I am often asked when the vision of “PAWS” first emerged as a reality, and how we decided to start a sanctuary for captive wildlife. I wish there were a quick and romantic response, but that is not the case.

Ed Stewart and I never really planned to operate a non-profit organization, and certainly not a sanctuary. And, by the way, “sanctuary” was my descriptive designation of our attempt to properly house and provide care for the hundreds of exotic animals who were in need of refuge in the early 1980s.

At that time, animal shelters were often as bad as roadside zoos, with handlers walking young lions and tigers on leashes and breeding animals to provide more homeless cubs for display and photo ops. I chose “sanctuary” to exemplify our mission which we hoped was different.

But I digress, and this is a long explanation, so stay with me.

Time did not fly, it slowly crawled across years of depressing experiences observing sick, dying, malnourished and helpless young and old animals who were part of the exotic animal industry.

My enlightening experiences with captive wildlife resulted in the publication of my first book, “The Lady & Her Tiger”, in 1976. It was a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection and won several awards; it was also the first exposé of the use of exotic animals in films. I didn’t know it at the time, but I was an animal activist before the term was conceived.

I had stumbled upon the exotic animal world while working as an actress, dancer and singer. Working on a television show with animals literally changed the course of my life and I found
myself desperately trying to make life better for an eclectic array of exotic animal species working in the animal shows and movies which were popular in the late '60s and early '70s. I kept a journal of my harrowing experiences which became “The Lady & Her Tiger.”

And then I met Ed Stewart, my partner in life and work, a soul mate, although neither of us knew it at the time. It was not love at first sight.

I was the trainer for Lincoln Mercury’s “Sign of the Cat” car commercials and mother/protector of the popular cougars, Chauncey and Christopher, the animal stars of the television advertisements. Known among the advertising executives, and Lincoln Mercury’s directors, as a temperamental virago who demanded impossible luxuries for the feline performers, I was often the precursor to headaches and heartburn.

Ed’s brother, Jim Stewart, was a successful young merchandising manager for the car company, known for his skills in administration and decisive action. When the cougar was scheduled for an appearance in his district, Cleveland, Ohio, he immediately assigned his younger brother, Ed, to “take care of the cat woman.”

Ed often says he will never forgive his brother, and he has been taking care of me since that memorable day in 1976. He followed me to Detroit for a car show, and then to California. My friends did not expect him to last longer than three months; to my surprise (and his) we have survived 36 years of tenacious determination to educate the world about the injustice of captivity for wildlife. Neither of us would change a minute of the times we have spent blundering through challenges, too stubborn to quit.

We traveled across the country promoting the book and working in films with the animals I had acquired, and would never
relinquish, until the publicity from the book sounded a death knell to my career as an animal trainer. I was persona non grata in Hollywood.

We purchased a resort in the redwoods of northern California in 1978, retiring our animals to the peaceful surroundings of the big trees. The animals loved it, and Ed and I, cheerfully at first, launched our new career as proprietors, cooks, dishwashers, bartenders and cabin cleaners at Howling Wolf Lodge in Mendocino County.

The recession of that time seems worse to us than that of today — perhaps because we became resort owners at a time when gas prices soared and few could afford a vacation in the redwoods. We worked long hours supporting our small group of precious animals who loved life in the forest.

In 1980, an animal trainer who read my book and recognized the villain of the piece, appeared at the lodge and enlisted our advice in exposing more cruelty in the Hollywood film industry. We launched a full scale investigation by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and a four-part television disclosure from our resort, which led to the revocation of the license of the largest supplier of animals to films and television.

In 1984, we met our hero, then Assemblyman Sam Farr, who agreed to introduce legislation in California that would set standards for the care and handling of captive wildlife. AB 1620, now part of California’s Department of Fish & Game Code, was passed into law in 1985.

We moved our group of retired performing animals to Galt, California, in 1984, renting a rural, defunct dairy and dog kennel. We expected to return to the redwoods once the legislation was passed and we had remedied the cruelties involved in the use of captive wildlife in films and television.

WRONG!

Naive as we were in those days, we had little understanding of the vast financial empire of the exotic animal world and its ties to drugs, guns and criminal activities. Our bill awakened a hornet’s nest of powerful enemies and political opponents.

Meanwhile, our arrival in rural Galt triggered a constant stream of animal control officers bringing confiscated lions, wolves and other exotic animals to our door. We were the only permitted exotic animal facility in the area, and they desperately needed places to keep confiscated animals until they were reclaimed by their owners.

Ed and I had lost our visible means of support and were facing
a growing number of mouths to feed beyond Christopher, J.C., Lucifer, Lucretia, Sweet William, Harriet, Stanley, Seymour and Gwendolyn, our own beloved, and dependent, brood. We decided to seek employment with one of the national animal welfare groups who had offices in the area, and began making rounds feeling confident that one of them would surely want to delve into the cruelties involved in the use of animals in entertainment.

**WRONG AGAIN.**

Several groups invited us to speak, and everyone was interested, but none wanted to spend time on the issue. They advised us to form our own group, the unwelcome suggestion that we had avoided assiduously in the past.

Elsa, a four-month-old lion cub, had just arrived, brought by animal control officers to spend a weekend with us until her loving owners reclaimed her the following Monday. The adorable lioness lived with us until her death at age 15. Her doting owners did not return to court and never contacted us to see how she was faring.

Welcome to the world of exotic pets, Pat and Ed!

The Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) was formed out of necessity, with former loyal patrons of Howling Wolf Lodge assisting with the legal paperwork and becoming our first donors.

Most of them are still with us, and we are eternally grateful.

With hiccups and lurches we staggered through those first years convinced that, once we had educated the public and all concerned, the problem would be solved and there would be no need for refuge for the victims of the captive wildlife trade. The shelter in Galt would serve as a temporary solution.

You guessed it.

**WRONG AGAIN.**

**2014 — PAWS marks its 30th anniversary.** Today, under the leadership of co-founder Ed Stewart, PAWS maintains three sanctuaries for captive wildlife in Northern California, providing refuge for elephants, lions, tigers, bears, bobcat, lynx, serval, coyote, leopard, mountain lion, oryx, emu, deer and monkeys. PAWS’ ARK 2000, in San Andreas, CA, is the only sanctuary in the country to house bull elephants. PAWS’ animals receive 24/7 care, 365 days a year.