During my twelth summer at overnight camp in Minocqua, Wisconsin, I was quite the veteran counselor. The directors of camp decided to put Josh in my cabin, a 12-year old boy with severe separation anxiety. Often he would stay home from despite having no difficulty making friends. His last stint at an overnight camp lasted only 3 days. But he anxiously wanted to try again, and he signed up for 4 weeks.

On the first night, I make all of my campers set at least 3 goals for the summer. Josh’s were to learn to waterski, to make new friends, and to stay all 4 weeks. He loved to snow ski with his family, and while he hoped to try waterskiing at the previous camp, he wasn’t there long enough to experience it. As a waterski staff member, I pulled some tricks to get him extra time down at the docks. Ten days into the summer, Josh finally stood on top of two skis and glided along the water behind our boat. He completed a lap around the entired bay, which is deemed a “miracle” at our camp because the lake is named Miracle Bay. On the radio, I let the dockman know what had happened, and as we drove Josh past the dock, still on his skis, a crowd of fifteen campers gave him a standing ovation. He was glowing with pride and excitement.

Unfortunately, two weeks into camp, Josh’s anxiety caught up with him, and his parents drove up to take him home. They thanked me for my help, or perhaps my effort. I’m not sure if I failed or succeeded for Josh. But, I do know that I loved taking on this responsibility, and that I took an interest in Josh for a certain reason. It’s the same reason I scowered the hospital playroom to bring a leukemia child the toy he wanted in his hospital room. It’s the same reason I want to treat a child with croup in the ER. And the same reason I get concerned about a child’s mental health and home environment. The reason is because childhood should be fun.

I loved my childhood. I loved camp. I loved recess, sports, and cartoons (I still watch cartoons). And I wanted Josh to have the same great experience I had in Minocqua. I was happy to wake up at 5am with him whenever he had trouble sleeping to keep him company and to keep his mind off his homesickness. I didn’t want the cancer patient to miss out on playing with his toy simply because his neutropenia kept him out of the playroom. I want the kid with croup to sleep well so he can play with his brother the next day without being exhausted. Adult life is filled with complicated relationships, financial stress, and much more difficult decisions than we ever had to make as kids. Being a kid, on the other hand, is supposed be fun. So whenever I see a sick child, I have an urgency to make sure he or she can still feel, act, and play like a kid.

For my residency, I’m looking for a program that is dedicated to giving as many kids as possible a high quality of life, that recognizes a childrens’ health has to do with their physical well-being as well as their emotional well-being. We have to balance their medical treatment with taking away pieces of their childhood. I look forward to being a pediatrician who can help kids be healthy to achieve their goals, or, if the illness is too heavy, at least bring them a toy or help them ski around the bay to make sure they can still be kids.