

**Things They Left Behind: Wells's Photos of Foreclosed Homes**  
**The ARTery, the arts website of WBUR, Boston's NPR station**  
**Written By Greg Cook / Published May 3, 2013**  
**<http://artery.wbur.org/2013/05/03/david-wells-foreclosed>**

A pacifier discarded on the floor. Boxes of Christmas decorations. An American flag wadded up and wedged between a towel rack and a bathroom wall.

Since 2009, David H. Wells has been recording the human cost of our Great Recession that began the year before by photographing the things people left behind when they abandoned foreclosed homes.

In the Providence photographer's heartbreaking exhibit "Foreclosed Dreams," organized by guest curator Viera Levitt at Yellow Peril Gallery (in Providence, R.I. through May 12), he documents toys, credit reports, martial arts trophies and family heirlooms jettisoned in homes in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, California, Connecticut, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and South Carolina.

A pile of half eaten toast lies on a plate in a kitchen in a Huntington Park, Calif. A black and white photo of a uniformed serviceman embracing a woman is tucked behind (what looks to be) an electric cord in a Providence home.

Formally, the 34 images are sufficient. Some of the most compelling compositions—like a photo of a mirror reflecting a room empty except for a broom and empty picture frame that plays on space and creates a rhythm of rectangles—are the least affecting emotionally. But Wells's subject—this terrible sense of emptiness, of abandonment, of exodus—lasers into your soul.

What you see are decades of effort and memories discarded in anger, frustration, exhaustion, devastation, haste. "From Bad Beginnings to Happy Endings," says the cover of an evangelical book discarded among the brown leaves beside a house in Fresno, Calif. Someone scribbled "I love our family" on a box left behind in the mess in a Millbury, Mass., house.

Walls and ceilings are ripped open. The saying "I'm ruined" here becomes physical and emotional ruins. The departed often don't seem to give a damn how they leave the place. Or they're too harried and broken to get it together.

Wells purposely doesn't photograph the people. By focusing on their things, by leaving it anonymous, he aims to draw us in personally, to get us thinking that could be my house, that could be my grandfather's photo, that could be my child's toy.

There's plenty of blame to go around in this massive tragedy, from the rapacious banking and real estate industries to the individuals who failed to repay their loans. But regardless of the reasons, the results are a diaspora of devastated families.