



BLAME *the* BAKED GOODS

A SERIES OF SWEET WHODUNITS
FROM AUTHOR JOANNE FLUKE

by Jenna Marotta
photo by Kimberly Butler

Joanne Fluke keeps 27 shoeboxes full of recipes in her Southern California kitchen. Her favorites are splattered with chocolate or butter; proof that they were well loved.

“It’s my legacy from my mother, her two sisters, my grandmother” who once scribbled a recipe on the back of a gas bill “her two sisters, and all the neighbors in the small town in Minnesota where I grew up,” Joanne says, recalling Swanville and its population of less than 300. Although she moved away from Minnesota around 1980, the nine-time grandma returns there every day when writing her New York Times best-selling series about crime-solving baker Hannah Swensen.

This year, Joanne published her 30th Swensen book, *Triple Chocolate Cheesecake Murder*, which follows on the success of *Cherry Cheesecake Murder*, *Key Lime Pie Murder*, and *Double Fudge Brownie Murder*. The Hallmark Channel has aired six TV movies based on the series, ranging from *Murder, She Baked: Just Desserts* to *Sweet Revenge: A Hannah Swensen Mystery*.

When writing her first book, *Chocolate Chip Cookie Murder*, in 2000, Joanne aspired to craft a more relatable female protagonist than we often get to see. “I wanted to make the main character somebody that was not gorgeous and thin,” she says. “I wanted her to be a baker. And I thought, ‘I’m going to write somebody that is nice-looking and she’s got blazing red hair that’s frizzy, and her favorite outfits are sweatshirts and jeans.’” Hollywood took liberties by casting blonde, blue-eyed *Days of Our Lives* actor Alison Sweeney in the role for TV.

Both the books and the movies tell the story of a former academic named Hannah who returns home to fictional Lake Eden, Minnesota, to be closer to her family after the death of her father. She spends her days selling homemade pastries at her bakery and café, The Cookie Jar—unless she’s assisting Detective Mike Kingston on his latest case.

Joanne sprinkles each of her books with a combination of her inherited and newly whipped-up recipes. Occasionally, she includes recipes sent from her devoted fanbase, the “Hannah Maniacs.” Meeting an 8-year-old reader inspired her to use kid-friendly baking terms. For example, “I always tell people how to plump the raisins,” she says.

Prior to creating her beloved baker character, Joanne released 12 psychological thrillers, mostly while employed as an executive secretary. While plenty of authors track how many books they write, she does not. “Adding them up scares me,” she says. “Then I set a goal like, I’ve got to get to 50. It puts on pressure.”

Joanne credits her work ethic to her parents, who juggled multiple businesses, including a funeral parlor and a hardware store, during her youth. Her next mystery, *Caramel Pecan Roll Murder*, is set to arrive in bookstores winter 2022.

Joanne spends considerable time thinking about the busy lives people lead. “We have a lot of stress,” she says. “People just need a time-out.” Which is why she’s happy that her stories transport audiences to “a nice little town where they’ll meet some people they’ll probably like.”

BUTTERSCOTCH DELIGHT COOKIES

From the forthcoming *Caramel Pecan Roll Murder* by Joanne Fluke

Makes 2½ to 3 dozen soft, butterscotchy cookies that everyone will love

- 8 ounces (2 sticks) salted butter
- ¾ cup white sugar
- ¾ cup brown sugar, packed
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 2 large eggs, whipped up in a glass with a fork
- 3 cups all-purpose flour, packed
- 2 cups (one 11-ounce package) butterscotch chips

Melt the butter in a microwave-safe bowl on high for 60 seconds. Let the butter sit in the microwave for an additional minute. If it's not completely melted, microwave in 20-second increments with 20-second standing times until melted.

Set the melted butter on the counter to let it cool. Put the white sugar in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Sprinkle the brown sugar on top of the white sugar and add the salt. Turn the mixer on low and blend the sugars and salt together. With the mixer still running on low, add the vanilla extract, followed by the baking soda and baking powder. Mix thoroughly. Add the eggs, and mix again. Shut off the mixer and scrape down the bowl.

Turn the mixer back on low and thoroughly mix in the melted butter. Add the flour to your mixing bowl in half-cup increments, mixing thoroughly after each addition. Turn off the mixer, scrape down the sides of the bowl again. Add the butterscotch chips and give the cookie dough a final stir by hand.

Cover the dough with plastic wrap and set it in the refrigerator to chill for at least 45 minutes. Overnight is fine, too.

When you're ready to bake your cookies, preheat your oven to 375°F, and make sure your rack is in the middle position. Leave your cookie dough in the refrigerator until your oven has come to temperature. Prepare your cookie sheets with non-stick cooking spray or line with parchment paper.

Take your cookie dough out of the refrigerator and use a spoon or 2-teaspoon scooper to transfer balls of dough to your prepared cookie sheets, 12 cookies per standard-sized cookie sheet.

Bake for 10 to 14 minutes. When your cookies are done, remove the sheet tray from the oven and let cool for 3 minutes before moving the individual cookies to a wire rack to complete the cooling.

Recipe excerpted from Caramel Pecan Roll Murder (out 2022) by Joanne Fluke. Published by Kensington Books.

