It all began with a seagull. Beth Ostrosky Stern and her husband, Howard Stern, stumbled upon an injured bird while walking on their favorite beach. “We knew about The Wildlife Rescue Center in Hampton Bays so we called them immediately. A volunteer showed up right away to transport the bird to the center for rehabilitation,” Beth said.

A few weeks later, Beth and Howard received a phone call from the Wildlife Center that the bird had healed. They were able to pick him up and release him. “We drove to the center and were given a tour of the facility and saw firsthand the incredible work they do,” Beth said. Beth was so inspired by her visit that she decided to become trained in wildlife transport. “I am now one of the volunteers called upon when there is an animal in need in my area,” Beth said.

One day she was called to rescue another seagull that was tangled in fishing wire and severely dehydrated. “I used my rescue kit: gloves, blanket, and a plastic box with air holes. After I placed him in the box, we transported him to the center and a month later I was able to release him. Watching him soar over the ocean where we found him was such an incredible feeling. There is a gull who visits the roof of our house daily, and I like to believe that it’s him!”

The center rescues a diverse assortment of animals, including birds, turtles, rabbits, deer, swans, and ducks. “Pretty much all of the glorious wildlife found here in the Hamptons,” Beth said. She recalled one particular experience with The Wildlife Rescue Center that touched her heart. One day Beth and Howard found a hurt deer lying in their yard. Three volunteers transported the creature back to the center. “Once there, they realized she was a lactating doe. I spent hours trying to find her babies but was relieved to learn that another doe would find and take care of another deer’s orphaned babies,” Beth said. The Wildlife Rescue Center determined from the doe’s injuries that she had been hit by a car. “Her spinal cord was injured so they had to do the humane thing and euthanize her. But, there was an orphaned fawn at the center who was not eating and they put the fawn near our lactating mama and the baby was nurtured back to health for a few days while they kept the doe comfortable. I feel that was her purpose. It was so sad and also so incredibly beautiful to witness,” said Beth.

For her photo shoot for Social Life this summer, Beth chose to be photographed by Howard, surrounded by some of the beautiful animals that the Wildlife Rescue Center saves every single day. “The center deserves to be recognized and supported, and I don’t think everyone who lives out here is aware of them. It is a very important place, and Howard and I are so passionate about what they do,” Beth said.

At the charity’s yearly summer events, Beth gets to hold some of the animals so she already knew the other “models” in the shoot. “It was so nice seeing them again!” Beth said. The birds she is pictured with have been permanently injured and cannot be released to the wild. Beth was able to hold them under permit from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to be used as education. “We had such a beautiful day shooting there. We love hearing the animals’ stories and how well they are healing. It’s hard to get me to leave once I’m there!” Beth said.
If you are interested in getting involved at the The Wildlife Rescue Center in Hampton Bays, you can visit its website and look for volunteer opportunities. If you program the rescue center’s number (631.728.9453) into your phone, you can easily call them if you see a hurt or sick animal. “Please don’t walk by and ignore. They need our help. The center operates on donations. Please think of them when you are enjoying the wildlife outside your window,” Beth said. “They are saving these magnificent creatures every single day.”

Beth has always been an animal lover, but a turning point in her life happened when her beloved bulldog, Bianca, passed away. That is when she decided to dedicate her life to helping felines. She began volunteering at North Shore Animal League America. “I would see so many cats in cages and it broke my heart. That was the moment I decided to spearhead a 15,000-square-foot expansion onto North Shore Animal League America’s existing shelter. The organization offers a cage-free environment for all the cats that stay there. We’ve raised over eight million dollars, and we are in the middle of the renovation now. It’s so exciting! It should be up and running by this time next year,” Beth said.

Beth and Howard also foster cats in their home in Southampton. They’ve had over 700 cats or kittens come through their home over the last five years and have found them all loving homes. Currently they live with four resident cats and over twenty foster ones. “I always had a fantasy of living a life helping animals. I feel so fortunate to be living my dream,” Beth said.

This summer, all of their foster rooms are full. “Someone found a new mama and her six babies in the backyard of a Manhattan church and contacted us. Mama Summer and her six babies now take up one of my foster rooms. We have twelve other orphaned kittens in the other room. It’s kitten season and every day I am responding to calls about kittens in need,” Beth said.

Another one of their current house guests is Maserati, a special kitten they found in a dumpster at a Maserati dealership. “We are going to do his adoption on the upcoming Hallmark Channel’s Kitten Bowl that I host every year,” Beth said. This is the sixth year in a row that Beth will be hosting the Kitten Bowl that airs every year on Super Bowl Sunday. “I am literally on an indoor playing field with over 100 adoptable kittens from North Shore Animal League America playing all over me!” Beth said.

Spending so much time with cats has taught Beth about their emotional lives. “People often think cats are aloof and independent. Not at all the case. They are lovers and such amazing companion pets. They all have such different personalities. The beauty of adopting from a shelter is that you can ask the adoption counselors and staff at rescues to match you with a personality that would fit best with you and your family,” Beth said.

Beth keeps an active Instagram account that is filled with photos of her with darling foster cats. She currently has over 430K followers. “I love how passionate my Instagram followers are. Most of my foster kittens’ adopters make Instagram accounts for my babies after they are adopted! One of my blind former fosters has over 80,000 followers! Blossom is a superstar!”

Another superstar is Buddy, the cat Beth wrote about in her second children’s book, Yoda Gets a Buddy, the follow-up to her debut picture book, Yoda, The Story of a Cat and His Kittens. “People seem to be enjoying following the cats’ stories from the moment they’re rescued to their forever family day,” Beth said.

Howard is Beth’s help in providing love and support to the foster cats. “He is my partner. He supports everything I do. He helps me socialize the kittens and he offers the financial
Beth is drawn to Howard because he is an animal lover. “He’s compassionate and kind. And the most generous man I know. And the smartest. And I find him to be incredibly handsome!” Beth said. The first night they met, she knew she was falling in love with him. “I knew he was my forever,” Beth said. If you asked her for love advice on a happy marriage, she would say, “Listen, talk, and make sure you appreciate each other every second of the day.”

Everyday rituals for the duo include morning coffee with the fosters and playing with their resident cats. “Howard and I spend every morning having our coffee and reading the papers in the foster room. It is quite adorable that litter after litter of kittens all love the same thing: Howard’s hair! It’s heaven for kittens to play with!” Beth said.

Five years ago when Howard and Beth received their first foster litter, Howard formed a strong attachment to a little male tabby named Tarzan. “Howard still speaks about him and how we should have kept him. I remember he followed Howard everywhere. It was the cutest thing! However, Tarzan is thriving in his forever home. I check up on all of my former fosters. All 700!” Beth said.

What does it feel like to hand over a beloved foster cat to a permanent home? “It is so bittersweet,” Beth said. “I do end up feeling like a piece of me is handed over as well, so I immediately get more fosters to focus on filling that hole in my heart. But I am so grateful and happy for my babies when they are adopted. It means my work is done. But there’s always another in need.”

Photography by Howard Stern
Hair and Makeup by Erin McNeill
Thank you to Jim & Cheryl McDougall and Ginnie Frati from the Evelyn Alexander Wildlife Rescue Center in Hampton Bays.

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