



A Same-Day Beginning

I sometimes jokingly call Libby “Dr. Dr. Libby” because she holds two doctorates, one in education and another, I believe, in literature or a closely related field. But although those academic accomplishments are deeply impressive, those who truly know Libby understand that her greatest strength is not simply found in degrees, titles, or credentials. It is found in the remarkable way she makes people feel seen, valued, encouraged, understood, and strengthened.

I met Libby Smith a little over three years ago when we both started on the exact same day at Holdfast Recovery. We were same-day starts, both stepping into an unfamiliar world, both trying to figure out exactly what we had signed up for and what this next chapter of life would look like. I think Libby, in particular, felt understandably apprehensive in those early days. Walking into trauma and addiction work is no small thing. It is emotionally demanding work, deeply consuming work, and often painful work. People on the outside sometimes imagine therapy as simply sitting in a chair and talking, but those who truly do trauma work understand something far deeper. When you genuinely enter another person’s suffering, when you genuinely allow yourself to sit with shattered childhoods, addiction, abuse, grief, terror, betrayal, shame, and despair, there is a cost to that.

Over time, however, I had the tremendous privilege of supervising Dr. Dr. Libby for well over a year, and it became increasingly obvious to me that although she was not yet fully licensed at that point, she was already functioning at the level of a deeply skilled and highly intuitive

therapist. Her empathy was natural. Her therapeutic instincts were strong. Her insight was thoughtful and grounded. But beyond all of that, what ultimately stood out to me most about Libby was not simply her clinical competence. It was her extraordinary heart and her remarkable ability to encourage people who quietly carry very heavy burdens.

The Gift of Validation

If there is one word that defines Libby Smith, it is validation.

Without question, without exaggeration, and without exception, Libby possesses one of the most remarkable gifts for affirming and encouraging others that I have ever personally encountered. She does not flatter people artificially, and she certainly does not overdo affirmation in some performative way. Instead, she somehow lands encouragement exactly where it is needed most, with sincerity, humility, gentleness, and grace. Those who have worked beside her know exactly what I mean. She notices emotional exhaustion that others miss. She notices discouragement, self-doubt, quiet burdens, and the invisible emotional fatigue that trauma therapists quietly carry after years of entering the suffering of others.

That matters more than most people realize.

Scripture tells us to ***“bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”*** In many ways, that verse captures the essence of what good trauma therapists actually do every single day. We enter suffering with people. We sit beside them in darkness. We help them carry pain that at times feels unbearable. And if we genuinely care, if we genuinely allow ourselves to enter those stories with emotional presence, then some of that pain inevitably stays with us. Clinically, people may call it vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress, but regardless of the terminology, those who do this work understand the reality of it. We carry pieces of people’s suffering quietly inside of us.

Libby understands that reality in a deeply unusual way. She sees the burden. She sees the responsibility. She sees the emotional weight carried quietly by therapists and caregivers who spend their lives trying to hold space for shattered human beings. And rather than ignoring it, she offers something profoundly healing through her encouragement and validation. She strengthens people. She restores courage. She helps weary hearts continue leaning into the work.

What has personally moved me so deeply over the years is the consistency of her encouragement toward me. As many people know, I frequently send out blogs, reflections, essays, and writings to people I care about. Many people never respond at all. Some respond briefly. But Libby is almost always the very first person to write back, and she responds not casually, but deeply, thoughtfully, emotionally, and reflectively. She reads with her heart. I honestly do not think she fully realizes how meaningful that has been to me over the years.

Horses, Healing, and Faithfulness

In fact, more often than not, Libby is the very first person I send my writings to because I know she genuinely cares about what I write. She reflects deeply on it. She allows herself to be emotionally moved by it. And somehow, simply knowing that something I wrote touched her spirit gives the writing itself greater meaning to me. Validation is a profoundly healing thing, particularly for people who spend their lives pouring themselves into others. There are moments in this work where therapists quietly wonder whether anything they are doing truly matters, whether they are helping enough, whether they are making a deep enough difference, and whether the emotional cost is truly worth it. Then someone like Libby comes alongside and quietly reminds you that your words mattered, your presence mattered, your work mattered, and your willingness to continue showing up mattered.

Another beautiful dimension of Dr. Dr. Libby is her extraordinary love for horses. Libby is an accomplished equestrian who deeply understands horses, rescues horses, nurtures horses, and ministers through horses. She currently has a herd of rescued “critters,” as she affectionately calls them, animals that many others may have overlooked or failed to understand. There is honestly something deeply fitting about that because the same heart that notices wounded people also notices wounded animals. Libby sees what is frightened, what is hurting, what needs gentleness instead of force, and what needs patience instead of pressure.

Her work with horses beautifully parallels the work she does with traumatized human beings. Horses respond to nervous systems. They respond to emotional congruence, safety, calmness, trust, and regulation. In many ways, horses mirror what is happening inside of us autonomically, and Libby intuitively understands that reality in a deeply beautiful way. She uses her love of horses not merely as a hobby, but as a ministry of healing and restoration for people recovering from trauma and addiction. Through those interactions, people often rediscover trust, grounding, connection, and emotional safety in ways that ordinary conversations alone sometimes cannot fully accomplish.

Life eventually carried Libby to Kansas so she could be near her daughter, who has struggled with devastating and life-altering health complications. Watching someone you deeply love suffer is its own unique agony, and I cannot imagine the emotional burden Libby has carried through those seasons. There have been financial hardships, emotional strain, uncertainty, and fear that would understandably overwhelm many people. Yet through all of it, Libby has never lost hope. She has never lost faith. And to me, that says everything about the depth of her character.

I am also deeply proud of her for continuing her professional journey as she moves toward becoming a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in Kansas while simultaneously pursuing additional NeuroFaith® Certification. Even now, at a stage of life where many people begin slowing down, Libby continues leaning forward into growth, service, healing, faith, and purpose. Scripture tells us to “encourage one another and build each other up,” and honestly,

Dr. Dr. Libby -The Ministry of Encouragement
-Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.

that verse captures Libby beautifully. She builds people up. She strengthens people. She restores courage in people who are emotionally exhausted.

Because she understands something important. We are not called to sit in rocking chairs and simply rock our final years away. We are called to rock it for Jesus, to continue carrying light into dark places, to continue loving people deeply, and to continue entering suffering with compassion and courage until the final breath we breathe.

And Dr. Dr. Libby absolutely gets that.

So, Libby, thank you. Thank you for your encouragement. Thank you for your wisdom. Thank you for your validation. Thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for seeing people so deeply. Thank you for helping weary hearts continue the work. Thank you for strengthening my own spirit more than you probably realize.

You have profoundly impacted my life, and I know without question that countless others would say exactly the same.

With profound gratitude, affection, and respect,

Jeff