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The Scenario-Setter

JANE ALDEN STEVENS '74

When my brother's children were young, I spent a lot of time playing with them on their farm in Vermont. Because I am a photographer, this often meant that the kids and I would collaborate on ideas, posing and costuming for pictures we wanted to make of each other.

On the day this photograph was made, I brought a lot of Band-Aids. The girls loved to plaster themselves with them—just because. As they put each one on, they acted like they were covering their bodies with war paint, arming themselves for battles to come. It was not lost on me that the purpose of adhesive bandages is to cover up wounds and help them heal, but it was extraordinary to see the girls gain self-confidence and authority the more Band-Aids they put on.

At one point, we decided that the entrance to the barn would make a perfect stage. I set up the 19th-century panoramic camera that had belonged to my great-grandfather, and Pauline sat in the doorway, patiently waiting for me to be ready. As she looked over at me, I realized how powerful she appeared, so I asked her to “make muscles” in order to up the ante even more.

I pressed the shutter, and as the lens scanned the scene from right to left, her sister Anna unexpectedly jumped into the scene. I hadn't realized that she had been recorded until I processed the film—a perfect example of how balancing control with chaos allows me to create photographs that contain multiple layers of meaning.

One of St. Lawrence's first multifield majors, Jane Alden Stevens lives in Cincinnati, where she is professor emerita of fine arts at the University of Cincinnati. She and her husband, William G. Barnhart, have a daughter, Zoe Barnhart '19.