For additional resources, visit pbswisconsineducation.org
Glossary

conservation (n): ..... protecting and taking care of things in nature like animals, plants, air, and water

environment (n): ..... the world of living and nonliving things

landfill (n): ........... a place where waste is buried between layers of earth

plastic (n): ............ human-made material easily molded into different shapes to make useful items

post-consumer (adj): ... something that has been used and thrown away

recycle (v): ............ to save and break down items that may have gone into a landfill to make new items

Resin Identification

Code system (n): ...... a set of symbols stamped on plastic products that identify the type of plastic resin they are made of

revolutionary (n): ..... someone who brings about a major change or changes in ways of thinking and acting

toxic (adj): ............. something that may be harmful and can cause illness or even death
CONCLUSION

Milly kept talking to people about recycling and helped write Wisconsin’s recycling law. The law banned dumping recyclables in landfills.

Milly died on August 3, 2014, at age 91. Her work with plastics recycling lives on. As recycling changes, more people like Milly will need to tackle new recycling challenges. Who will be the next problem-solver to stand up and become a revolutionary for our environment?

Photo Credit: Wisconsin State Journal.

Milly never stopped sharing about the importance of recycling.

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Do you recycle? What can you recycle? Why should you recycle? Milly Zantow (zan-toe) cared a lot about the answers to these questions. She was a revolutionary (rev-o-lu-shun-air-e) in the world of recycling. Her work to recycle plastic changed her community, Wisconsin, and the world.

Most people couldn’t do the tests to tell plastics apart. They needed an easy way to identify and sort plastic items for recycling. So Milly, Jenny, and others came up with the idea to stamp a symbol into plastic products: a triangle with a number inside it. The number told what type of plastic it was.

For years they told everyone about their idea. In 1988, the Society of the Plastics Industry rolled out the Resin Identification Code system. Plastics recycling took off.

Here you can see the recycling symbol (a triangle made of chasing arrows) that has a number one inside and the letters PETE below. This means the item is made of polyethylene terephthalate, which is recyclable.
In 1982 they sold the business. It later became Wisconsin Intercounty Nonprofit Recycling (WINR). Milly helped run WINR. They were doing good work, but there was still a problem.

**FAMILY**

Mildred “Milly” Taylor was born on February 13, 1923. She and her six older siblings grew up on a farm in Oklahoma. Her family depended on their farm. They reused and repurposed (re-pur-pussed) all they could. When Milly got older she remembered what she learned growing up on the farm.

Here is Milly as a child on the farm, surrounded by her family. Milly is seated in the very front (1927).
After high school, Milly planned to continue her studies. Her family needed her to care for a sister recovering (re-kov-er-ing) from surgery. That changed her plan, but she tried to keep studying and working. Milly married Wayne Stevens and they had two sons. After Wayne died, she moved to California where she met Forrest “Woody” Zantow. They married and Milly and her sons moved to Wisconsin to live with Woody. Milly and Woody had a son together. They lived on the Baraboo Bluffs.

In 1979, they started E-Z Recycling. E-Z stood for Ehl-Zantow, the last names of its founders, Jenny Ehl and Milly Zantow. They were busy from the start. Busy making a difference.

They spread the word in nearby schools and asked students to collect plastic items to recycle. People from the area helped them collect, sort, clean, break down, and grind up recyclables (re-si-kla-bles).
Milly volunteered at many places in her community. One place was a **conservation** (*kon-ser-vey-shun*) center called the International Crane Foundation (ICF) in Baraboo. She cared for cranes and helped run ICF. In 1978 Milly went on a trip to Japan for ICF. She saw that people there sorted their trash before putting it out for pickup. She found out that they were recycling.

She went to the nearby University of Wisconsin campus to learn how to do tests to identify types of plastic. She also decided to get a plastic grinder to grind up plastic items. It was expensive. Milly told her friend Jenny Ehl (*ail*) about it. Jenny offered to help. They both cashed in their life insurance (*in-shur-anse*) policies to get the money to buy one. Then they drove to Chicago to get it.
Waste Woes

Back in Wisconsin, Milly heard that the landfill in Sauk County was closing. It was almost full and leaked toxic chemicals into the ground. A new landfill might not be ready before the old one closed. Milly went to the landfill to see what was going on.

Much of the waste in the landfill was plastic. Plastic packaging for items was becoming more common. People tossed it after just one use. All of the plastic waste was not good for the environment.

Milly thought that the plastic should be recycled. She went to the county board and told them her idea. They said no. They said they didn’t know how. They said nobody did. Milly didn’t give up.

A Plan Takes Shape

What she had seen in Japan inspired Milly. Some things were already being recycled where she lived. Milly did research to learn more about plastic. She wanted to know if and how plastic could be recycled.

She asked a milk company in Milwaukee what they did about defects in milk jugs. Did they throw them away? No. They melted them down and made new ones. When she heard that, she thought that recycling plastic had to be possible. She went to area plastics companies to ask if they would use post-consumer plastic to make their products. Would they use it? Well, it wasn’t so simple. Plastic waste had to be sorted by type, cleaned, and ground up before they would use it to make products.

Photo credit: Wisconsin DNR.