

Luisel Ricks-Santi

Born: Puerto Rico

Currently: Hampton University, Hampton, Virginia



I was born in Puerto Rico and my father joined the Navy shortly after my birth. He was stationed around the world, but when I was 10, we went back to Puerto Rico.

Our street ended with a 15-20-foot cliff overlooking a rocky beach in a bay full of manatees, sting rays, octopus, crabs and all types of fish. In the fifth grade, each child chose a year-long project; I focused on the migration patterns of manatees in our bay. Discovering new animals and plants piqued my interest in science.

Today, I'm a cancer geneticist and founder of the Hampton University Cancer Research Center - where we're looking at incidence rates of cancer in ethnically diverse and underserved populations. That feeling of discovery is something that continues to excite me to this day. When I make a new connection or develop

hypotheses - I feel like my heart skips a beat - just like it did as a young girl in Puerto Rico!