

# LUZ

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**“Trust yourself. We are often capable of some truly remarkable things when we allow ourselves to give in to our instincts of survival and self-love”**

***-Luz Salem Villamil***





## Luz Salem Villamil - My story

Diagnosed with stage 1 breast cancer at age 31 and treated at Mediclinic City Hospital

### When did you find out you had breast cancer?

I was diagnosed on July 25, 2018. I was 31 years old.

### How did you find out you had breast cancer?

The first time I felt the lump on the right side was back in February 2018. I honestly did not think it could possibly be cancer, not then anyway. I thought it was just a random lump from a hormonal imbalance that would eventually go away.

My lump was quite large and from my first visit to the doctor, they became concerned. One week, an ultrasound and a biopsy later, I was diagnosed with stage 1 breast cancer.

### What did you go through emotionally?

It was extremely difficult. From the moment I was given the news, I did not understand how this could have happened. All I could think about was: "I'm 31. How can I have breast cancer at 31?" I felt guilty as if having cancer was my fault. I tried to find something to blame it on. Was it my own vanity? Was it because I did not eat well

enough? Was this some kind of punishment?

Focusing on my mental health during this time was very important to me. I felt that I needed to understand "what for" rather than "why" this was all happening to me. It was that small change in semantics that made all the difference. No, I still don't think cancer is a gift. It is not a gift. The diagnosis, and the treatment, is very harsh and going through it is physically and emotionally challenging. It just meant that I would focus on what this experience brought to my life in a more positive way. It still means that I am looking for the meaning beyond it, taking it day by day always with a little bit of humour in between.

Cancer has made me question my ideals of beauty, of femininity, it has made me understand my body in ways I did not think possible. Cancer has made me realise that there is no better time to do anything than right now.



### What did your treatment plan include?

I had a unilateral mastectomy of my right breast and 18 sessions of chemotherapy.

### How did you cope with the treatment?

Everyone has a different way of coping and nothing you do is "wrong" - we all handle things differently. For me, I was very systematic with my illness and treatment. I had excel sheets and I tried my best so that the disease would disrupt as little of my life as possible. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't but I did try my best to surround myself with loving people which helped immensely.

Treatment was quite difficult. The first thing I did was contact a friend, and fellow survivor, who did an amazing job at walking me through the process of what chemo was going to be like, of what surgery would be like and so forth. She helped me see the other side of the tunnel. She was already recovered and looked strong and beautiful and that gave me hope that this was only temporary and I could turn things around.





My friends were truly incredible as well. My parents could not be here with me but my brother did fly in for a few weeks and everyone was just so supportive and loving through it all. I was blessed to have them, they tried to make me as comfortable as possible and I discovered self-love through their eyes.

#### How was your treatment with Mediclinic?

I did my mastectomy and part of my chemo at Mediclinic. Dr. Annett Al Hamadi at Mediclinic City Hospital was absolutely wonderful, she made me feel comfortable from day 1 and I was lucky to have her as my lead surgeon. I was able to do an immediate reconstruction and it was a remarkable job.

I will always be grateful to Dr. Fadi and his nurse, and Dr. Annett, they were a wonderful team. They helped keep me sane by answering all my questions and being kind and supportive throughout.

#### What motivated you?

The thought of getting through this and everything that I



learned in the process. I was going to give my recovery my best because I deserved to give myself that chance.

#### What advice would you like to give to the people reading your story?

Trust yourself. We are often capable of some truly remarkable things when we allow ourselves to give in to our instincts of survival and self-love.

#### Anything else you wish to add?

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my story.



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