Wendy Eberhardt was always athletic, participating in high school track & field and in college intramurals, and running for fun and fitness in her 20s and early 30s. But she began developing back issues, and in 2002, was diagnosed with progressive degenerative disc disease and told that within 10 years, she would probably need surgery unless she lost weight.

In January 2013, Wendy joined the Lake Michigan College Wellness Program that had partnered for 10 weeks with the Renaissance Athletic Club. She lost 2% body fat and about 10 pounds in 10 weeks. She was happy, but disappointed that the program was over.

That’s when she met Bill Magley, personal trainer and owner of Nature’s Fitness, or “NatFit.” Bill introduced her to HIIT, High Intensity Interval Training, and she found that she loved the variety of it: Ropes. Sandbags. TRX. Body blades. Kettle bells. She says that, although they were the hardest workouts she’d ever done in her life, she had great fun. Within three months, she had no more back problems, her knees hardly hurt, and she was losing weight, inches, and body fat while gaining strength and toning/building muscle. In January 2013, she was at 44% body fat, and her goal was to get it down to 30% or less. At last measurement, she is currently at 29% with a new goal of 24%.

Early this year, she began training for the Tough Mudder, a 10 – 12 mile run that combines mud, nature, challenges, mud, endurance, mud, and 20 or more obstacles. She worked out three times a week with Bill/Nature’s Fitness and two to three times a week on her own. At home, she flipped, dragged, and pulled a tractor tire; packed large rocks up and down the hill in her yard; set up mini-obstacles such as a military crawl under wire and rope climbing; and ran through woods, road ditches, fields, gravel, and mud.

In June, she ran the Duck-n-Dodge, a three-mile mud-obstacle run outside of South Haven. In August, she ran the Merrell-Subaru Down & Dirty – Detroit, a six-mile 20-obstacle mud-obstacle run. In September, along with 8 other people from the Southwest Michigan/Northern Indiana area (they were T.E.A.M. Clutch), she ran the Tough Mudder – Detroit, 12 miles and 20+ mud-obstacle run. She says, “Those 3 hours 50 minutes were challenging, fun, exhilarating, and addictive. I was hooked!”

In 2015, she plans to do two Tough Mudders (Wisconsin and either Chicago or Detroit), one Down & Dirty (Detroit), and one Rugged Maniac (Wisconsin).

Though she says that she hasn’t run a marathon, and has struggled running this year from a leg injury, she plans to run the Wall of China half-marathon (or full if her leg is recovered) in May 2016, because, she says, “It’s there to be conquered!”

When Wendy met Bill Magley, she had no confidence that she would ever be able to be physically active again. She wanted to be healthy, heart-healthy, for her grandchildren, but her back and knees were constant reminders that she was not in good physical shape.

But Bill’s influence and impact on her life was about more than physical fitness. He was also her friend, cheerleader, and guide on this journey; Bill was part of a new family she joined when she became a part of NatFit. He helped her gain confidence in herself, taught her patience in goal-setting and goal-achievement. He also reminded her to back off when she tried to push herself too hard: “You have to be as passionate about your recovery as you are about working toward your goal.” He’d also tell her, “Anything worth achieving is worth the long months of hard work that goes into the achievement.”

When she told Bill a couple of weeks ago that she was going to China in 2016 to run on the Wall and she wanted him to train her, he said, “NatFit is going global!”

Wendy says now, “Bill, I’m not only going to run that Wall; I’m going to proudly REPRESENT you, Nature’s Fitness, and all that heart and soul in you put into each and every one of us!”