The Great Aging Adventure was certainly an experience I will not forget. I didn’t really know what I was getting my self into as I stepped into the aging suit. I thought to myself, “How bad can this really be?” I soon realized after I was suited up and immediately pulled into an extremely uncomfortable, kyphotic posture. I felt metal rods pushing into my joints, and I couldn’t bend over to get my shoes on. After struggling to get my shoes and goggles on, I thought about all of the difficulty an elderly person would have with their ADL’s. Simple tasks like bending your elbows to feed yourself, putting on a shirt, and reaching overhead to brush your hair could be quite difficult. It definitely taught me not to take my strength and good health for granted.

Another aspect of aging is the loss of eyesight, which the goggles simulated quite well. We took a picture of us in our suits, and I went to look at the picture and soon realized that I couldn’t see it. The picture was blurry and it troubled me to think that I would not be able to enjoy looking at pictures or reading books. As I walked through the halls, I couldn’t see the room numbers or read signs. I had a good laugh trying to type the email with my face an inch away from the screen. I think the hardest part about this was walking outside and feeling like the world was a dark and gloomy place. Walking to the car, I looked towards the East to peer at the beautiful snow-capped mountains only to see a blur of grey and white. It saddened me to know that I will lose my vision one day.

Getting into the elevator there was a maintenance man who looked like he was in his late 50’s. He asked me if we were doing a project for school and I told him we were experiencing what it is like to be old. He laughed and said, “Welcome to my world; Getting old isn’t for sissies!”

One thing I understand now is why the elderly groan as they get out of bed, stand up, sit down, etc. I found myself groaning like an old lady throughout this entire experience. Getting up off the plinth was hard, and sitting down on the toilet was even more difficult. I would have very much appreciated a raised toilet seat. Sitting down in the car was a task as well. I had an incredibly hard time trying to bend my knees to lift them into the car.

Walking, I continuously tripped over rugs and cracks in the sidewalks. I can see how this can definitely be a safety issue for elderly patients or people who use walkers. I decided to take a walk through the grass as well which was tricky to maneuver on. My fall ended up being more of a gradual descent to the floor. I was afraid I would get hurt and land on one of the metal rods. I think falling is a fear that many elderly folks have to deal with which is why it is so important that we work on balance, coordination, and proprioception exercises with them. It can be a very scary thing when someone who has brittle bones and thin, fragile skin falls. This can lead to a lot of anxiety.

By the end of the adventure, my back and neck hurt and I felt fatigued. It is troubling to think that these are only a few of the things that the geriatric population struggles with on a day to day basis. I had a difficult time wearing an aging suit for an hour, but I can only imagine having skin problems, pulmonary issues, incontinence, heart problems, and decreased nervous system functioning as well. As PTA’s it is important that we empathize with our geriatric patients and understand that they may be struggling with different physical, mental and pathological issues. It is important that we are patient with our elderly patients. Overall, I would say this was an eye-opening experience and I think it gave me a glimpse of what old-age can feel like.