Pier 48

August 1, 1998 By Barton Lidice Benes

Barton Benes' five-year correspondence with his Aunt Evelyn is surely one of modern art's most beguiling collaborations. They were an odd couple: Benes, a young gay artist living literally on the edge of the sex, drug and cultural upheavals of New York in the '70s, and Aunt Evelyn, an aging Florida widow who liked nothing better than answering her nephew's curious letters. In fact, she fast took on all comers—the hustlers, dealers and outcasts to whom Benes introduced her—using four typewriters at once and daily dispatching 25, 30, even 50 breathless, plain-spoken, astonishing pages. Aunt Evelyn is gone now, and of her many pen pals, all but Benes have died of AIDS. Benes has combined her texts with photographs and images to make some 600 exquisite, haunting "books." POZ is proud to present ongoing selections from this record of a world trembling on the brink of extinction.

I DON'T SEE THAT IT CAN BE MUCH FUN THERE. IT SOUNDS DIRTY WITH SPLINTERS AND GLASS ALL OVER THE PLACE.

I CAN SEE PEOPLE FLOCKING THERE TO SUNBATHE, BUT TO USE THAT PLACE FOR OTHER THINGS PUZZLES ME.

I KNOW THAT FARMERS HAVE ALWAYS USED THE HAYLOFT FOR LOVEMAKING, WITH ALL THE RATS RUSTLING AROUND.

I THINK THAT ALL CITY PEOPLE ALWAYS HAD A PROBLEM WITH RECREATION.

I HAD TO LAUGH WHEN I READ THAT NEWSLETTER YOU SENT ME. THAT MAN WANTS TO KNOW WHAT ANY GAY WOULD WANT WITH A SWEATY TEENAGER. HE MUST BE A VERY CLEAN PERSON IN ALL WAYS.

THOSE MEN MUST GET SOME KIND OF A SYSTEM THERE, TAKE TURNS GUARDING THE DOOR, AND HAVE DIFFERENT PASSWORDS FOR EACH NIGHT, THOSE PEOPLE HAVE HAD TO HAVE SIGNALS FOR A LONG TIME, SO IT WOULD BE NOTHING NEW,

THE ONLY WAY THAT POOR MAN WILL GET PEOPLE TO QUIT IS GOING TO THE PIERS, IS TO FIND THEM SOMETHING BETTER.

I THINK THAT IF THERE WAS ANY OTHER KIND OF GATHERING PLACE, OF ANY KIND, THAT KEPT CALLING THE POLICE SO MUCH, IT WOULD BE CLOSED DOWN AS A PUBLIC NUISANCE.

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