A Flower In The Box

Xin Yin

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A Flower In The Box

By

Xin Yin

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Committee Approval

Brian Larson, Chair
Date
Assistant Professor
School of Film and Animation

Tom Gasek,
Date
Assistant Professor
School of Film and Animation

Mark Reisch
Date
Lecturer
School of Film and Animation
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Abstract

*A Flower In The Box* is an animated graduate thesis film with a total timescale of 7 minutes and 13 seconds.

This is a film about my grandma and me. When I was young, I spent a lot of time with my grandma. She was a very important person to me in my life. She loved me very much and did many things for me. For example, she used to tell me a lot of stories before going to bed when I was very young. I still remember them today. They brought me a lot of imagination and inspiration. My grandma influenced me deeply. Many hobbies of mine are because of her. I love to sew, because she used to make dresses and clothes for me so sewing has become one of my passions. She also taught me how to cut beautiful paper into artwork, and cooked delicious food for me. So I think that my love for art and cooking is also because of her. In the film, I didn't want to talk about her influence on me. I focused on the happiness she brought to me. I showed these personal memories in my film through a girl growing up. The memory part in the film was more like a little girl’s imagination or dream instead of a realistic memory. I dreamed about her a lot since she passed away. I combined the dreamy imagination and my memories together.

The film is a hand-drawn animation that was produced primarily in TVPaint Animation Software and After Effects Software.
This paper outlines the entire film creation process from the idea development to the final postproduction stage. It describes all my intentions, obstacles, failures and successes, as well as technical specifics of the process.
Acknowledgement

First I would like to thank my grandma. The love that I gained from her was the soul of this film. Professor Brian Larson is the second person I want to thank. He is my thesis advisor and chair at the School of Film and Animation. I respect his knowledge about animation and when I produced my thesis film, I always obtained many great ideas and advice from him. He found some great reference films for me, and I gained inspirations from them. He also supervised my production schedule so that I could finish my film on time. I am very thankful to Professor Tom Gasek and Professor Mark Reisch, my thesis committee members, they brought many valuable suggestions and feedback about my thesis. In addition, I would like to thank to my composer, Royal Teague, who is talented, smart and patient. I am very satisfied with the music he did for my film. He understood my film deeply and did the music efficiently in a short time. And also, I am grateful that Professor Skip Battaglia could respond to my film. He gave such a great speech on the screening day.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents, my family and my friends. They gave me a lot of love and support so that I could have energy to finish this film. I am extremely grateful to them!
Introduction

The making of the graduate thesis film “A Flower In The Box” began in August 2012 and lasted until May 2014 as a final project within the MFA animation program at the School of Film and Animation of Rochester Institute of Technology. The entire work was done under the supervision of my thesis committee members, Brian Larson, Tom Gasek and Mark Reisch. The whole process consisted of:

1. Preproduction: story development, development of visual style, storyboard and animatic
2. Production: key frames, in-betweens and inking, coloring and background painting
3. Postproduction: editing, visual effects, music and sound effects

I had three goals for my thesis film. First, I wanted to direct a good animation film with all my knowledge of animation that I learned during these years in RIT. Secondly, I wanted to achieve improvement on dealing with the rhythm of story telling. And third, I wanted to design a beautiful film with my own style.
Preproduction

Development of story

- What is the best idea?

A good thesis idea is difficult to develop. The best way is to compare ideas and choose one that will motivate you to work on it. Then after all the thinking process the best idea wins. When I prepared the thesis film, I had been thinking for a long time. I had a lot of ideas, but I was not satisfied with any of them. In 2012 I took part in the Big Apple program with professor Tom Gasek. We had a thesis preparation class. We talked about the thesis ideas in the class, and we discussed them with our classmates. At the beginning, I had one blurred idea in my mind. It was a story about a guy who, while travelling, meets a big rabbit in a cabinet during his trip. In my mind there were some dreamy pictures that were interesting. I shared this idea in the classroom. Tom said he couldn't understand this story. He asked what was the theme of this story. Actually, I did not understand it either. I tried to make the story integrated. But I just couldn't make any sense of it. So I gave up this idea. Then I had another one. It was a dark fairy tale. In the meanwhile, Brian Larson agreed to be my thesis advisor. As distance being a problem, I contacted him by emails. I wrote down the story treatment and emailed him, shortly after I got his feedback.

I like the idea, but it needs to be refined. Put the paragraph about it being dark and stylistic in the 'Rationale' section. Mention that you want to explore this theme and push your abilities in color, texture and visual language.
The story itself is fine, maybe a little weak and a little hard to get without an explanation. But more importantly, you don’t need ANY of the talking!! Let this be told visually through action, acting, pace, color and character. The visuals can explain the whole thing, the words, as you have them, simply repeat what is already being shown. Work on the ending, make it stronger and more to the idea that danger comes in different forms and safety does as well.

Brian

I tried to make the story better. But I still wasn’t convinced. If I cannot make myself satisfied with the story, how can any audience like it? Eventually, I lost my passion and moved on to my next idea.

At that time my grandma had just passed away, I missed her so much. One day I dreamed about her. In the dream, she kept disappearing, and I was looking for her everywhere. The feeling was like I was Alice from “Alice in Wonderland”. So I told myself, “why don’t I make a film telling a story about my grandma and me?” I really wanted to write about this feeling. Finally, I decided it was going to be the theme of my thesis film. I e-mailed Brian this idea. After some changes, I finished the thesis proposal and passed the thesis proposal meeting.

• How did the story become integrated?

The process of creating a story is like building a house. Foundation, structure, furniture and decorations are needed fundamentals. The order of these elements is extremely important, and following this order helped me to make the story clear.
First, I needed to have a solid foundation, if I wanted to build a firm house. The main idea of the story is the foundation. What should I tell? What should I express? I asked myself. It was a really tough time for me because I was going through a very difficult time. I was very sad all the time. My best friend’s father passed away only six months before my grandma, and another good friend’s mother was suffering from terminal cancer. I wondered how people could get out of their misery after their family disappeared from their lives and never came back. I did not have a good answer. When my grandma passed away, I told myself that I should be strong and happy, because that’s what she would have wanted me to be. She loved me, and her spirit would continue to love me even if she was gone. The beautiful memories between us always kept me warm and made me strong. This was the only way that I could feel better. I wanted to make a film to remember the stories about my grandma and me. In addition, I hoped that my film could comfort the people who lost their loved ones and myself.

Building off this foundation, I needed to add structure. After I decided the theme of the story, I started writing. First, I followed the idea of my dream about my Grandma. In my dream, I always sought my grandma, and my grandma always disappeared. The environments always changed as well. It was kind of hide-and-seek game. I liked the hide-and-seek theme as a part of my animation, because the dreamy style could let me play with my imagination. Interest was very important to me, so that I could keep my passion on the production process. So I prioritized this part in my film. Then I considered the rule of a story. In a story, the beginning part should be a problem. And then something changes, and at the end there is the solution. After a long time thinking, I had a simple idea, which
was about an unhappy girl becoming happy. The girl’s memories about her grandma resolved the problem. After deciding upon this, the basic structure was clear. The film would consist of three parts, which were the depressed girl section, the memory section, and the happy girl section.

I got the structure of the story, and then I needed to put the real content in it. The real content was the furniture of a house. I collected some memories that were the happy moments with my grandma when I was young. She did so many things for me. She told me interesting stories. She made me beautiful clothes. She cooked me delicious food. She taught me different kinds of artwork. I exaggerated these memories, so that the second section looked fun instead of boring. I scaled the items related in each memory. For example, in the grandma sewing part, the needles and the thread in the background were much bigger than the character. Also, I used a magic way to show how the stories that were told by the grandma were amazing. I let the animals in the story get out of the book, and they interacted with the characters. To connect the realistic part and the memory part, I created an area, which had a tree. This area contained many things that belonged to the girl and her grandma. When the depressed girl came to the tree, she remembered something about her grandma. My goal was to show the audience that the tree area was the trigger of the girl’s memories. How could I do that? To answer that question, I put the tree in each memory.

However, all these memories might have not resolved the problem, which was the girl’s depression. I needed a trump card. Luckily, I did not spend a long time to figure it out. It just came to me by itself, like destiny. A special leaf
suddenly popped out in my mind, when I thought about one memory section in the film. In that scene, the grandma was sitting under the tree and cutting the paper artwork. The dead leaves were falling down from the tree above her. It seemed sad. The girl finally found her grandma, and realized that she was really old, just like the winter tree was. They both had lost their energy and transmitted a feeling of sadness. The grandma noticed the girl’s feelings. So she made that special leaf for her granddaughter whom she loved very much. She cut the leaf into the shape of a beautiful flower. It meant that any bad thing could become something good, if you had a positive attitude. That was what the depressed girl needed in the first section. Even though the grandma passed away, she left many treasures to the girl. The special leaf was one of them. That made the girl stronger. Therefore, the initial problem was fixed, the girl cheered up.

The last step was the decorations, which made the house glow. In my opinion, the decorations for a story are the details. I heard that good movies are worth watching a million times. I agree with this statement. Usually, good movies have nice details. If the film is filled with many great details, the audience will not understand everything at once. They will have to watch the movie over and over again and every time they will discover something new. The details can bring the audience new feelings. The details could be items or props in the scenes. The details could also be meaningful colors in the background. Take my film as an example. My film had several details that proved important to the story; the tree colors, the memories, and the changes in the design of the girl. The tree in different sections had different colors. In the memory part of the film, the tree changed with three colors. It started with green that meant spring. Then it
changed to pink that meant summer. After the pink flowers were gone, fall came.
So the tree became orange. At last, all the leaves of the tree were gone, because
winter arrived. All the changes showed that the time passed by. The girl grew up
and her grandma got older. And when the leaves were completely gone, it
indicated the grandma's life was ended. I think these details make my story full
and more interesting.

To finish the final version of the story it took me a lot of time. I added and cut
plots constantly. Some ideas were good, but they were not necessary for the
story, so I got rid of them. Otherwise the story would be tedious. For example, in
my proposal, there were four parts in the memory section. After the discussion
with Brian Larson, both of us believed that the film would be too long and three
memories were enough to state the story clearly. So I compared them, chose one
and deleted it. The one that I had decided to delete was the one about that the
grandma cooking for the girl. The reason I deleted this one was there was no
interesting point in this part. There is a famous film director in China, called
Wong Kar-wai. He is known to work in a laggard way on scripts. Sometimes there
is no script at all. He starts to think about the plot during the shooting of the film.
I was not crazy as him. But I did change many plots while I produced the
animation. In the proposal and the first version of my storyboard, there was a
swing chair under the tree. When I was about to embark on the animation, I
thought if I changed the chair to be a round stone bench around the tree, it would
be clearer to state the story and easier to do the animation. So I changed it. In a
word, any plot and detail should serve for the story and the theme.
The original idea of the chair (Picture was from first version of storyboard)

Final design was a bench around the tree. (Picture was from final film)
Development of visual style

Development of visual style

Design style comes from life. My thesis design was influenced from many different styles that combined together became my own style. It was a long process. My film style consists of all the things that I love in my life. Everything around me affects my style and me. I might have different styles when I am in different stages of my life. Each style is complex. It comes from every aspect of my life, such as music, fashion, painting, books, movies, travel, food, friends and family. The latest style of my work reflects my latest interests and life style. For example, in my film, my own clothes influenced the clothes of the girl. I was infatuated with a fashion brand called Madewell. There was a kind of dress that attracted me because it was simple and classic. I had many dresses with the same look but different colors. I loved this dress so much to the point that when I designed the character, I made the girl a similar dress. From micro perspective, animations and artworks that I liked influenced my film style directly. I adore the Japanese animation director, Hayao Miyazaki. His movies are filled with love and compassion. His film, "Spirited Away", is one of my favorite animation films, particularly because of the character Yubaba, which left a lasting impression to me. The image of her big head, big nose and overweight body are deeply in my mind. When I design an old lady, I always think about the look of Yubaba. I also love Disney’s animation. The characters of Disney’s films are usually realistic. They are cartoony, but follow the proper human anatomical structure.

Besides the big studios’ animation, there are many new and great small animation studios and independent animation artists’ animations, such as
Headless production, We Think Things studio. Before my thesis film, I watched many good animations on Vimeo, which is a video website. Headless production’s animations were stunning. Their characters were graphic and simple, I loved their style so much, and I learned a lot from their animations.

Yubaba in film Spirited Away

Disney film Princess and Frog

Characters design by Headless production
It seems that concept design is relaxed and flexible. However, designing a film is not limitless. I also had to follow rules.

Design serves the story. This was the rule. It means that the design should help to show the story. In my study at RIT, I learned that shapes and colors, which are the elements of design, have their own language. Different shapes and colors represent different meanings. Circle shapes are usually friendly and safe; triangle shapes are evil and dangerous; square shapes are strong and slow. The colors also have delicate meanings to show different personalities and moods. For example, dark colors are dangerous and serious; pink is seen to be a girlish color; grey can represent a sad mood. Knowing well about the shape and color language is very helpful for character design and background design. When I designed the characters and backgrounds, I always kept this rule in mind. In my film, there were three big sections. In the first section, the girl was sad. It was raining and gloomy weather, so the color in this part was grey. In the next part we passed into the girl’s memories, which were happy ones, so this part was colorful. Then the last section, the girl became happy so there was a transition from gray to colorful. The weather became sunny and beautiful so the color changed from grey to bright as well. The changes of the color told the story well and clearly.
Production time decides how simple or complicated a design should be. Because of limited time, I had to simplify my design. At the beginning, I thought about the characters’ outlines and shadows. I tested different approaches for one character. And the result showed that the characters with no outline and with shadows were amazing. The shadows made the visual more delicate and emotional. I saw on Vimeo a great movie called “Annie” which inspired me deeply. The characters of this film were without outline style and I was curious to learn how to make it. I left a message on Vimeo to the animator; Chloe Nicolay, to see if she would have been willing to share some ideas. A couple days later, I got her reply.

Hi Xin!

Thank you so much! It's really nice of you :)

We used TV Paint animation, to animate AND to color everything. At first we wanted to animate on paper, and some of the animations were made that way, but we realized it was a lot more convenient and fast to do everything on TV Paint. It's quite easy to use; maybe there are some tutorials online.

Well there is a special plugin on TV Paint that can automatically paint the lines the same color as the "filling" color (you always need to go back on it to correct stuff manually though). But again, we realized it was even faster to just color the lines 100% manually. When you clean your animation, you use only black, and then you activate the alpha to protect the blank zones on your Line layer, then you color the line any color you like.

Hope it's clear enough!

Good luck with your thesis movie!

Chloe
I was not expecting that she would reply to me so quickly. I appreciated that she took the time to talk to me and teach me so many details. Her input helped me a lot, and it saved me a lot of time trying different methods. I was excited to make my drawings outline-less style and shadow for my film. However, at that time I still did not know how long it would take me to finish. In the 2014 spring semester, I was on the cleaning up stage for my film. At the same time I had an internship in King-Size USA Inc. They asked me to do an animation teaser for their pitch. I used the outline-less way to color the animation in TVpaint. Six seconds animation (three characters) it took me days to color. At that moment I realized that I could not apply the same way to my thesis film. It was not doable in a short time. I gave up the ideas of outline-less way to color the animation, and also I abandoned the idea of drawing shadows as well.

• **Character Design**

There were two main characters in the film, a girl and her grandma. Because this was a story about my grandma and me, I considered my grandma and me as references. I thought about the production time and made the design simple and doable.

**The girl**

During the story, the girl was showed in different stages. So I had to design the girl in different ages. It was a challenge. First, I decided to design one age of the girl. I chose the 20 year old girl as the first design. I drew many sketches and picked up one that I liked the most. I cleaned up the sketch and colored it. I showed it to Brian. In his opinion, the girl looked older than a 20-year-old girl. I
designed the girl thinner and changed her pants to a dress to make her look younger. After the changes, I still did not like the design. I thought it was boring, and it was too common. I wanted the character to look special otherwise I would lose my passion while I animated it. Then I gave her a big red nose. I loved it. However, there remained a question about how I would keep the girl looking like the same person. In my opinion, keeping design consistency was the key point. So I used the same color for the girl's dresses, and kept her in the same hairstyle. In the original story, the girl had a bag to contain a box that had a special leaf in it. Considering production time, I decided to design a hidden pocket on the girl's dress instead of the bag. Otherwise, I would have to animate the bag as a secondary motion item. It would be too much work. For the color, I gave the girl dark hair and dark eyes since I was the reference of the girl. I chose red for her dress because the red could stand out in the background and I wanted to highlight the girl as the main character.

The grandma

My grandma had a round head and round nose and she always wore a knit hat during the cold weather. She was a little bit over weight. So I used the circle as her basic shape. In the story, the grandma was warm and sweet. All the memories of the girl were happy with her. According to the shape language; circles represent warm, comforting, approachable images, much like my grandma. To make sure the designs of the grandma and the girl were the same style, I gave the grandma a red nose as well. In the original design, the grandma wore a hat. But in the story, there were four seasons. Wearing a hat all the year was a little bit weird. So eventually I got rid of it.
The character with shadow
Old design version of the grandma and the girl

The girl in different ages

Other characters

Besides the human characters, the film had three animals, a butterfly, a rabbit and a deer. They were showed in little parts of the film. I did not make a lot of effort on the designs of them. The only thing I cared about was that they should be cute. Acting cute was their function in the film. And according to the
story, the animals were made from grandma’s magic. I chose the orange as the color of the grandma’s magic color, so the animals’ were orange too.

• **Background Design**

The film had a realistic part and a memory part. In the realistic part, I designed a farm as the environment. The main location was around a tree on a little hill in the farm. The tree was the significant symbol. It indicated the connection between the girl and her grandma. It was also the main location of the whole film. The entire story in the film happened around the tree. For the convenience of the story, I designed a tree with a stone bench around it. The original idea came from my memories. In my hometown, there were similar trees on the mountain. When I was young, I used to go there with my family. I also found photos as references. The color in this part were grey, because the raining weather and the depressed mood of the girl. And I also designed a colorful version for the farm that was used for the end of the film where the weather was sunny and the girl became happy.

![The reference and the design of the tree](image)

My dreams gave me the inspiration for the memory sections of the film. In my dream, the environment looked like in a space, which was wide, dark and
illusory. I developed my imagination where the story needed it. According to the story, I designed three parts. The first part was the grandma telling stories to the little girl. Usually, my grandma told me stories at night before I went to sleep. So I designed this part in a dark space. There was a big book in the space to relate the theme. The second part was the grandma sewing a dress for the girl. In this part, the sewing materials were designed giant to build the dreamlike atmosphere. The third part was the grandma disappearing part, which was the peak of the story. I used a lot of orange that represented grandma’s love in the film. In general, the memory part was colorful, because the girl spent many happy moments with her grandma. It contrasted sharply with the realistic part.

**Storyboard and Animatic**

- **Storyboard**

  Storyboards achieved the first look of the story. First, I drew all the images out from my head. And then I added more details and adjusted the camera’s angles. I watched the first draft storyboard, and thought all the camera angles were too flat. It might be too boring to the audience. I showed my storyboard to Brian and told him about my thoughts. He did not agree with my concerns. On the contrary, he thought the camera angles were fine. Weird or odd cameras angles would not match with the type of my film. My film was a sweet and warm family story instead of a crux play or a horror film. So the normal camera angle was enough to tell the story well. So I learned that everything in the film should serve for the story.
• Animatic

The Animatic connects all the storyboards into a timeline. Timing was the key point in this step. Controlled rhythm was very helpful to express the theme of the film. For the specific type of my thesis story, I believed that slowing down the timing was the primary tip. Longer timing gave the audience a chance to get into the mood of the film. I used After Effect software to edit the storyboards together. At this animatic stage, the timing was not the final time lock. It was an important guide for me to produce every shot.
Production

At the beginning of 2013, I finished the animatic. It was time to do the animation. Before the start, I was thinking about the methods of doing animation. I had two choices. One was to draw it on paper. Another one was to draw it on the computer. I thought my thesis film might be the last film that I directed. After graduation, I probably would work in an animation company so that I could not use the traditional way to animate any more. Therefore, I decided to draw the animation on paper.

Key Frames

My first step was to create the key frames. I applied all the knowledge that I learned when I animated. I kept all the animation principles in my mind, such as timing, spacing, squash, stretch, weight, volume and so on. I also wrote them down on a paper and stuck it on the wall near my desk, so it could remind me all the time.
That spring quarter was tough. Besides my thesis film, I also took two classes, which were Acting for Animation and 2D Computer Animation. Both of the classes had many assignments. In addition, animating on paper was inefficient because of the complex process. For those reasons, I could not achieve the goal of completing all the key frames. After the discussion of the committee meeting, Tom suggested me to take one credit in the summer otherwise I would fail the Thesis class. I took his advice, and finally abandoned the paper-way of animating.

In the summer of 2013, I went to a school called Gnomon, to study Anatomy and Painting classes in LA. At the same time, I worked on key frames of my thesis film. I wound up animating digitally using TVPaint software. Finally, I finished all the key frames at the end of summer.

**In-Betweens and Inking**

In 2013 fall, I got an internship opportunity in a company, King-Size USA in NYC. They allowed me work on the project in Rochester. That was a good opportunity, so I could work on my thesis film at home as well.

I took a long time to finish doing in-betweens, because the key frames were too rough. Sometimes I had to redraw the key frames. In addition, there were extra animations such as the movement of the character's hair in the wind. And also, I had to animate some background. For example, the giant book was closed while the girl rode the magic deer. That book was a part of the background that
had some textures. For this case, I had to draw the animation in Photoshop and added the textures in every frame.

In the meantime, I did inking. I inked the animation as soon as I finished in-betweens of each scene. After finishing each scene, I put it into After Effects to edit sequence scenes together so that I could check the timing. I made sure the entire scenes could connect to each other well. If not, I would fix them.

**Coloring**

Coloring was a super easy and a relaxed process for me. I did it fast, and I even did not think about anything. The only annoying thing was that I had to make sure all the outlines were closed. If the outlines were not closed, I needed to fix them. Otherwise, the bucket tool used for coloring would not work.

I also colored the outlines. After some tests, I thought that brown outlines looked better than the black ones. The characters with brown outlines could be in harmony with backgrounds. So I decided to change them. Thanks to the great function of TVPaint, it was easy to change.

**Background Painting**

Usually, background painting belongs to the preproduction stage. But I did not have enough time to do the pre-production and I had to paint backgrounds at this step. Unfortunately, at this time, I did not have much time left at this point. So I asked some friends who were Angela Song, Jieting Chen and Serina Mo to help
me out. They were talented and did a good job on my backgrounds. But their styles and my style were different, even though I had given them a sample to guide the style. So I still needed to change the backgrounds a little bit by myself. Anyway, they were very helpful. I really appreciated their work.

Some backgrounds from the film
Postproduction

Editing

The Editing stage means the film is almost done. Finally I started the editing at the end of April 2014. I did not spend a lot time on editing. Animation is not like an action film that can be cut in many scenes. For animation, every scene is precious because of its production time, which would take the animator a long time. So, usually every shot is determined in the preproduction stage. Basically, I just put the ordered scenes together into After Effects and then I fixed timing problems in some scenes. That’s it. And I was happy that there was not too much compositing work in my film, because I did not have much time left.

For the process, first, I exported the animation sequences as TIF format, which allowed the backgrounds to be transparent. I imported them into an After Effect file, which was the animatic file. It was easier than creating a new file, because I could use the animatic file as a reference without thinking about the order of the scenes. After this step, I put all my backgrounds in, and adjusted some little details. For example, there was one scene in the film that was about the girl walking to the front of the tree from the back. For this scene, I needed to use a mask tool to hide the girl when she was in the back of the tree.
Visual effect

There were some visual effects that I had to do in my thesis film. Such as, magic light, falling leaves, and transitions. I used two different ways to approach the effects. I used After Effect and drew them by hand in TVPaint depending on different situations.

In my thesis film, there were some parts that needed particle effects, which could be made by After Effect. Such as the scene of leaves falling down, the scene of grandma disappearing, and the scene of the box opening. I was not good at this skill. So, at the beginning, I decided to ask somebody to do it for me. But, later, I noticed that the classmates who were experts about it were very busy at that time. In that situation, if I wanted to finish the film as soon as possible, it was better to do the visual effects by myself. Eventually, I made the decision that I wanted to learn how to do particle effects. I Googled it, and I found many free tutorials on YouTube. I skimmed through some tutorials about how to make particles in After Effect, and picked up a few of them that were useful for my film. Then I watched them carefully. After one afternoon of studying, I learned the skill. It was not that difficult at all. I applied the skill to my film and tested it in multiple ways to find the best effects. The result was good and I was satisfied. Besides the particles, I also used After Effect to create the raining effect. This one was much easier. I have to say that the improvement of technology saved me lots of time.
Besides the technique of software, I also drew some visual effects by hand, because they had specific movements, which could not be done by software. For example, there was one scene where the magic cloth spun around the girl. I drew the crazy movement of the magic cloth in TVPaint. The good thing about drawing effects was that it was alive instead of mechanical. In the natural world, there is no same thing. Even the twins have differences. Only the mechanical products from factories could be same. The specific characteristics make things alive. The hand-drawing effects have the same feature, which is unique and special. That is why they look vivid and alive.
Music and Sound effects

Music and sound effects in films are very important. Good music and sound effects help to tell the story clearly. Especially, for my film, music and sound effects were essential elements. My film did not have much dialogue. There were only three lines. It would be dull and boring, if there was no music in my film.

It was destiny to get my composer, Royal Teague. Before I knew him, I had other two composers. The first one was my classmate Gloria’s friend, Juan E. Ahon who was a teacher in a music school in Peru. He made the music for Gloria’s second year film. He was talented. I loved his music so much. When I was in LA in 2013 summer, I asked Gloria if she could introduce her composer to me. She agreed and gave me Juan’s email. Then I emailed Juan and got his promise. I sent him my rough animation so that he could think about the ideas of music. After that we did not contact much until half year later. At that time, I finished all the in-betweens. So he could work on the music with the time locked animation. However, he was so busy that he could not reply to my email in time. The time almost ran out. He only finished a little part. I was so worried about that he would not have enough time to work on my music, because he also was doing music for Gloria’s thesis film. So I made a decision that I would search for another composer. I got two references from my friends. One composer was Chinese; another one was American, Royal. I wrote emails to both of them and attached my animation and I got an answer from the Chinese composer immediately. Because we spoke the same language, the communication was great. He only took half a day to finish a music sample. The music was good. But it just did not
match with my film. On the next day, I received the email from Royal. He said he would love to be my composer and he really loved my film. But I told him I already had chosen another composer. He replied me:

Xin,

Aw.

Well, I actually had some time today, so I worked on an idea for your short. I captured this idea over the opening frames. I thought you would enjoy hearing the music your film inspired. No pressure, but if you like it, I’d love to write more. It is only a demo I quickly put together after a big brainstorming session this morning, so judge it kindly haha. But it feels honest.

If you’ve already got the other composer locked in and writing, I understand. Just hoping on the tiny sliver of a chance you’ll change your mind. :) I hope we can work together in the future, too.

Thank you!

Royal

After I listened to the demo he sent me, I was so excited. That music was what I wanted for my film. I was so surprised that he knew my film so well. Immediately, I changed him to be my final composer.

We discussed a lot details about the music. We sent more than 200 emails only in 20 days. I gave some ideas to Royal. I wanted my music sweet, light and with some kind of childhood feeling. For the instruments, I thought harp and accordion were good options. So I suggested Royal to use these two as the main instruments. Royal did the music efficiently. And he replied my emails in time so
that we could communicate the thoughts immediately. The final music was great!

Another surprise was that he did a great job on the credits music as well.

For the sound effects, Royal did most of it. Meghan Boehman who was an animation student in RIT helped on some sound effects as well. In the film, the girl had a few simple lines; and the grandma hummed a song. Royal asked his friend and his grandma to be the voice actresses. And then he used software to change the voices to match with the characters’ voices. In the process, I asked him to fix the sound effect several times. He always understood me well, and the final effect was good. I felt so lucky to have Royal as my composer. Without his music and sound effects my film would not be integrated.
My Improvement

I had done many projects before my thesis film so I knew what was my weakness. I expected I could improve in the new film. I did SOAP in my second year study in RIT. It was a family comedy animation. In this film, I did not do a good job on story’s rhythm. Some plots were too fast that could not tell the story well. This time, I tried my best on the rhythm. The story of my thesis film was about the love between a girl and her grandma. I believed that the most important thing was when people watched my film; was that they could get the emotion that the film showed. First, I slowed down some plots in the result that audience could go into the atmosphere. Secondly, I added wind in the peak part of the story so that it could help the dramatic effect. To show the wind, the hair of the girl and the grandma was floating and the leaves of the tree were falling. Lights and shadows could also help to show the emotional atmosphere just like Michael Dudok did in his film Father and Daughter. However, the limited time could not allow me to add the shadow. In addition, my composer Royal did a good job on the music, which enhanced the mood of the story.
Conclusion

My film was showed in the school at the end of May 2014. Professor Skip Battaglia gave a great speech on the screening day. My film got a lot of compliments. The only thing that some people did not like was the red nose of the characters in the film. But I love it, it is my style.

The process of doing my thesis film was a conclusion to my studies in RIT. I applied all the knowledge I learned. It also was an essence of my recent life experiences. I spent most of my time in animation study in these few years since I came to U.S.A. During these years, many things changed a lot. My life style, my personality, my mind, my friends, my family all became different. This film recorded all the changes in my life. I believe that in a few years, when I will watch my thesis film again, it will recall my life and me in these four years.
Appendix A

Flower In Box
An Animated Production
By
Xin Yin

Thesis proposal submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the School of Film and Animation in the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences at the Rochester Institute of Technology

April 2012

Approved by:

Thesis Advisor: Brian Larson, School of Film and Animation

Committee:
Tom Gasek, School of Film and Animation
Mark Reish, School of Film and Animation

Working Title: Flower In Box
Director: Xin Yin
Advisor: Brian Larson
Technique: 2D
Start Date: April 2012
End Date: May 2013
Runtime: 5 minutes
Format: Digital
**Synopsis:**

A 2D animated film about a 20-something girl who, in a time of doubt and fear, opens a small white box containing memories of her time with her grandmother. The warmth and comfort she gains from reliving the memories provides her with the strength she needs to carry on. This film will strong visuals and imagery more than traditional story structure to evoke the power of memories and family.

**Rationale:**

This is a personal story. My grandma just passed away few moths ago. I am that girl who misses my grandma so much. I would like to make an animation about my grandma and me in a interesting way instead of a sad story. The grandma's personality is playful and spunky. In the girl's memory part, the grandma always hides on the way. So the memory journey is also like a hide-and-seek game. The girl always looks for her grandma in this journey. This project will be a 2D animation work. I will focus on the dynamic movement using much exaggeration and metamorphosis. The background will be watercolor painting. The style of this project will be colorful and relaxed.
Treatment:

A 20 years old girl walks on the street. Suddenly, it rains. The girl looks around and runs to a big tree to avoid the rain. She arranges her wet hair and looks at the view in the rain for a while, and then sits down on a long bent that is under the tree. She takes a box out of her pocket and opens it.

After that, the view changes. She is changed to be 5 years old little girl sitting on a little chair. Her grandma sits on another chair with a storybook in her hand. They are on a big opened book. And also there are many big books lying on the ground. The grandma is like a magician. She brings the characters out of the storybooks. The girl is so happy. She plays with the characters. And then she notices that her grandma disappears. She looks everywhere. She searches the big book and asks the characters. But nobody knows. At this time, a good smell floats to her. She is attracted by the nice smell. She flies with the smell. At the same time she becomes to be 8 years old girl. She follows the smell and finds her grandma. Her grandma who is looks older stirs soap in a big pot. Many delicious foods fly out of the pot. The girl flies in the air. She grabs food and eats happily. Suddenly, the girl falls down to a soft cloth. And her grandma disappears again. The girl walks on the long shape cloth and searches her grandma. Many long shape cloth with different pattern float in the space. The girl runs and jumps from one cloth to another. At the same time, she becomes 12 years old. She finds her grandma is sewing. Also, the grandma is older than before. The clothes come from the sewing machine. The grandma uses the sewing machine to make beautiful dress and toys for her. The girl wears the beautiful dress and dances with the toys around her grandma. However, her grandma becomes older and older. The sew machine disappears. Only left the grandma sitting on a chair. She shears a paper in her hand quietly. And the toys also disappear. In this space, there are only the
girl and her grandma. The girl looks at her grandma and walks to her grandma slowly. The grandma looks sick. But the smile is on her face. Now the girl looks about 20 years old. She is much taller than her grandma. She walks close to the grandma and stops. The grandma stops shearing and looks at the girl with smile face. The grandma gives the girl something in her hand. The girl takes it and finds that it is a beautiful paper flower. The girl is touched. She hugs her grandma. The grandma pats the girls back. Finally, the grandma becomes transparent. Then she flies to the sky and translate to many shiny beautiful flowers around the girl. The girl looks around amazedly, and then smiles.

The scene translates to the realistic environment. The girl stands in the rain. She stretches out her hand and feels the rain, smiles.

End

**Timeline:**

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Appendix B
Model sheet