Writer’s Note

The Oasis comes from a world I knew growing up. From kindergarten in Iowa, through middle school in Illinois, and into much of high school in New Mexico, I lived in mobile home parks. I saw a lot of different lives during those years. Some were happy and beautiful. Some were ugly and sad. Most were more complicated than they appeared from outside. I always thought there was a movie in simply moving from trailer to trailer and seeing what was happening behind each door.

Mobile home parks are strange little communities because everyone lives close together without necessarily knowing one another. There are neighbors who become almost family, people you wave to but never really speak with, people who will help you fix something without being asked, and others who keep the curtains closed and seem to disappear inside. Sometimes a trailer is suddenly gone and, a few weeks later, another one appears with an entirely new family and a new story happening inside it.

As a kid, friendships often formed for the simplest reason: we were all there. (I could use the word “propinquity,” which I learned from Michael Nesmith, but I don't think it's a very common word.) There weren't always a lot of other choices. Kids of different ages, races, families, and personalities ended up playing together because we shared the same little patch of grass and had to figure out how to get along. A lot of the childhood world in *The Oasis* came directly from that experience.

I was also interested in something I began noticing as I got older. Poverty has its own hierarchy. Someone struggling financially can still look down on someone who has even less. One family might have air conditioning while another has a broken swamp cooler. One trailer might have freshly painted trim and a garden while the family across the road doesn't have enough food. People who are all living fairly close to the bottom can still find ways to decide who is respectable and who is “trash.”

I wanted to spend time with those ordinary differences before the larger story takes over. The bad water, a birthday cake bought from the markdown bin, teenagers with nowhere to go, petty arguments between neighbors, pride, resentment, crushes, addiction, loneliness, and kids turning whatever happens to be nearby into a playground were important to me because I wanted the park to feel like a real place.

Another detail came directly from childhood. I remember practice tornado sirens in Iowa, and my friends and I used to play on top of a grassy berm that covered a storm shelter. We were fascinated by the fact that there was this hidden concrete room underneath a place we treated like a playground. We wondered what was inside and imagined going down there. I carried that image with me for years, and eventually it found its way into the screenplay.

More than anything, I wanted *The Oasis* to feel like a place I recognized rather than a setting I had invented for a story. I knew versions of these families growing up. I wanted the people behind those trailer doors to be the reason the world mattered.