything you're seeing and responding in the moment. I'm gonna look and I'm gonna addition some neutrals to see what I like up there and see what kind of relationships are making. So every time you make a choice and make a decision in improv your trying to make a relationship. I kinda like that dark piece. One thing I like about it right away is that it picks up the neutrals in this, it also has a squared side. I mean this is just the natural shape of this scrap which I love working with natural shapes. Again, I feel like I'm in the flow when the patchwork is directing me. So I like how this fits kind of naturally. See how I turn that around. Like it actually looks like it was cut to match right there that happens all the time. That's called serendipity. You know another thing I like is how it picks out this yellow square which is one of the first things that I noticed that was exciting to me in this square piece. So actually I mean I could audition some other things. I mean there's the white. So I don't know but I like the black. I mean it's just sometimes first choice is best. So I've got that I want to put that there. I'm gonna have to put something here. I'm just gonna whack this off. I'm just gonna cut this one to have a smaller piece. I wanna cut it a little bigger than my black square. And again, I'm gonna try to



work in these other pieces. And the reason I'm not committing to this right now is because I don't want to have a partial scene. So I'm thinking about kind of this whole picture right now to just get this sewn into one piece here. I'm gonna have to make a couple more decisions. I'm gonna have to pick something to go right here and I'm going to have to figure out what's gonna go right here. You can use chunks of fabric, you can use strips to add and put around it or you could just use the pure strips, basically you can do anything you want. So you just have to decide. I'm gonna try to keep it simple. I tend to be somebody who's more complex in the way I put patterns together. And said sometimes I challenge myself to keep simple. So again you know you pay attention to your limits. I'm gonna put this to this and I'm going to line that edge up and again I'm going to cut to match. They're almost match already, but I will just make sure that they match exactly right again there's kind of a nice natural gentle curve in this. I'll kick away the little bit that I cut off and you can see that's a natural fit. Now this is there's something here hanging off and so I am gonna add a little strip and you know what? I think I'm just going to add a bright red just to put something different in it. I tend to like to have brights and unexpected things. So I'm going to just throw in a little piece of red here. Alright, I'm gonna start sewing. So let me get the Machine. I'm gonna kind of keep this to the side. (machine vibrating) I'm gonna cut this off first. I'm gonna press this and then I'm gonna seam this to the main piece. So now I'm gonna line this back up at the top again and you it's still cut to match and it'll be fine down here I think and if it doesn't I'll show you a trick on how to take out things that don't lie flat. I think it looks pretty good. So now I'm gonna flip right sides together and I don't really need to pin this but if this got bigger I would probably pin it. I don't want it to stretch out a shape just again pinning how much you pin depends on your own sense of your own level of skill. (machine vibrating) Alright, now I'm going to press this open. Before I go to the next step, I'm going to go ahead and trim off my filler fabric down here. A lot of times I trim it a little looser because I don't know what I'm going to sew on the other end and I can always clean it up later. Now I need to make some more decisions. We know this is gonna go up here. I really kind of like keeping this black and white or a high contrast with it. And it's so open it just feels so open right now. I want to try to keep that openness. I'm going to try not to get too busy 'cause I tend to like to get busy. I can look for natural fits here. You know again I'll audition some things and see what I like. Okay one thing I don't like about this, is I don't like the sharp angle. So one thing is I could recut this to keep that more open or I could look for another fit. When I turn it this way the fit looks a little bit better, although it's a little short. I also have to look at coloring. Let's see what it looks put this bright yellow in there and sometimes you know you just can fuss too much and you just be like whatever it doesn't make that make of a difference. But I kind of like this it looks like you know having that white keeps it nice and open. The line feels you know it doesn't feel awkward or cut off and it's pretty much a natural fit with the edge of this and so we get our natural lines. Now another move I might consider making, would be you know I could I could sew a bit of this red in there, if I wanted to make a little line and have this red connect up which is kind of exciting. It's like I can look at it this way and I can look at it this way. I kinda of like the red So I'm gonna do something a little crazy I don't often unsew things but I'm gonna just take this apart right here and I'm going to put this piece of red in. (machine vibrating) Then I iron it open. Alright now see what we got here. I'll put this under here. Every time you sew a quarter inch seam things get a little tighter you lose a 1/2 an inch. So I think about that a little bit as I'm sewing not in terms of precision but more just to make sure things are open. So if I know that this this little red thing is gonna get tighter, this red strip will get tighter once I sew that seam. And I'm also looking at this red. I think this is actually good. I like it right here. So I'm gonna use my tailors chalk and then I'm gonna mark right along that line; my

cutting line. Okay so now I can pull this out. I can see exactly where I need to cut where I cut to match. I'll cut right along that chalk line. Again another way would have been to just keep it on my mat and use the rotary cutter, and then it shows me where my starting sewing line is or you just use the scissors to cut it. But as the pieces get bigger, it's easier to do the chalk line I think. Now you can see when I flip to sew, there is a curve. It's pretty easy for me to navigate but again if it feels a little awkward for you especially if you have long pieces that you're joining, I often do this, I will take my chalk again and I will put cross marks with the chalk on my fabric to help me line things up when I sew. So now I can flip this and even though it seems very like oh how does it go. I have a couple of guidelines. You can use these cross marks and I can line them up. And that just gives me a little guide as I'm sewing. I'm demonstrating on a piece that it probably wouldn't naturally have to do, but if I get a lot bigger pieces, if I have big pieces that are the whole length of a quilt I must always do this and I pin it in place before I sew it. So now it's ready to sew okay most people advise that you pull pins out. I don't necessarily do but for safety reasons I'm going to pull them out. (machine vibrating) Let's iron. I have so many seams in this of course I want my seams going that way. Check out some of the strings. Does anybody see my Whoopie moment from earlier. There's my little seam but remember when I sewed that in backwards most people won't see that in the scheme of the quilt. We're gonna have this piece it's gonna come here and now we've got to figure out the last row. This is gonna go there. So what do I want to put up here? Let see here. Alright, I'm gonna audition a few things. I could look into putting this dark here. It's kind of the right length. It's not too bad I don't know. Let's see what happens if I turn it this way. I don't know it doesn't really do anything too exciting for me it's not bad but I'm not thrilled about it. Let me go back to my high contrast fabric. Let's bring this back in and I've already got a chunk of it here so let me see what happens if I just use. So the natural fit is this way. You see how this does not fit naturally at all and I like I tend to like to go with the natural fit. I could also do it this way. I really just have to make a decision. I think I'm going to keep it that way and then I think I'm going to take the high contrast again and... make it go the other way and get a little rail fence action going on. It's getting complicated. It's not too bad. It's kind of boring. I'm gonna try one more option and then I'm going to decide. So notice how overwhelmed you can get by the different options. So at some point you got to kinda stop and just be like make a decision. And you can see how improv can tell you a lot about the way you make decisions and choices. I wanted to try putting more black in. I kind of like the black. I'm gonna add more black. And as a challenge because I really wanted to use this piece I'm gonna put a little piece of this at the top I think. I'm not gonna put it there. I don't know if I want to put it in either. There needs to be something here that fills in. No, I'm just gonna keep it simple. I'm gonna add the red again up here or down here. I'm gonna add the red up here and then I'm gonna sew this to this and we'll do the more order of sewing. (machine vibrating) I think that's enough. So I'm just gonna cut this off. I think I need more than this. So now we're going to have our final order of sewing here. We're gonna have this go into this. That's a natural fit, so I'm gonna sew this to this. Before I iron, I'm going to go ahead and stitch this to this and you know I'm going to put this above make sure I have enough length. But it looks pretty good. Again it's a pretty natural fit. I don't really need to trim it before I sew it. So I'm just going to flip right sides together. (machine vibrating) Now I'm gonna iron the whole row. So I'm gonna line this up and I'm looking at all my segments now, this is probably going to overlap that a little bit. So I could position this as far down or as far up as I want. Its just as long as these things overlap. You can see how there is a difference you know there's this angle actually that works pretty well. Another great natural fit because this angles down as well. So I never really trimmed things up too much until you know the end because

you never know you know where you're gonna have a natural kind of curve. So I've decided I want a dark border around the edge. I'm working with strips that I already have cut they're a little narrow. So I'm going to sew two dark ones together to get a thicker one. (machine vibrating) So let's see what how these strips look. I'm gonna go with it like this and I'm looking this is a long strip. I see that it's got kind of a bulgy, a little bit bulgier there so it's a little wider. So I'm gonna go ahead and cut it at that level. Again I'm looking for natural fits. I'm just going to cut it off. Okay so again the order of sewing is changing a little bit I got to sew this to this before I sew that row together. So let's go ahead and do that. This looks pretty. Like it'll sew pretty well. So we're gonna just try it without cutting it to match and if there's any bubbles I'll show you how to take them out. So this fits really nicely. I'm gonna cut down here, you can see there's a piece here hanging off I'll just go ahead and cut that to get it out of my way. I'm gonna move this out of the way. So let's cut this to match. So it lines up so well, it has a great natural fit and flow. One thing that I really like about this is see the difference between that and that. I love how this beautiful piece vibrant piece kind of gets highlighted whereas here it blends in more but here the whole column stands out as a single piece just by that short little shift. And that wasn't really planned. It just happened that way but you know an intuitive level you see those things that you're not even aware of until sometimes after you've made the choice. So I'm gonna go ahead and cut this to match. See I have this line, I can cut this curve all the way through, slight curve. So if you want to you can put a few chalk lines to help you keep things registered. A lot of times I'll chalk right on the seams, on important seams. See that I don't have to put it on both sides and put on one side and know that I'm gonna match up a seam. I can do one here. Alright I'm gonna flip it right side together so again the improv rule is right sides up, cut to match like two pieces of a puzzle butting together and then you flip right sides together and sew your quarter inch seam. So now this time I'm lining up my chalk points with certain seams. So if you having problems with your stitches coming apart when you cross cut, then you might go with a smaller stitch length then you know the I need typically use the average which is 2 1/2 to three but if you're finding that that's not you're still having things come apart then you might go to a two or 1 1/2 you can make your lines tighter. So again pin as much as you need to support your best sewing The other thing to remember about improv is you come to improv with your own set of knowledge and skill set your own skill set of techniques, and all of that is you know fair game. It's not like you have to sew things the way I sew them. If you know certain techniques and you can do things if you can do in sets and you want to play with in sets on an improv piece then you can do partial seams and doing sets. Whatever techniques that you have from clothes sewing to patchwork, all of it is part of who you are and how you're going to improvise. So feel free to you know use your own type of techniques as you do as you do this. (machine vibrating) Alright, let's iron it and see how it looks. Wow I really love seeing these seams after that you commit. Once you've sown you've committed. And I really love what happens when this is getting sown. Look at the other neat relationships that came out. I love how this white kind of almost matches there. None of this was planned. And again this little offset so you get kind of a line that goes down there and then you've got this and you have these bleeds, so that the seam this straight seam is actually kind of hidden. Because all of a sudden your eye picks up this seam right or it picks up right here rather than this straight seam line. So we're on our last seam now and I'm really like how it's looking. This is the first relationship we made but it ended up being the last seam because we had to add all this other stuff. Alright, I'm gonna cut this to fit. Right up here though you see how this overlaps I should cut this to match. Actually I'm going to cut it to match over here but I'm going to not cut it to match here just to see what happens. Because sometimes you try to make something cut to match and it

just doesn't match. And then you sew it and you get a bubble. So let's see what happens. I'm so good at cutting things to match that's the way you should do it but I want to show you what happens if you forget to do it or you're cutting the match doesn't quite line up, then we'll show you how to fix the mistake. Okay, so I've cut it to match up there. You see right here I'm going to just trim this straight to this line. So I guess what I'm saying I'm intentionally making a mistake so I can show you how to fix a bubble that might occur if you you know if your alignment gets off or you don't quite cut things to match. So I'm kind of intentionally making a little mistake so I can show you how to correct it. So normally what I would do is I would cut this line right here all the way down but you see I'm gonna let it hang over. And I'm just gonna cut I'm just gonna sew it like this. And we'll see what happens when I do that. (machine vibrating) You can see it was easy to sew. It all looks lined up. So I'm gonna flip it over and look at it. So first thing I wanna do is I'm gonna trim this off. this is kind of just extra. So you can see here it's kind of subtle but this happens a lot. You see how because I did not cut this one edge to match, you can see now I have a bubble and either it's gonna bubble here or it's gonna bubble here. So I can take a seam to take that bubble out. The way I'm going to do that is I'm gonna make sure that I'm gonna basically take a dart. I'm gonna make sure that the piece is very flat. So I'm not gonna do it on the ironing board if it's bigger than the ironing board and this piece is. So I'm gonna have it on a flat surface and then I'm gonna see where this bubble naturally wants to go. It could go right here. That would be an easy place to take the seam that's going to curve the line a little bit more. The other way I could do it is where if I'd cut it to match in the first place it would have fallen it would have been right here. And it keeps it a little straighter. So I'll have to decide what I like better. I don't know if it makes a difference. This seems to be easier so I'm going to go with this one. So you can see how it has a natural place that it wants to fall. And it's right on the seam which is great. Sometimes you have to do a cross seam and that's okay too. What I'm gonna do is to do this I want to make sure my seams are in the direction opposite of the dart. So you can see that my seam under here is going this way. If it was the other way I would have to re iron it. So I'm going to go this way because it's going to be easier and it's going to be a lesser dart. So that's the natural fit for the dart. So that's what I was checking out. Now I'm gonna pin it, and then I'm gonna take it to the ironing board and I'm going to press it and I can even take the pins out at this point. So I'm gonna get a really crisp crease. I want to bring it back and I want you to see this crease. I'm gonna open it up, I'm gonna flip it this way. And you see the crease right there. So I'm gonna stitch right along this crease all the way to the point where it meets the seam. And the stitch line of the seam you see I did have to take a little nip there just so that I could open this up because of the direction that the seam was sewn in. So now I'm going to take this to the sewing machine and stitch right along that crease. I'm starting right along the stitch line and then I'm going to then start following the crease and stitch right along that crease line. (machine vibrating) So here is the new line of stitching. It's basically a dart on the seam. So let's take this to the ironing board and see if we got our bubble out. Nice and flat. No more bubbles. And can you even see where the dart was. It's right here. Now I'm going to flip it over and trim away the excess from that dart, back down to a 1/4 inch. So this piece is pretty much done except for the trimming up I don't really like to use a ruler to trim off and make my improv pieces squared up but you could do that if that's what you like. What I prefer to do is to just kind of go with the natural shape of it. So I'm going to trim it up there's a few awkward places I also like to turn it around and look at it in different angles as well, to get a good feel of what I've got. I'm gonna start the trimming. This side is pretty even so I'm going to come right here and just with my scissors I'm just eyeballing it and trying to cut off as little as possible. That looks pretty good to me. Now I'm gonna turn it this

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way and work on this edge. This I don't like I don't like how it flares out here, so I'm gonna just start with this kind of get it in. This natural curves not too bad so maybe I'll just clean it up a little bit and leave it. Let's go the other direction. Now I could decide if I want to bring this in a little bit but for now I'm going to leave it. This is a little bit strange right here so I'm going to start cutting this a little straighter and you see I can taper it off. And then this part curves out a little bit. So I'm gonna just keep cutting it kind of straightish to the point to this red point here. It looks pretty good. And then the last edge. Now I do notice that this piece really curves a lot on this edge. I'm going to go ahead and cut this off. So I feel if there's a couple awkward spots on it I think this is a little awkward right here. So I may just what could I do about that. I could decide to just trim it a little thinner right here, I think I'll do that. I don't really like how this comes up like that. So I'm gonna actually rip this seam out and then I can just take this and smooth it out a little bit more. I think that looks a little better. This piece could be like a baby quilt and running vertical it does have a bit of a slant on one side that's pretty pronounced but I like it. And who says it has to be all squared up. I kinda like the natural shape. I don't think it looks awkward at all. So let's do a little evaluation now. I'm gonna look and see what surprised me. What did what happened that was unexpected. What did I discover or learn. What was satisfying and possibly what is dissatisfying. I have to say that I don't think there's anything I'm dissatisfied with which is great. I am very satisfied with how open and unfussy it looks. Sometimes I can overwork things. I feel very satisfied that I reached a personal goal and one of my personal goals is to keep things simple. What surprised me is just the color looks fabulous. I didn't have any plan I didn't have any idea you know what would go with the segment that we pieced today, and I'm really happy with how the bold, high contrast sets off the it's a little bit of contrast but a lower contrast that has more of a glow. And then these kind of whiter harsher things with bits of bright color really nicely frame these glowing pieces and allows it to glow. I like the offset of where the borders are. You feel like there's a bit of a border here and a bit of a border here and then you've got this thin border here that looks nice. And you know it is what it is. Sometimes I love the pieces I make and sometimes I hate them I love this one which is great but even if I hate it, it would be okay because it's just one step in the process. So evaluate it, enjoy the process and take whatever you learned into your next improv project.