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**BOOKS / Houston children's author has something to crow about / Lavaille Lavette's "Roopster Roux" series to promote reading gets new awakening with comedian Harvey.**

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**By LANA BERKOWITZ**

**Staff**

AUTHOR Lavaille Lavette was nursing a cut on her knee when she answered the phone. She had fallen that morning while skateboarding on the sidewalks near her Houston home.

"I had on elbow pads, my helmet and one knee pad. I couldn't find the other knee pad," Lavette said. "So I go out and where do I fall? On the knee without the knee pad. Got a scrape on it, that's all."

It was the beginning of a busy day that included a meeting with the board of directors of the Greater Houston and Convention and Business Bureau and afternoon meetings with a manufacturer and graphic designer about Roopster Roux products.

Lavette's children's book character Roopster Roux has awakened anew with input from comedian Steve Harvey. Four Roopster Roux books were published seven years ago. The series stars a middle schooler who uses his love of sports and reading to conquer wacky villains. Roopster Roux also depends on his Roux Ripper skateboard, which has special powers.

"So Roopster kind of does everything that I do," Lavette said. Except Roopster is a rooster and his nemeses have names such as Punster and Victor Vain.

Harvey is a character in Roopster's latest adventures, "That's Not Punny," which was released in July, and "You're So Victor Vain," which will be available Sept. 15. Two more Roopster tales are due in 2008.

Lavette and Harvey, who met through friends, attorney Ricky Anderson and actor/writer/producer Rushion McDonald, want to develop Roopster Roux as an animated television series. But before Roopster becomes a TV star, Lavette is bringing out new titles with the "Steve Harvey presents" banner.

The books will feature humor and action, a combination Lavette used to interest her brother in reading when she invented Roopster Roux. About 10 years ago, Lavette's parents in Lafayette, La., had Tyrone on a waiting list to enroll at a school for children with learning disabilities. Since she had been working at HISD as a teacher and administrator, Lavette offered to let Tyrone live with her to attend a Houston school until there was an opening at the Louisiana school. Although her parents warned her that grade-schooler Tyrone was a stubborn, reluctant student, Lavette thought she could handle it.

"I thought, 'I'll straighten him out,'" Lavette said, but she found schoolwork was the last thing on her little brother's mind. "It was a mess. All he wanted to do was play basketball and skate."

So while they played basketball, Lavette would tell Tyrone zany adventure stories about characters who liked to read.

"I started getting into it and making up more and more stories," Lavette said. The chicken in the tales became a rooster, which Tyrone pronounced "roopster."

Tyrone is now about 20, and Lavette says she's pushing 95. She left HISD around 1998 to become a writer and an educational consultant. From 2001 to 2004, Lavette served as a special adviser to U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige.

She's also writing two other book series, including the Peppermint Mint Club, about four teenage girls.

Roopster, however, is her passion.

Lavette and Roopster, who is drawn by illustrator Vuthy Kuon, begin their book tour this month with stops in Las Vegas and Detroit. Lavette will be at Barnes & Noble, 5000 Westheimer, at noon Sept. 8 to sign books.

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