



8. SCARECROW

Ho`oponopono is a traditional Hawaiian prayer practice of reconciliation and forgiveness.

It originates from the widespread **Polynesian** belief that a person's errors cause illness, and that until those errors have been acknowledged and forgiven, misfortune will continue to affect the entire family system — through sick children, sterile land, and other forms of inherited suffering.

Ho`oponopono is defined in the *Hawaiian Dictionary* like so:

To put to rights; to put in order or shape, correct, revise, adjust, amend, regulate, arrange, rectify, tidy up, make orderly or neat, administer, superintend, supervise, manage, edit, work carefully or neatly; to make ready, as canoe men preparing to catch a wave.

The rendition of the *Ho`oponopono* prayer included in this ritual was recorded in 2015 at a special plant medicine ceremony by a group of close female friends, who sang it as a healing offering for my ailing mother:

I love you. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I thank you.

Grappling with deep childhood trauma (some of it remembered, some of it repressed), my mother's inner world was riddled with fear and anxiety, and her home at **High Acres Farm** became her kind of private prison: both the site of her half-recalled traumas, and also her chosen refuge from the world beyond its gates.

For much of the final thirty years of her life, she split her time between an apartment in New York City and the main house at High Acres Farm, where she more or less lived in her bedroom, surrounded by piles of paperwork that covered her bed, sitting and working all day in the same place where she would sleep.



Her fear was palpable here. She sealed off all the fireplaces with heavy sheets of plastic, so that insects couldn't enter through the chimneys. She kept the doors to the house locked all day long, and locked herself in her bedroom each night before going to sleep. She had burglar alarms installed at every downstairs window, triggering a computerized voice in her bedroom any time a window was opened or closed in the house.

In this ritual, a handmade "scarecrow" is assembled, using my mother's standard summer uniform of plaid linen pants, a plain cotton shirt, and a pair of white athletic sneakers. Scarecrows are rural totems that use fear as a tool to keep others away, and as a result, they end up standing alone in their fields.

The scarecrow is moved around the upper lawns of High Acres Farm, visiting the various sites of her possible traumas, before entering the house, climbing the stairs, moving down the long hallway into her bedroom, and finally taking its place in her bed.

As the scarecrow travels, it receives the healing *Ho`oponopono* prayer in each location — acknowledging and forgiving the past, while sending love and gratitude into the future.

Though this ritual was filmed around six months before my mother's death, its final moments eerily foreshadow her passing, as she ended up dying in the very place where the scarecrow was ultimately laid. In the filming of this final scene, an aberration in the lens caused a shadow to pass across the image of the scarecrow just as its head unexpectedly fell to the side — as if its spirit, giving up its burden, were finally leaving its body.

Performed in 2015 — Duration 3:31