Bio: Clara Denise West, Ph.D.

Clara Denise West, Ph.D. is an award-winning author, engineer, educator, songwriter, and the creator of **Koko and Friends™**, a restorative storytelling universe designed to protect childhood and rebuild emotional safety for children through SEL-driven narratives, music, and community. She is one of fewer than 3,000 Black women in U.S. history to earn a Ph.D. in engineering, and one of the extraordinarily rare Black women—representing less than **0.03%** of all licensed amateurs—to hold an **FCC Extra Class Amateur Radio License**, the highest level of communications licensing in the United States. Her work fuses systems engineering, high-level communication analysis, emotional intelligence, moral development, and trauma-responsive practice into a transformative mission for children.

Dr. West's purpose crystallized when her then eight-year-old daughter attempted suicide due to relentless bullying. Conversations failed, logic failed—but a story about a small bug named Koko who loved the game of basketball, who practiced every day even when the world doubted him, opened the door to her daughter's truth. Through this metaphor of a child fighting to stay in the game, her daughter finally expressed what she could not speak aloud. That breakthrough birthed **Koko and Friends™**, not as entertainment, but as a life-saving intervention designed to restore the dignity and emotional safety of children everywhere.

The basketball court became the symbolic landscape for teaching endurance, teamwork, courage under pressure, and the power of staying in the game even when life delivers hard fouls. This lived urgency became the foundation for the **Koko and Friends Anti-Bullying Program™ (ABP)**—a comprehensive K–12 system that integrates Social-Emotional Learning, trauma-awareness, cultural belonging, conflict resolution, and student-led leadership development. Just as championship teams thrive from the inside out, the ABP addresses the *root causes* of harmful behavior by building identity, belonging, emotional regulation, and peer influence. Instead of simply giving students rules, the ABP equips them with the **moral compass and leadership role** needed to shift school culture—one play, one decision, one moment of courage at a time.

Recognizing that no team wins without a strong support system, Dr. West developed **Not on Our Watch™ (N.O.W.)**, the community sustainability arm of the ABP. N.O.W. installs a trained **Community Program Coordinator™** on campus who serves as the on-site, trusted point guard of emotional safety—scanning the floor, reading the energy of the school, coordinating wraparound help for families, and reinforcing the values needed to keep every child in the emotional game. This ensures that culture change is not episodic—it becomes a **living, sustainable system** supported by school, home, and community working as one team.

Building on this structure, Dr. West later designed the **City-Wide "Last Straw Campaign™"**—a unifying public initiative intended for the City of Memphis. Modeled after the power of a home-team rally, it was engineered to mobilize students, families, educators, and civic partners in a symbolic stand against bullying. Though fully developed and approved, political shifts prevented implementation. Still, the campaign's architecture demonstrated Dr. West's ability to design **city-scale, cross-sector teamwork** grounded in SEL and child-led leadership.

Expanded Work and Impact

Her broader portfolio continues this theme of empowerment, teamwork, and confidence-building:

- **Koko and Friends™** books, animation, music, and SEL tools
- **The Long Shots Locker Room™**, a youth entrepreneurship platform inspired by the underdog spirit of sports
- **Koko and Friends Life Lab™**, merging STEM + SEL and teaching children to think strategically—on and off the court
- **Koko and Friends Jukebox™**, an AI-assisted SEL music platform filled with anthems of confidence and perseverance
- **School & community programs** serving at-risk and underserved children

Dr. West has been featured in national media, honored by national and international film festivals and educational organizations, and recognized with awards including the **Mom's Choice Awards™ (Gold)**.

Her mission is rooted in one unshakable conviction:
Childhood is sacred. Emotional safety is non-negotiable. And every child deserves a village strong enough to protect their hope, their identity, and their joy.

Like the best coaches, she believes children must be taught not only how to play the game, but how to recover from setbacks, trust their team, rebuild confidence, and rise after every fall. She is committed to rebuilding the village that once protected childhood—and to giving every child the strength to stay in the game, take the shot, and discover the champion within.

Storytelling is her playbook.
Healing is her mission. Empowerment is her destination.
Children—our most vulnerable players—are her assignment.