Dearth

By Camille Ragland

Introduction

My project was created to help myself and others process grief, especially from the death of a recent loved one. I wanted to do that by creating a whimsical view of the afterlife, while also memorializing my abuela (grandmother) that I lost. I decided to create a game, so I and others are able to go back and play if need be. With having a game in mind I also had an idea of how I wanted to look, play, and feel, so I decided to create everything myself, including the coding, writing, art, music, sound effects, even the font of the game. I'm very particular and have high expectations when it comes to my craft, especially when it's something that's incredibly close to my heart.

Ideation

In the beginning of the semester I knew that I wanted to create a visual novel game with ghosts and have everything done by myself. However, it's a large undertaking, so I created a calendar, budget, and asset list to understand exactly what I needed to do because I was wearing so many hats. While I didn't follow the calendar and budget, it helped me figure out where I should be whether I'm ahead or behind.

Creation (Art)

I wanted a certain hand drawn feeling without losing fidelity and resolution, so I drew everything on my iPad using my apple pencil and Procreate. To maintain the textured hand-drawn feeling, I found free brushes that mimic crayon, 2B pencil, chalk, and other textures, only keeping to a set of 8 brushes to be consistent. I also made sure to use certain brushes for only certain parts, for example the 2B pencil for outlining and words while the chalk texture would be used to create certain textures and to color. I also went for a more simplistic style because I was doing everything, and I didn't want to make the art to busy because of all the color and texture being used.
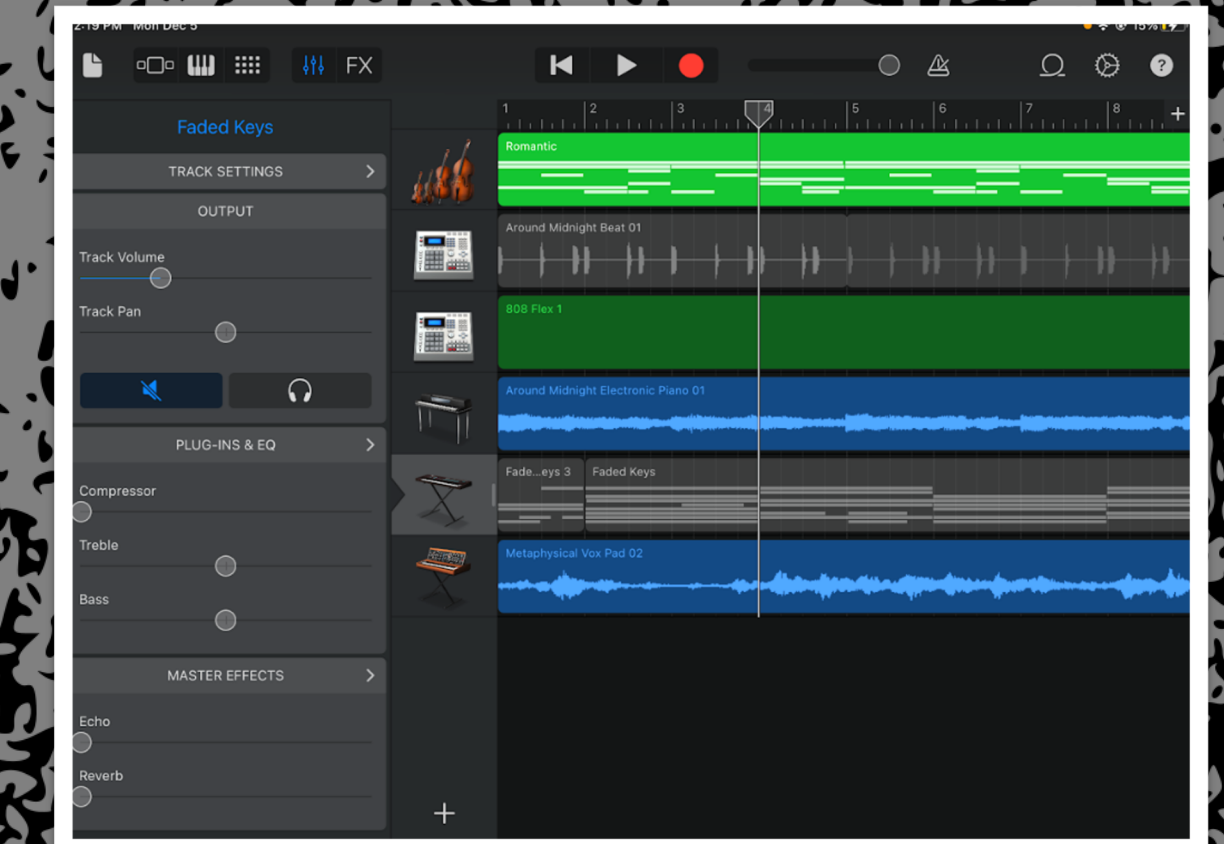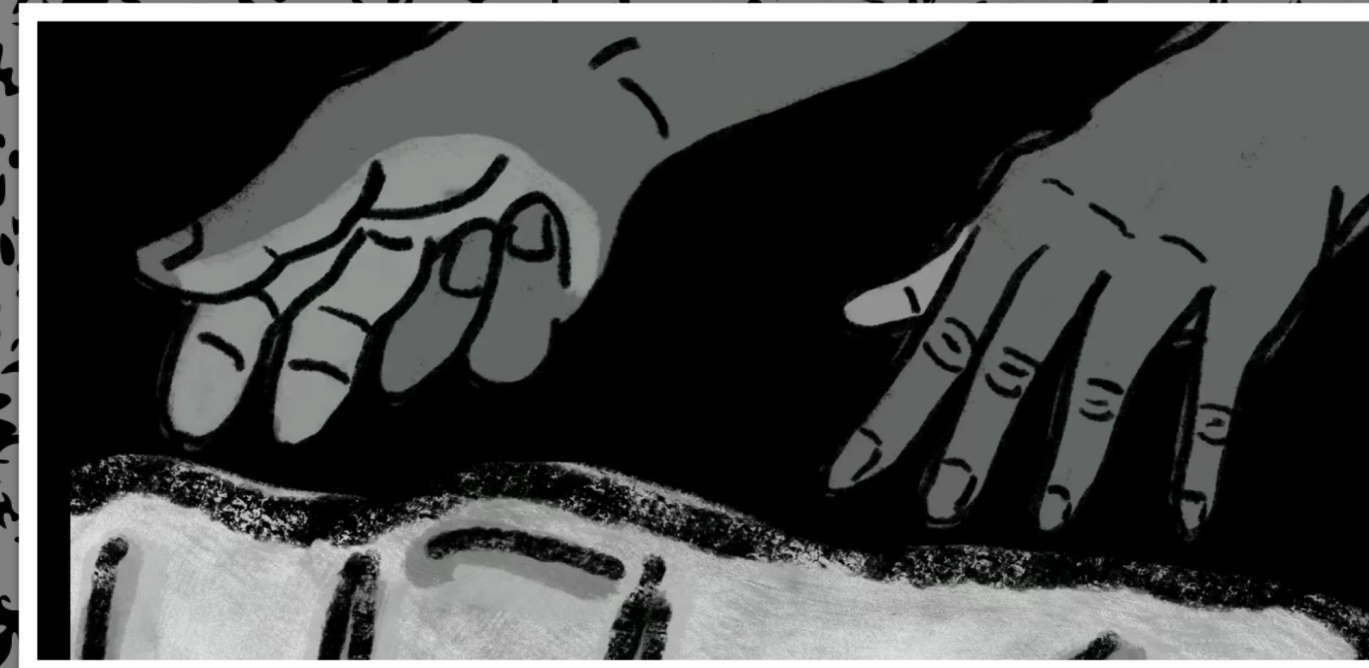

Creation (Writing)

Writing was a challenge for me because I was first unsure of how I wanted the story to go. However, I'm a visual person and once I drew the first two characters of the game, I understood what plot points I wanted. The second challenge in the writing process was the dialogue. After creating the characters, I also created set personalities for them, so I had to stick with a dialogue that moved the story along, didn't feel rush, stuck with the theme, but was also true to the characters.
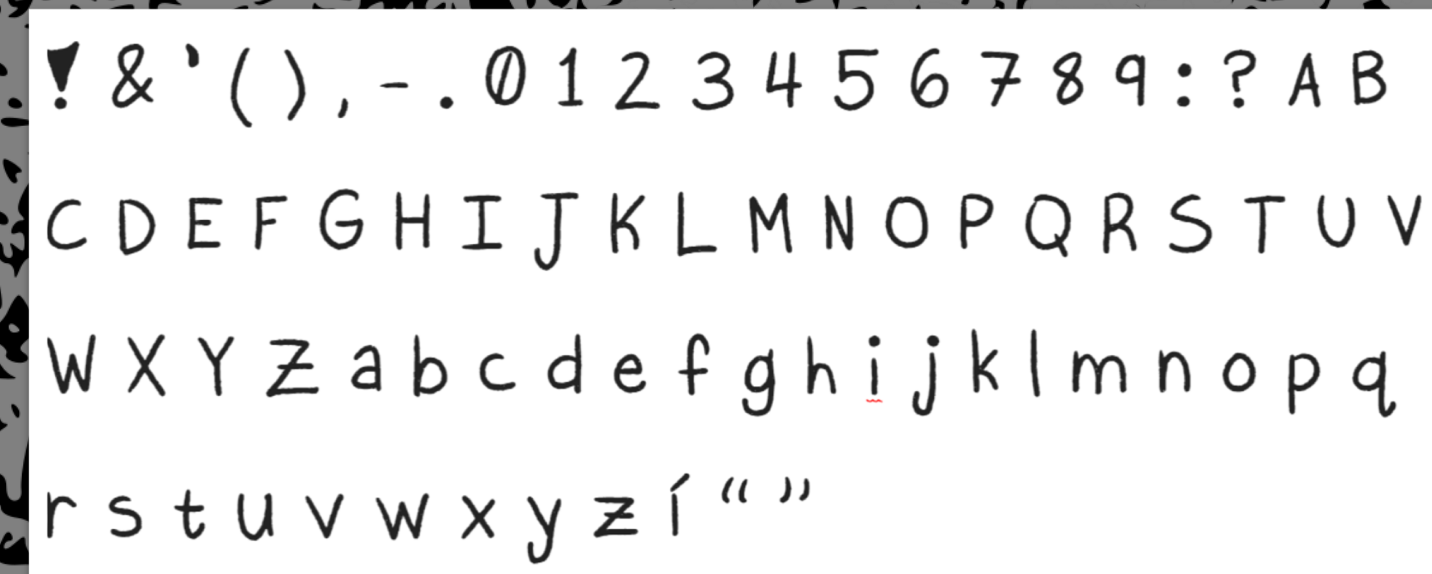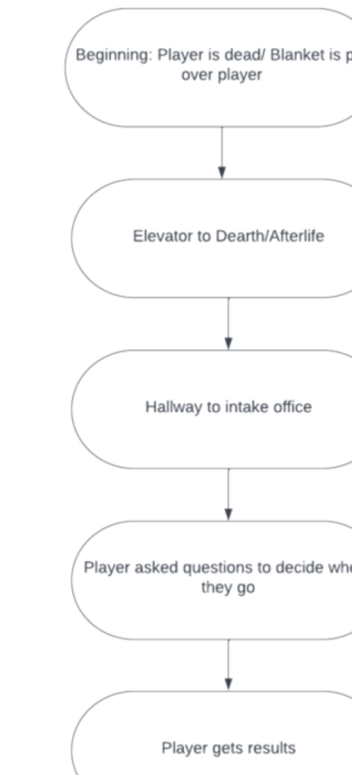

Creation (Music)

Music was my biggest challenge of creating this game because I never created music before, I didn't have an idea about music theory, or about notes. So a lot of my time was experimenting and trying to figure out what exactly I wanted to do. Professor Nikki D'Agostino helped me a lot with this by suggesting creating soundscapes, using synths, and told me about the 5th note. After playing around a while in GarageBand, I was able to create the kind of music I wanted for the game. I wanted something ethereal but didn't stand out, and didn't conflict with the transition noises that the characters made to signify they were talking.

Creation (Coding)

I've been programming since I was young, so I'm able to pick up coding languages easily, and Ren'Py was no exception. I've coded in Python before which is what Ren'Py was based in, however it was recently updated so some tutorials online were outdated because of the recent update. I either had to sift through different YouTube tutorials, find answers on Stack Exchange, Reddit, or read the Ren'Py documentation myself to be able to solve any problems I had along the way.

Conclusion

As I created this project, I learned a lot about myself and picked up many new skills that I can use for future games I plan on doing. Overall, I feel content about the project because I set out what I wanted to without compromising my artistic integrity and meeting the high expectations I had set for myself. I also believe that I did honor my abuela in the best possible way that I could by memorializing her within the game in the way that I did.