

Elizabeth Musoke-Flores: A passion for conservation education

By Donald Tipton

What is the first thing that you notice about a person? For me, it was Elizabeth Musoke-Flores' smile and the way that her walk was completely carefree.

That is, until we started our conversation. From the first email introduction to the moment we sat down, there was a warmth and understanding that we both had. It was as if we had been friends for years and had just finally found a moment to catch up on life.

We sat across from each other at the Blackbird Café and took deep breaths. Elizabeth immediately found ease and we began our conversation. What became relevant was the fact that we both had no idea where to begin, but we found a point.

Elizabeth is a proud recent graduate of Kansas State University. Coming to Kansas for a unique opportunity, Elizabeth first went to K-State for a five-year non-Baccalaureate master's degree, spent a year working in the Kansas City area, then went back to school to earn a doctorate in Environmental Design & Planning. Her smile and facial expressions show how intense yet satisfying her experience has been.

These days the newlywed has become a pivotal contributor to the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education. Elizabeth expressed her love for the program and the knowledge that she has gained in the few short months she's been there.

When asked about what she does, Elizabeth smiled, laughed and sighed. I noticed that she was not overwhelmed with her responsibilities. She was simply trying to find a way to put them into words, at least words that I would understand. No fear of boredom from me.

Elizabeth is a volunteer, but not just the average volunteer. She is intricately involved in data collection and outreach for the Green Schools program. She told me about the updating of data, and how integral this is for keeping the program going.

With a program working with 400 schools in Kansas, this program is largely available statewide. Elizabeth places her hands on everything that she can. There is a passion in her eyes as she lists her values and talks about why she ended up with this organization. It's all about "improving education," she says.

When asked to expound she says, "It's important for people to understand the environment and how we affect it."

She continues, discussing important it is for people to "understand the importance of environmental conservation."

I shake and nod in agreement, all the while reveling in the fact that this is all volunteer work. She's not paid. This is simply for learning and heart-filling purpose.

We talk further, and she discusses her roots. Elizabeth is half Ugandan and half Kenyan, having been born in Kenya and raised there until she was 17.

Because of this, she has a unique view on the American experience and the environmental response Americans have. This further propels her mission and values when it comes to the environment.