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Kids give Obama a sense of young America

By Judy Masterson

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HIGHLAND PARK—The president got an earful from second-graders at Braeside Elementary when “Dear President Obama: Letters of Hope from Children Across America” was published this spring.

The collection of nearly 200 letters and drawings from children in 29 states and every region of the country has been named to the KidsPost Summer Book Club by the Washington Post. Compiled shortly after Obama’s election, the book includes letters and drawings from former students of teacher Larry Hiler, who recently retired.

“I am happy you are the president of the United States of America,” writes Ryan Mack, 8. “I hope when you are president, we won’t have wars, guns, robbers and fighting. We will have world peace.”

Helene Bergmann, 7, advises: “I think we should stop killing tigers. Every July 2nd we should give money to the poor. We should give presents to children in the hospitals and children that are poor.”

Shelby Auerbach, 8, portrays Obama standing at a podium beneath a sunny sky and the American flag. Obama’s two young daughters stand behind him, proudly calling him “Dad.”

A Highland Park High School student also earned a spot in the book. James Liebenson, 15, tells the president that he became interested in politics because of his historic candidacy.

“I never realized debating with friends over politics was so much fun,” Liebenson writes. “I enjoy and take inspiration from your speeches.”

The book was compiled and edited by author-journalists Bruce Kluger (USA Today, National Public Radio) and David Tabatsky (“Chicken Soup for the Soul: The Cancer Book”). Contributors range in age from 4 to 18.

The 179 children ultimately selected for “Dear President Obama” represent a spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds, from the seventh-grader in a Manhattan private school to a classroom of children in one of the poorest communities in Lincoln, Neb. The young correspondents express their hopes

and dreams about the world they live in.

Ryan Mack, home from summer camp on Tuesday, said that seeing his hopes for world peace in print made him “really happy.”

“I’m a Democrat and I want war to stop,” Mack declared.

How does Mack think Obama could stop it?

“By talking with the other team,” Mack said.

His mom, Ally, said the letter made a historic election even more memorable.

“I am so thrilled that he expressed himself in three sentences, let alone to be chosen for the book,” she said.