

LIVING

She learned to crochet while grieving her newborn son

Teaching the craft has since become a business – and a way to help other parents.



Judah David Creations owner Darice Oppong shows team members from the nonprofit Resilient Middle Georgia a single crochet stitch in a beginner crochet class in Macon. The business is named after her son, who lived for less than a week after being born premature and weighing just 1 pound, 9 ounces. PHOTOS BY KATIE TUCKER/THE TELEGRAPH

By Katharine Tucker • The Telegraph

Darice Oppong never saw herself crocheting as a job. Less than two years ago, she didn't know how to crochet at all. But, while overseeing a beginner crochet class in Macon in December, Oppong taught nine women a skill set they could transform into anything they wanted.

The 28-year-old began her part-time crochet business, Judah David Creations, in January 2024 after prematurely giving birth to her son, Judah David Oppong, in April 2023. He lived in the neonatal intensive care unit at Beverly Knight Olson Children's Hospital in Macon less than a week before dying.

"I feel like crochet is a metaphor for life," Oppong said to her class while holding and slowly tugging at the end of a blue ball of yarn. "Your life might feel like a tangled ball of yarn, but if you just take one stitch at a time, eventually you can make something beautiful."

After Judah's death, while she grieved and looked for a way to stay busy, Oppong learned how to crochet. What began as a casual hobby has grown into a career that Oppong never saw for herself. She also now teaches the creative outlet that helped her mourn her son to other parents with babies in the same NICU ward where her son was a patient.

"I feel like, more than anything, it's not just crochet that I sell," Oppong said. "I feel like I sell hope."

Oppong always felt she would serve people in some way professionally. She studied public health at Mercer University and planned to go to medical school, then worked in community outreach for a Macon-based clinic. Although she enjoyed the work, the job was a large undertaking and required her to travel across the state. She felt burnt out and decided to quit at the end of 2022.

When Oppong quit her clinic role, she found out she was pregnant the next day.

Oppong began experiencing complications in the middle of her pregnancy, was put on bed rest for four weeks, and went into pre-term labor at 24 weeks. Her son was born prematurely on April 23, 2023, weighing 1 pound, 9 ounces. After Judah was born, doctors told Oppong and her husband that they wanted to keep him in the NICU for the next three months.

"People prepare you for having a baby. No one really prepares you for having a baby and then leaving the baby. It was really disorienting for me," Oppong said.

She said her Christian faith allowed her to remain hopeful. She even set up a 24-hour Zoom call with friends and family to pray virtually. She said she had constant reassurance from those



Darice Oppong demonstrates one method for how to complete a slip knot during a crochet class for parents of children in the neonatal intensive care unit at the Beverly Knight Children's Hospital in Macon.

close to her that Judah would survive, with little mention of what would happen if he didn't.

"I think in the moment, especially as Christians, we tend to romanticize or ignore reality for the sake of faith. I think faith is faith when you actually know that things are hard," Oppong said. "In this season, God really taught me, call it what it is. He's little. This is hard."

After three days, Oppong said that Judah's health declined. He died on April 28 after living for five days.

"We took him off all the things and were able to hold him and it was so sad, so incredibly sad ... I was very confused in so many ways," she said. "I've always been a person that's pretty positive and optimistic."

For Mother's Day 2023, only a few weeks after losing Judah, Oppong posted a black and white picture on Instagram of her silhouette while pregnant along with a short passage she wrote the day after her son's death.

"His body is still and his hands are white. This is death ... I've never really seen it this close. In a way, it's actually very peaceful," she said. "If (God) chooses to let death happen then it must be for a reason. ... So rather than running from it, I feel like he's asking me to lean into it. Lean into the weakness, the brokenness, the tragedy and very soon

beauty will rise from the ashes."

Starting Judah David Creations

After Judah's death, Oppong said she "took the rest of 2023 off," and felt depressed and unsure of what the next step was.

Her husband had bought her a beginner crochet kit with all the supplies she needed, but in the hardship of the weeks after, she didn't take the time to learn a new skill.

But for the next six months, all she did was crochet, teaching herself through YouTube tutorials.

"Everyday, I just crocheted. I would just crochet not knowing what it would look like at the end, not knowing what it would be, not knowing what it would come out to," she said. "But I would just be consistent in doing that."

After four months, Oppong completed her first blanket and made a few pairs of crochet earrings for friends. Almost immediately, people messaged her asking to make them something. It sparked the first thought that she could crochet as a business.

Oppong said she originally had hesitations about starting a shop that stemmed from a hobby she learned in her grief, and she wondered whether it would be profitable from her pain. But the thought of naming the business after her son felt like a way to honor Judah David in a new way.

For the first few months of business, Oppong only worked on selling handmade crocheted pieces, such as bags, earrings, ear warmers and other products. She attended local artist markets such as the Wesleyan Market.

As the business grew, Oppong said it was a struggle to keep up with inventory with just one person. It sparked an idea to fulfill one of the requests of the market attendees – teach people how to make her crocheted products and incorporate it into her business.

"When I started my crochet shop, I remember thinking like, because there's so many crocheters online, how am I going to stand out amongst the plethora of people? But I thought, I don't know any crocheters here in Macon," she said. "I don't know anyone local who's teaching here."

She began teaching beginner crochet classes at the Macon yarn shop Farmhouse Fibers, not even a year after initially learning how to crochet herself. Now, she said her classes make up around 80% of the revenue for the business.

Helping other NICU parents

In the spring of 2024, Oppong collaborated with Chandra Albritton, a licensed professional counselor who works with families and children at the children's hospital, on creating a support group for NICU parents and incorporating

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ing crochet into the group. The first NICU support group met in August 2024.

"The main benefit of this support group ... is to let them know during their hospital stay with their sick babies that there's someone here who's also concerned about what they're going through," said Albritton. "With Darice ... she fully understands what that loss feels like."

Parents visiting their children in the NICU are invited to come to the group, which meets twice a month. Oppong teaches her beginner crochet class while movie plays in the background for those who just want to sit in.

In a recent feedback survey, support group members shared their feelings about the benefit of having something to do while in NICU.

"I loved being able to work on something during my time away from my little girl's bedside. The caring and compassion of all involved made me feel comfortable in the uncertainty," one parent said in the survey.

"Darice is an amazing individual and so was everyone in this group," another group member said. "Scratch that, it wasn't ... a group, it's a family."

Oppong now works on Judah David Creations part time while also working for nonprofit Resilient Middle Georgia. In December, she completed her master's degree in organizational leadership and still serves as a praise and worship leader at her church.

She juggles a lot and admits that her life now is not what she expected just a few years ago.

"I love sharing my story because it brings me healing, validates others' feelings, and carries on the legacy of my son," she said. "I will never tire of repeating it."