

Lucy Gray photography

The Geography of Foreclosure **By Lucy Gray, 2010**

The journalist, Marilyn Snell, got the idea of following Dorothea Lange's trail through the Central Valley of California where the most foreclosures were happening in America in 2010. She did all the painstaking work of finding people who'd come to California during the dustbowl and people whose houses were in foreclosure. We visited courthouse steps where fixed bidding was taking place. I went on my own and interviewed Rondal Partridge who had been Dorothea Lange's assistant when she took most of her famous photographs of Californians in the 1930s for the WPA project.

On the road when we were meeting people and hearing their stories we cried a lot. I sometimes broke down while they were telling their tales and hugged the people. Marilyn didn't think that was professional and she'd wait to let go until we were in the car and down the road, sometimes she couldn't make it more than a few hundred feet out of their driveway. We had so much in common in our view and so much that was different. She wrote a beautiful piece that is in Mother Jones online magazine now. That frees me up here to talk about what I was trying to portray in my pictures.

For example, I am conflicted about the construction in California that has happened in the last twenty years. Unemployed construction workers break my heart but I am saddened by the building that has trammelled this majestic state. In Los Banos the city managers decided to sell themselves as a suburb of San Jose and they made developments based on that concept. They sold their crime free town as a place that would be good for raising children. But when homeowners had to commute for hours every day their children were left alone to cause a lot of trouble in the farm community. And now Los Banos has whole developments of ugly, cookie cutter McMansions that were foreclosed on before they were occupied. That's what I was thinking about when I photographed Steve Rath, the City Manager, in the field dotted with street lights that had been put in for a development that was foreclosed on before the houses went up.