

Second Place  
Benjamin Rozema  
Calvin Christian High School / 11th Grade

### America's Leading Lady: An Insight into Betty Ford's Life as an Inspiring Leader

Unapologetically outspoken and refreshingly honest, Betty Ford prevails as one of the most extraordinary and influential first ladies in U.S. history. Married to the honorable President Ford, Mrs. Ford's entry into the public sphere could not have emerged at a better time. The political scandals, Vietnam War, and embittered remnants of the civil rights movement forged a yearning in the American people for an honest, authentic figure to rectify the societal debacle, and Mrs. Ford suffused that void. Therefore, Betty Ford is revered for being an exemplary leader as she exhibited audacity, candor, and resourcefulness.

As First Lady, Mrs. Ford is recollected as being an audacious voice in the women's rights movement. When Mrs. Ford was an adolescent, her father unexpectedly passed away in a carbon monoxide tragedy; consequently, the burden of earning money was assumed by her mother. Akin to many women during the 1930s, Mrs. Ford's mother earned a considerably low wage compared to what most men earned, and Mrs. Ford perceived this injustice. Therefore, as an adult, Mrs. Ford's vocation concerned championing gender equality, even if it bore her trouble. In fact, she often drew criticism from her own party, the Republican Party, due to her more progressive stance on birth control and equal pay for women. Nonetheless, she disregarded the critical comments and continued to boldly fight for her convictions. Mrs. Ford will be remembered most notably for her dauntless fight to pass the Equal Rights Amendment, the proposed constitutional provision that prohibits the denial of civil rights based on gender. Though her battle to pass the amendment ended unsuccessfully, Mrs. Ford's audacious devotion to equality highlighted the leadership qualities she possessed, and she continues to stand as a quintessential leader for individuals with a fervent passion.

Mrs. Ford's candid decision to publicly disclose her breast cancer diagnosis sparked a revolution in women's health. Shortly after entering the White House, Mrs. Ford received the troubling news that her body possessed breast cancer. During the White House's prior years, health afflictions often remained hidden out of fear that a weakness in health would equate to a perceived weakness in leadership. In addition, breast cancer existed as a sensitive subject that very few women desired to address. Mrs. Ford, however, aspired to maintain a transparent public appearance, for she desired Americans to regain the capacity to trust public leaders. Thus, Mrs. Ford courageously discussed her breast cancer diagnosis and, as a result, her testimony ushered in a dramatic alteration in women's health. Widespread mammograms and breast cancer awareness rallies superseded uncertainty and despair concerning the issue. It was no longer a matter reluctantly spoken about but rather an issue comprehended and truthfully discussed. Through Mrs. Ford's candid announcement, breast cancer awareness and prevention has expanded tremendously, and, in turn, numerous women have been liberated from this alarming disease.

Mrs. Ford is remembered for the strides she attained in addiction treatment and prevention through resourcefully utilizing her personal experience as a former addict. Initiated by a minor pill to ease her spinal arthritis, Mrs. Ford's infrequent alcohol and prescription medication consumption slowly transpired into a serious addiction. Shortly after departing from the White House, Mrs. Ford was confronted by her family concerning her issue. Having a deep love and profound respect for her family, Mrs. Ford embraced their advice and successfully sought professional help. Soon after her recovery, Mrs. Ford desired to inaugurate a reshaping concerning addiction's adverse

connotation. Realizing the influence she had on the American public, Mrs. Ford decided to publicly recount her past struggle with addiction to commence the transformation she longed for. Analogous to her breast cancer response, Mrs. Ford's actions succeeded to positively alter the public's view of addiction, and the disorder was no longer deemed a taboo subject. The current progress surrounding the issue of addiction is evidenced by Mrs. Ford's resourceful decision to promulgate a vital issue.

To conclude, Mrs. Ford lived as a distinguished leader of many causes by virtue of her audacity, candor, and resourcefulness. A genuine and effective leader like Mrs. Ford is challenging to discover today. Her unrelenting boldness serves as a beacon of encouragement for aspiring leaders, and her candor is coveted by many in today's society of translucency. Despite the trials Mrs. Ford experienced during her lifetime, individuals today have the privilege of admiring a leader who utilized her tribulations to progress vital issues. Though Mrs. Ford has departed, the advances she achieved and the robust leadership qualities she possessed continue to resonate with Americans today.