To put it bluntly, Angel was a hoarder--of both cats and various other material objects. When Angel passed away, her cats were left without aid until her family became aware of the situation after a notice from the Metro Animal Control. The family had no idea what to do. Inside, there was an unknown number of cats, with junk and spoiled food stacked nearly to the ceiling in most rooms. Outside was a colony of feral cats, in part the ones that had escaped the house, as well as those attracted by the cat food left out. As is often the case with situations of animal hoarding, a rescue organization was called in, and that is where I came on the scene with Noah’s Ark Society. Through this experience, I saw first-hand the severe problems involved with animal hoarding.

My three-person volunteer team with Noah’s Ark Society (NAS) was tasked with identifying how many cats were in the house, trapping them so they could be taken to the vet to be spayed or neutered, and cleaning out the house to be a safe and sanitary environment for the indoor cats. It was disgusting and horrifying work. It is hard to describe how bad exactly it was; if it is any indication, a person could smell the house from the driveway, and we went in expecting to find dead cats. Unfortunately, in animal hoarding situations, 80 percent of the cases find dead or suffering animals (PETA).

However, despite the odds, this was not the case. By the end, we had trapped and vetted fifteen cats from inside the house and nineteen in the outside feral colony. While some were able to be placed in foster homes, there simply were not home enough trusted by the NAS to hold that many cats. The alternative was to surrender them to a shelter, where they likely would have been put down for their feral behavior. In Nashville Metro Animal Control, 12% of animals are euthanized (Metro), but this percentage is much higher for animals seized in neglect cases, due to the likely contagious illnesses (Polak). For NAS, that wasn’t an option, even with its limited funding for the serious medical care necessary.
Instead, we renewed our efforts. We constructed emergency shelter outside for the feral cats so they would be safe from the elements and dropping temperatures. With few resources, this meant lining plastic tubs with straw and blankets and creating make-shift wind and rain blocks with tarps. The daily care of the outdoors colony then included breaking the ice on the water dishes at each visit. Volunteers kept track of which cats were seen at each visit, so we could make sure the outdoor cats were remaining safe.

Additionally, we deep cleaned the inside of the house from top to bottom. Underneath the dirt and the grime we found that, although it was a bit dated, the house was beautiful and completely livable. We began the process of moving the tame cats back into their home. All of the cats who were living inside had health issues, as is usually the case with hoarder cats. Noah’s Ark Society provided veterinary care in quarantine for several of the cats. Some had respiratory infections that took weeks to recover, due to the air quality where they had been living for years. And, it ended up that one of the outside females was pregnant, which added seven more cats needing care.

For a few months, volunteers stopped by every day to care for the cats and make sure they were all still healthy. Now, however, a couple lives in the house and has embraced the responsibility involved. While volunteers such as myself still check in to make sure the cats are well taken care of, we have shifted focus to the cats still living in the outside community. Eventually, we hope to get them all homes and continued medical attention as well.

While unfortunately, this experience of animal hoarding is not an anomaly, it was my first exposure to it. I have since learned more about the woman who lived there and what led to the situation she lived in. Angel was by all accounts a very kind person. She loved her cats more than anything else in the world, and would sometimes go without in order to care for them. Angel fit the stereotype for a cat hoarder: single, female, older, little family involvement (Price).
We found out later that she suffered from some mental disorders, which likely added to her animal hoarding propensity. In fact, animal hoarding has now been classified as an Obsessive Compulsive Disorder subtype and is believed to affect 1.5% of people worldwide (Price). Angel’s family was aware of her mental instability, but as they lived in another state, they had not been to her home in quite some time to bear witness to the conditions there. The whole situation was sad for Angel, her family, and the many cats. Only her death brought the needs of the cats to light.

Noah’s Ark Society will continue to work with Angel’s cat community, and only the future will show what we can accomplish. NAS is opening a cattery in its retail shop, dedicated to Angel. An opportunity for the remaining cats to visit with potential adopters. And other abandoned cats in the future. Through my time volunteering with the animals at Noah’s Ark Society, my passion for all animals has increased. I want to continue to contribute to the NAS mission of being a ‘voice for the voiceless’ and do what I can to ‘save them all.’
A Voice for the Voiceless, Grace Kueker

**Before**

**After**

**Angel's House Cats**

**Angel's Outside Cats**

*Feeding*

*Winter shelter*

*Trapping*
Works Cited


