My education had always been “my thing.” While my peers had sports or other interesting hobbies, I had a report card to fawn over, and for a while, I was content with that. If I had nothing at all, at least my academics were still steadily going for me. As the years went by, the weight of these expectations that I’d placed upon myself grew heavier as I strived for more academic rigor and high-achieving goals. My pursuit for excellence had gone from a place of passion to obligation, riddled with the complexities of my own perfectionism.

While I began relating to the songs “this is me trying” and “mirrorball” by Taylor Swift, I could feel myself mentally spiral into a pit of nonstop tasks. I knew that I couldn’t sustain the life I’d created, but it was all I have ever known. I don’t know who I am if not constantly sprinting on a treadmill to success. The thing with treadmills, however, is that they never lead to a destination.

When I joined Sports Medicine as an elective, I discovered my passion in medicine, and it shifted my entire perspective on education. My academics became a means to my career, to reach a goal of making a difference in people’s lives by doing the thing I love. I rediscovered my fervor for learning, consequently applying it to every subject as they all intertwine to build me up for my career. Now, going to college isn’t a given because that’s what all “gifted” students do, it’s a given because it will take my prowess for medicine to greater lengths.

For a period of my academic career, it was like being on a treadmill, completing tireless amounts of work, and zoning out in the process, with no distinct end point or meaningful purpose. Today, as I strive to pursue higher education, I climb up a ladder instead, and I can feel myself getting closer to my dreams. My final destination as a surgeon is in sight now, and it is what motivates me each day to value my education for what it can do for me, not what I do for it.