

Frogging

My hands cramped as I struggled to use muscles that felt like they've never been used before. The dexterity in my fingers were clearly lacking and I had never felt so useless. The video kept repeating, "Make a slipknot. Put the hook through and tighten the loop. Then yarn over and pull through to make a chain." It was half gibberish and nonsense to me, and I understood almost nothing. The YouTube video I watched had made it look so simple but here I was now, breaking a sweat over yarn and a crochet hook. It was at this point I started doubting my sudden want to learn how to crochet. Maybe this was just too difficult, and I should find a different hobby. Music maybe? How about painting instead?

Some part of me couldn't give up though despite the clear lack of natural ability. I had invested my money into it already by purchasing three giant balls of yarn, a hook set, and yarn needles, and I was determined to learn how to crochet and join the fiber art community. It was March of 2020 after all and with the world in quarantine, it seemed like the perfect challenge to tackle to help mitigate the isolation. After countless tries and playing twister with my fingers, I was finally able to make my first chain! In crochet, a chain is a foundation row of stitches that form a chain-like pattern hence the name. With that win on my shoulders, it was time to tackle something far more difficult: the tank top.

Crochet is truly like a second language filled with abbreviations and terms I'd never heard of. Different yarn weights are called different things such as weight four yarn is referred to as worsted weight and weight three is dk which stands for double knitting. On top of all that, there's different terms for different countries! A single crochet stitch in America is referred to as a double crochet stitch in the United Kingdom so you can imagine the confusion that ensues when you're trying to read a written pattern. One of the terms that stay consistent no matter where you are though is the term "frogging". What does that even mean? Is my yarn going to magically turn green? Do I have to leap over hurdles to finish my project? Nope, it's none of those things. "Frogging" is the term used when you must rip back

your work like when you've missed a stitch or messed up part of the pattern. It comes from crocheters saying "rip it rip it" which then turns into "frogging". And boy did I do a LOT of frogging with this tank top.

In hindsight, crocheting a tank top is one of the easiest items you could make. It consists of a simple rectangle using back and forth rows. There's no increasing or decreasing stitches and it's just a repetitive motion. Of course, this is all information I know now after years of practice but back then I didn't know the first thing about yarn or yarn fiber, so I used an acrylic yarn to make a summer tank top. Only later I would figure out through online discourse communities, that acrylic makes you sweat as a synthetic fiber so making a summer top out of it was asinine. The easy rectangle somehow turned into a trapezoid shape, and it was filled with holes from missed stitches. I was disappointed in myself but then I remembered I could always frog it and redo it. Each time I ripped back my work, I learned one more thing about this complicated fiber art.

Despite the learning curve, the crochet community is extremely welcoming and helpful. There are podcasts and YouTube video tutorials dedicated to spreading the craft and teaching as many people as possible which is how I learned. Facebook is littered with specialized groups and there's a real effort to community build. Crochet-a-longs, or CALs as they're abbreviated, exist so a group of crocheters can all work on the same pattern at the same time and feel a sense of togetherness. Local yarn shops and festivals are plentiful and filled with smaller independent businesses that dye their yarn by hand. There's a thriving discourse community filled with all ages, genders, and people alike. With that, there are also shared values within the crochet community.

As I explored more into the community, I felt like my values really aligned. There's an emphasis on sustainability and ethical practices and consumption. Since it takes so long to make the clothing, crochet is a great way to participate in the slow fashion movement where

quality over quantity is preferred. Handmade clothing, or “me made” clothing, is seen as very special since we all collectively know how much time and effort (and frogging!) went into making just one piece. I’ve always been drawn to textiles and fiber crafts not just to learn but also to join a community of shared values.

Through crochet, I learned the importance of failing. I failed a lot at first, missed stitches, and miscounted rows but through frogging, I grew comfortable at ripping back my work. Failing doesn’t mean it’s the end of the story but instead a learning moment that will make me a better crocheter in the end. I myself grew up with a lot of shame associated with failing and thinking that it means you should give up on whatever you’re doing. Only pure talent deserved to keep trying and any bit of failure meant you just weren’t cut out for it and shouldn’t try again. Crochet prioritized practice and repetition. It didn’t matter if you messed up, you could always frog it and give it another shot.

That hole filled misshapen first tank top gave me the foundation and confidence to create my own complicated sweater pattern. I was able to go from a simple rectangle to complex shaping and stitches all through the process of frogging and redoing. Sweaters, hats, and scarves came easily to me as I gained more knowledge. Even with more experience and projects under my belt, I still frog many mistakes to this day. It’s a special thing when you can take a quality in a niche category and apply it to the rest of your life and that’s exactly what crochet taught me. As a consequence of the crochet discourse community, not only did I broaden my mindset on failure but found comfort in like-minded individuals with shared values.

MEMO

1) what you wanted to accomplish with this Portrait

With this portrait, I wanted to explain how the term frogging in crochet not only helped me learn the craft better but also helped me apply it to other parts of my life. I also wanted to show the community that is built around crochet.

2) what you think is working well on this draft

I think there's a good flow and main point to the draft and not much rambling. I feel as though it is concise and shows the story of learning how to crochet and the effects of it.

3) what you're worried about or think you might need help with.

I think I need help with paragraph organization or adding in specific details. I would like to be more descriptive and use imagery more.