



Cake in the country

Happily baking in the back of beyond..

Double chocolate chip cookies

November 23, 2013

Well, it's been a while. I've given up a large amount of my blog time in order to sleep in the last few months (job, exams, life has been taking over), but I have been swearing to myself that I would actually do some baking and manage to take some pictures and write something on this abandoned blog.

Here's the thing. It is November, and I am firmly of the opinion that (gulp- the C word) Christmas does not begin in August/September/October/November. I have a rule that after The Late Late Toy Show I do enjoy Christmas, but I won't make the Christmas effort until December! Now don't get me wrong, I absolutely adore Christmas, but 4 months of jingle bells does not a happy camper make. However, given that I have a few days of annual leave now and I have a ridiculous amount of stuff to get done in December that will likely not include baking/photography for the most part, I'm adding to my Christmas gift giving series. Previous ideas for edible loveliness can be found [here](#).

Part of the reason giving baked goods to extended family/friends works well for me (apart from the complete happiness baking it brings) is that I am quite possibly the worst person for buying presents early for people, being ridiculously excited about them, and then giving them to people 2 days later on the 10th of December. I then have to start the process again. Find a different present and...

whole other story. Speaking of stories, let's begin to examine the days of shopping for Christmas presents. These usually go something like this.... (Cue fuzzy dissolve screen to a wet, cold and blustery December day in town)

Part one: The beginning.

The date was December 21st. With a heavy purse (Air. And I.O.U.s. And lots of 2c coins) and a light heart I hopped out of the car only to be blown halfway across the carpark and into a rather

If you felt like it...



Looking for something in particular?

Hi. I'm Cake in the country. You may remember me from...

Hmmm.. good point. So heres the short of it: Born

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agitated looking lady with two children anxiously clutching selection boxes for fear they'd be taken away before Christmas eve. Santa was not getting any of these tiny chocolate bars. I sheepishly apologised and managed to struggle against the wind back to my car, ignoring the mittens, papers and odd small child flying around in the gale. Well, I thought to myself, it's a challenge but at least it feels like Christmas!

The fairy lights were lit, the Christmas music was seeping out of every warmly lit shop window, and a formidable queue of human traffic edged through every small space. The smell of mince pies radiated through the air. The magical edge was somewhat blunted by the screaming children, very grumpy parents and the general war at the tills, not to mention the impressive use of paper shopping bags as battering rams, but oblivious to such things I skipped to the nearest shop, flashing the salesperson a winning smile that implied I would indeed be spending my hard earned pennies in their terrific premises. The smile faded, however, when I realised that it may be a bit late in the day for some decent Christmas shopping. It appeared the once well stocked shelves were now full of bits of tissue paper, quite a significant amount of dust, and a lone DVD, which was quickly pulled away by a rather desperate looking man who hissed at me, threw some money at the disgruntled looking salesperson, and clutching the spoils of his labour quickly exited the shop, muttering something that sounded distinctly like 'my precious'. I stood for a minute, considered whether my sister would in fact enjoy a piece of tissue paper, but decided against it on the whole. Cutting my losses, I (less eagerly) strolled into the next store, catching one infant mid air and handing it back to a worried looking father who looked slightly disappointed with the return of his child. Well it quickly transpired that I may have been a little too relaxed in my waiting until Christmas week before starting my shopping, for potential presents were disappearing before my eyes. Doing my usual run through Penneys I witnessed a hunger games-esque fight between two girls over a hot water bottle with an admittedly adorable cover that looked like a sheep (oh the things they come up with). It appeared to be the last one, and clearly it was quite the commodity. Backing away slowly in order not to frighten them into turning on me, I decided that the best thing to do would be to pop in to the supermarket pick up a few bits and pieces for baking day...

End of part one. See my next post for the thrilling part 2 of this Christmas baking mini series. I know, I know, it's more exciting than the finale of breaking bad. In the meantime however, I give you quite possibly one of the easiest and most rewarding recipes I own.

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of it, click the about moi tab up there (it's half French so it must be high class). *and inventor apparently. **Follow @cakeinthecountry**

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P.S. Lovely board is from M & N design, Sligo based company. Bought it months ago and finally using it. Beautiful. (www.mandnfurnituredesign.com)

Double chocolate chip cookies. Eat with milk for comfort level infinity.

You will need

- 115g butter
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 130g flour
- 50g caster sugar
- 100g light golden sugar
- 30g cocoa
- 1/2 tsp baking soda

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170g white chocolate chips/buttons

Makes... quite a few. I can get 20-30 medium sized out of this pretty easily.

1. Preheat the oven to 170 degrees celcius.
2. Prepare your baking tray/cookie sheet. I really like the non stick mats for this as the sugar tends to make things stick. Otherwise good baking paper does the trick!
3. Melt the butter. Add your (room temperature) egg and vanilla extract.
4. Mix the flour, sugars, cocoa, baking soda in a large bowl.
5. Add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients and stir until combined.
6. Stir in your white chocolate chips.
7. Place small teaspoons of the mixture on your pre prepared baking tray. These spread out significantly so leave plenty of room between. You'll most likely have 2-4 batches to bake.
8. Place in oven for 8 minutes. Depending on your oven you may need an extra minute. They will be soft coming out of the oven, that's ok. No panicking allowed here.
9. Let the cookies begin to cool on the tray. Once they've started to become a bit more solid you can remove them with a spatula to a wire tray to cool.



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[@carolbergin](#) you will adore. 14 hours ago

Courtesy of [@hannahnicholso](#). I've never met a smilier dog in fairness.
[instagram.com/p/ojO5Vm q4HF/](https://www.instagram.com/p/ojO5Vm q4HF/) 16 hours ago

Time for some [@PittBrosBBQ](#)
<http://t.co/EzIyme4CGU>
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Be still my beating heart

That is pretty much it, extremely easy recipe and pretty rewarding overall! Happiness is. Enjoy with a glass of milk- and don't forget to keep some for Santa.

Anybody have any good Christmas shopping stories?

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Growing up in the West of Ireland chronicles: Bonfire night.

May 5, 2013

Hello there. I've been MIA for a while, mainly a result of my working and being a grown up (worse luck). That I won't bore you with, but I have put into words another wee tale of growing up in the wild west of Ireland.

Bonfire night. Once a year all of the neighbours would convene upon the seashore, where weeks of annual clean outs had produced piles of bric-a-brac that were piled up to enormous heights, mostly teetering dangerously to one side. There was one purpose to this meet up and one purpose alone. There was a bonfire to be lit.

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Naturally the night would start in quite a reserved fashion. People would greet each other and chat. Children would approach each other and quietly play around the seashore. A few of the men would start pecking around the pile, rearranging sticks and broken chairs and politely asking each other to catch this or throw that over. Setting the pile into something that could be lit was a task they would undertake with vigour. Once the acceptable standard had been reached (i.e. semi stable) and all small children had been plucked from it, they would proudly stand back and survey their handiwork, pour some lighter fluid or some such on it (Dad managed to dispose of a lot of Mum's soup this way- it's actually known to be explosive in large quantities) and wait for it to be lit. Therein lay the problem, as every year without fail nobody thought to bring matches. Well I and some comrades, fresh out of an Enid Blyton book, clearly knew the solution to this conundrum was to find some flint and/or a magnifying glass with which to create a flame, and set about looking for these around the seashore. Naturally this took some effort as we were on a rather wet beach at night, and if we had been lucky enough to find either of aforementioned prizes, they would have been about as much use as a referee at a Dublin/Meath match. The adults, on the other hand, had a slightly more fruitful idea of asking everyone present if they had a lighter or matches. Naturally nobody ever did, and it inevitably led to Dad running back to the car (parked some distance away to save it getting set on fire. Again.) and driving the whole way home to search for matches. Naturally he would be gone a total of 45 seconds when 7 boxes of matches would simultaneously appear. I don't think Dad ever actually made the lighting of the bonfire as he was always off scouting for something to light it with. Well as soon as it was lit a quiet hush would descend upon the crowd. For 24 seconds. Then the buzz of voices would rise above the crackling and the polite beginnings would descend unto the madness that only a crowd of people around a fire in the west of Ireland can aspire to.

The boxes full of penguin bars, coke, orange and no fewer than 147 bags of crisps would appear. Jim (Peter's dad) would start setting up a pile of bricks to turn into a barbecue and suddenly 14 boxes of burgers, 35 packets of sausages and one lonely veggie burger would materialise. They set about cooking them like pros. Within a half hour, children would be running around with plastic cups filled with something fizzy, turning them from somewhat manageable if bratty beings into something that resembled the worst of super nanny. Naturally nobody cared because you just left them to it. Mothers were happy in the knowledge that they'd reappear in the next few days (weeks if you broke out the sherbet), soft drink hangover present and most likely somewhat hungry after surviving on seaweed in their sugar filled psychoses. They would usher them in the direction of the growing crowd of other children, who were clambering on the famous rock that was for jumping off, and bask in the luxury of chatting to the other neighbours.

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The rock was the natural assembly point, being the place that was the highest point, with the exception of the burning pyre, which *most* had a fair idea not to climb onto. It was the guts of 15 foot high, or so it seemed when you were 5. In actual fact it comes up to my knee now, but at the time clambering onto that rock and jumping off it seemed like something MacGyver would hardly have attempted. Each year the first few children would stand around, hands in pocket, blade of grass in their mouth. 'I don't know now Jimmy, it certainly seems like a risky operation'. 'Well it is Michael, but let's face it, it's a rock that was made for jumping off' 'Do you know Jimmy, you're right there, can't be helped really. And sure I've been watching Captain Planet and they're forever jumping off things, not to mention those ninja turtles'. They'd roll back their sleeves, let out an almighty roar and gallop towards it at a speed Shergar couldn't have matched. A less than orderly line would form. With bated breath we'd peer down from the top of it, terrified to take the leap – 'Don't rush me!' But jump off it we did, with an affinity for jumping off things as only children who grew up in the nineties had.

Eventually our adventures at the rock would progress to an innocent wander over towards the mucky realms of the water's edge. When the tide was out, it was a sloppy muddy swamp that would envelop your foot with a satisfying shluuuup, taking wellies prisoner and eating the runners of the poor kid whose mother forgot the wellies. He was to stay shoeless for 2 and a half weeks, until there was 'a sale on at Cordners, I can't afford to be buying you new shoes if you're not going to look after them. Sure what did you need to go stamping around in the muck for anyway!' Our faltering nervously on the brink of the muddy bank would eventually escalate into outwardly pushing kids into the muck, normally limited to the boys but often a somewhat less manic girl would be unfortunately caught in the crossfire and unwittingly end up amidst the pile of mud covered ruffians who had already met their doom. Every so often an adult would be startled by the sudden appearance of a pair of eyes in front of the barbecue, the rest of their mud coloured unrecognisable faces blending into the dusk, would quickly deposit a burger or sausage in an outstretched hand, and like a flash (only slower and less dramatic) the child (presumably) would disappear.

As the night drew on, the more exhausted families would grab what they thought to be the correct children as they zoomed by, and holding them by the feet at arms length, would attempt to deposit them into the car. A meeting point would be agreed upon to redistribute the mix ups after they were hosed down the next day and it became clearer who was who, but as long as you had the right amount of children in tow it all seemed to work out pretty well. Except, of course, for that one child who was still stuck in the mud, but generally somebody tossed him a burger and he had a wee snooze until it got light again and a slightly worse for wear parent showed up embarrassedly the following morning. For years a number of children believed this was a treat called camping, and had never heard of a tent until they became old enough to go to Oxygen.

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As the crowd diminished, and the spare pile of kindling grew smaller, pallets and tyres would become seats, everyone would gravitate towards the fire, and in a semi circle, people would sit and bask in the warmth. Then, with Jim brandishing a guitar, someone would begin to hum, and without any warning Marion would produce a keyboard from some magical bag, and Pdraig would whip out a bodhran. Without fail the group would launch into a lively rendition of ‘Oh when the saints’, to be followed of course by ‘The rattlin’ bog’ which lasted for at least 45 minutes if not an hour. While most people sang, Dad graced others with jokes. I use the term lightly considering he had some issues with remembering the punchlines, a trait he’s famous for in these parts. This would continue well into the wee hours until the voices or the drink or the fire ran out, whichever two came first. Then the annual torch search would begin fruitlessly, and in the end we’d just give up and walk home in the early morning light, the youngest getting a piggy back ride and the older kids fuelled on by the dregs of the fizzy drinks. Despite some fuzzy heads on the older (Mostly. Well, let’s say 12+) attendees, we’d all manage to meet up the next day and participate in a good clean up of the shore. Dad would have a 4th attempt at telling the same joke and occasionally even make it to the end without forgetting the punchline, and we’d be happy in the knowledge that we had a whole year to learn more than the same three songs for around the fire. Life was good.

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Sweet Sugar Waffles for dessert... (book eats 3)

October 15, 2012



Also probably 'The book eats 3'!

Growing up in Ireland, where to the Irish person waffles are the infamous potato waffles, I didn't get much exposure to the American or Belgian style waffles. I had, of course, read and heard about them for years due to my obsession with reading as a child, and my local library's supply of babysitter's club and Sweet Valley books. Despite their 'athletic build' they seemed to live on a diet of waffles and pot roast, both of which I was unfamiliar with. So I thought it was high time to do something about the lack of waffles in my life and after a number of attempts, this is the one that I'm sticking with! Now one of the things that had put me off making waffles was this awkward process of separating and beating egg whites until peaked (not to mention I didn't have the patience for proving with the yeast types) and such, however, recently OXO sent me out a whisk to try out. Remember those old-fashioned contraptions there you turn a wee wheel and two beaters whizz around, getting stuck every so often but that your granny insisted was the best thing to whip the cream for the trifle? Yes, that type. Only they're really quite fabulous. It's a really

smooth mechanism and it whips those egg whites into soft peaks before you can say 'bloody whisk' and throw it across the room.



On to the recipe.

4 large eggs, separated. Make sure no yolk gets in the white!

250g flour (I use cream

2 tsps baking powder

1/2 tsp salt

50g sugar

1/2 tsp vanilla extract

60g butter (unsalted pref) melted

500mls milk at room temp or even slightly warm (otherwise the butter will solidify when you mix them)

1. Turn on your waffle maker to medium high
2. Mix your dry ingredients- flour, baking powder, salt
3. Beat your egg yolks with all but 1 tbsp of the sugar until pale and creamy.
4. Add the vanilla, butter and milk and whisk well.
5. Add the flour mixture to this and mix nicely until there are no big lumps. A few wee ones are ok.
6. Beat your egg whites until they start to hold a shape. Then sprinkle over your last tbsp of sugar and beat again until they form soft peaks.
7. Stir about 1/4 of the egg whites into the batter to lighten it. Then add the rest of your egg whites and carefully fold in until just mixed. Don't overmix or the pancakes will end up super flat and rather disappointing.

Cooking the waffles

A. Make sure your waffle iron is preheated

B. Take some oil spray or non stick spray (use melted butter or oil if you have none) and lightly spritz your 2 sides of your waffle iron.

C. Put spoonfuls of the mix onto your waffle iron and close. I'd go less rather than more until you figure out the right amount to avoid major spillages.

D. A good way to tell if the waffles are done is if the steam coming out has reduced a lot. My waffle maker doesn't have an 'I'm done' signal. Sine!



Serve with syrup, lashings of nutella, sliced fruit and/or ice cream.

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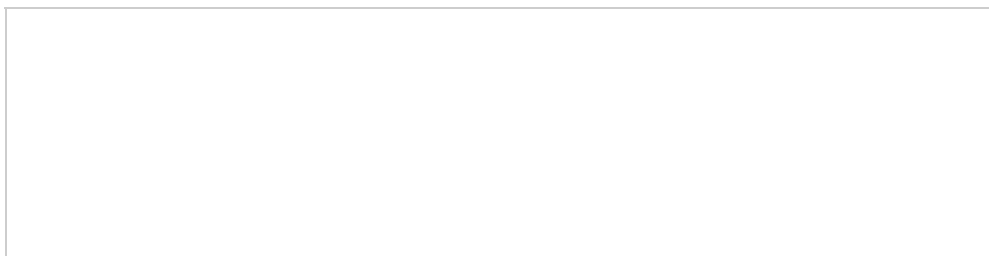
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Chocolate Mousse

October 7, 2012





Hello you...

Going from being a broke student to a broke jobholder has it's perks. For one, I have slightly more disposable income. I mean slightly, you'd all have heartattacks if you knew how much my student loans add up to, and that means more work for me, so I won't tell you. So on my first week of holidays, as tempting as it was to just spend the entire time sleeping, I decided I'd go visit Paris instead. I've always wanted to go, and it worked out pretty reasonable heading over midweek, so off I trotted with my tiny handluggage and went walkabouts around Paris. It was lovely weather and I just had a really nice time wandering around eating pastries until the cows came home*.

Anywho, one of the desserts (yes, *one* of) I treated myself to was a chocolate mousse. And it was rather fantastic, and so I started searching for a recipe for me to make my own infinite supply of yummy chocolate mousse. Now usually I'd turn to Ms. Julia Child for these things, but her book was upstairs, and I'm nothing if not lazyarsed, so a quick search led me to David Lebovitz's version of Julia Child's mousse. Hello, perfect recipe. I decided to give it a try, and lo and behold, it went down a treat. Even my mother ate some, which in itself is the all encompassing proof that this recipe is a keeper. A few work colleagues (Lisa being one, naturally) also had some with good feedback, and I'm not going to lie, I'm pretty sure it cured one person of manflu (Lisa's OH). Seriously. I could actually be on to something here. I didn't change much of the recipe, but I liked how mine came out- the original is from [here](#), and fabulous, and you should try this one. Now. Also, if you put a tiny bit of orange zest in, you may just melt altogether.



Couldn't resist

170g 70% chocolate
170g unsalted butter
60mls coffee
4 large eggs, separated
170g sugar + 1 tbsp
1/2 tbsp rum
1 tbsp water
pinch of salt
1/2 tsp vanilla extract

What to do:

1. Melt the chocolate, butter and coffee in a bowl over a pan of simmering water
2. Prepare a large bowl full of ice water
3. In another bowl, which fits on that saucepan up there of barely simmmering water, add your egg yolks, sugar (minus the tbsp), rum and water. Whisk this over the heat until it gets thick (described as runny mayo in the original). Then pop it off the heat and into your bowl of ice water. Beat it until cool and thick. Add vanilla.
4. Add the chocolate mixture to the yolk mixture and fold in until just incorporated.
5. In a separate, clean bowl, make sure there's no dirt, grease or an egg yolk in sight, whip the egg whites and salt until frothy. Then sprinkle in your sugar and beat until glossy and thick- but not quite to stiff peaks.
6. Add 1/3 of egg whites to the chocolatey yolky mixture to lighten it.
7. Very carefully fold in the rest of the egg whites until JUST mixed. Be gentle, we want bubbly mousse.
8. Transfer into serving glasses or jars. I made 5 little jars and 6 serving glasses with the amount this makes. Yummy.
9. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours. I left them overnight as it hadn't quite set in the 4 hours to be honest!



Bubbles. Delectable.

Eat. Enjoy. It's yummilicious!

*Note- the only cow I saw was on a plate. And it was delicious.

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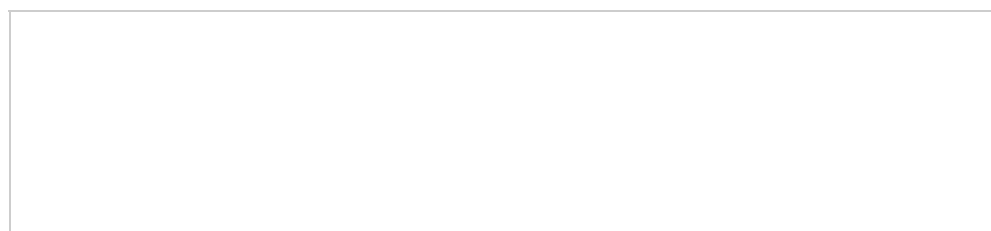
Salted Caramels - The Book Eats 2 and a very well received gift.

October 7, 2012



I'm not going to lie. These are my new pride and joy. Well, they may be neck in neck with the **brownies**. And the **devils food cake**. And the **cookies**. Hmmmm. I see what's happening here. Oh dear. Well I do like cooking. Anywho, so as you all know, my blog is much neglected in the last few months. I *have* been cooking the odd time, but I had camera issues first, and then I got into a run of call and was basically completely wrecked and airheaded for the last 8 weeks, as Lisa could tell you (Lisa is a mad GAA fan and dochtúir I work {ed:} with, and the best craic ever. She has also been chief sampler of all treats brought to work. Hi Lisa!). Actually we both had our days. I have also discovered that my talents do not extend to working out people's ages based on their date of birth. I just cannot do it. Mental block. Or just plain thick. On the other hand Lisa did repeatedly attempt to exit a door by pressing a light switch... Heh.

But back to the main point. I have been working 3 months. THREE! It honestly seems like 3 weeks. But every 3 months we are forced out of our current job that we have just settled into and thrown into a new job where we have to learn everything new. SIGH. Well at least I don't have to move county- there are a few jobs where you have to up and move house every 3 months. That would drive me completely mad. I've been exceptionally lucky though, I've had the nicest team ever to work with, I've learned LOADS, and I've had a really nice time! So on my last day I had to bring in something extra special, and as I've said I've been thinking of doing more of my 'Book Eats' series. My love for Enid Blyton's Faraway tree stories is well documented on this blog. It may have had a large part to play in my infatuation with toffee, although there is most certainly some genetic influence there, given that my mother has a tendency to physically attack anybody that comes within an arse's roar of her toffee supply. But it seemed that the children were quite adept at making toffee in the book, which they then gifted to Moonface and Silky. Well, I thought that it would be rather lovely to bring in to all of my co-workers on my last day as a wee thank you, and so I set to work to find a recipe I hadn't already tried and failed miserably at. Spurred on by that fact that children were apparently able to whip up a batch at a moments notice, I threw myself into the task. The recipe I based this on was from my most beloved of cookbooks- Darina Allen's Forgotten skills of cooking, but I've edited it quite a bit to make it a tad more to my liking. Without further ado, I give you my newest favourite sweet treat:





The sun was setting when I was taking pictures and all of a sudden the light just changed and it was so pretty!

Salted Caramels

You will need:

- 200g unsalted butter
- 200g sugar
- 4 tbsp golden syrup
- 1 tin of condensed milk (14oz)
- 1/2 tsp Maldon salt
- 300g chocolate (55% but go 70% if that's what you prefer!)
- 1 tbsp maldon salt for sprinkling

What to do:

1. Grease and line a tin with silicone paper or another non stick substance. I used a large swiss roll tin which fills about perfectly.
2. Melt the butter over medium heat.
3. Add the sugar, 1/2 tsp of maldon salt, and golden syrup and stir well until mixed.
4. Add the tin of condensed milk and stir.
5. Continue stirring over a medium heat until it begins to bubble and turn a glorious browny caramel colour. Don't stop stirring until you are pouring it into your tin!
6. Now. When is it done. In the book it says when it reaches a hard crack stage. However, my trusty thermometer has been put back on the shelf for this particular recipe. I've been using colour and the ice water test as a guide. The ice water test- fill a bowl with ice cold water and when you think your caramel/toffee is getting near the done stage, drop a spoonful into the water. Give it a second and test it for consistency. For this recipe I went with a semi soft type of consistency- chewy but squishy, if you get me. It's not quite toffee like, but if it got much longer it would be!
7. Pour into your prepared tin and leave to set.

TIP: To clean saucepan you need hot water. I usually fill it up with warm soapy water and pop it back on the hob for a few mins until the caramel scrapings soften up and are easily wiped off. Saves a lot of elbow grease.

8. When your toffee is set (could take a few hours), turn it out onto a chopping board, cut it up as you wish- I use a ruler and pizza cutter (oiled) to do the lenthwise cuts, and a scissors to cut each length into little bits of lovely caramel heaven.



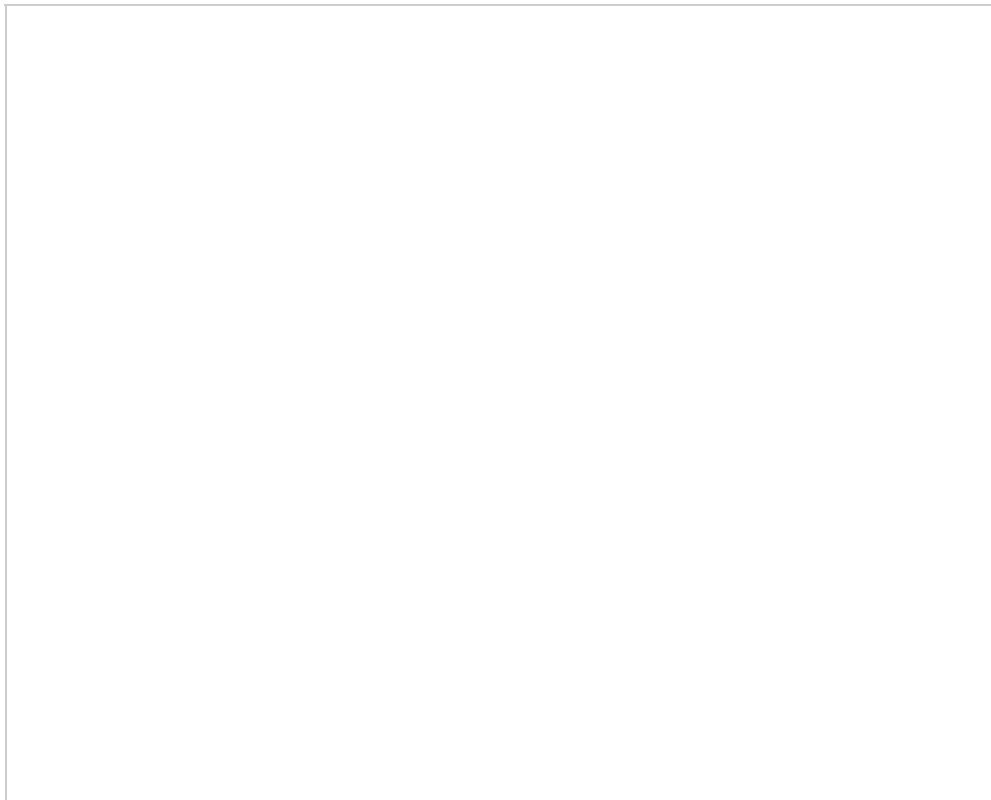
This is the colour you should get to. You can see a few wee bits where I didn't stir well enough, oops. No harm!



9. Melt your chocolate (I use a bowl over simmering water).

10. The tedious part. Dip each of your sweets in chocolate and leave on a non stick mat or wire tray to set. It takes me 3 trays to fit them all! Before any of them set – I do this in batches, crush up your malton salt flakes and sprinkle a little on each chocolate. This is really important as you can barely taste the salt we added to the actual caramel, and this way, I feel, works much better for taste!

Leave to set (If you can), and pack them into little gift bags or boxes. This is a really nice Christmas present idea for those of you that tend to give the homemade variety of gifts, and is very cost effective too!





Hello you...

Try not to eat them all. It is difficult. SO difficult. So good. I'm off to.. eh.. test a few now, see how well they hold up after a day. Seeing as my first batch didn't last for the day at all!

Enjoy these ones, they're a wee bit special I think!

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The wheels on the bus...

September 29, 2012

Long ago, I attended a gem of a place called school. I realise I'm only out of education three months, but I'm talking about a while back. And whilst most mornings we would (all 6 of us) fit into the back of my childminder's tiny car (we were who sardines in a tin got their inspiration from), there was a time when I had to get the school bus. Whilst this was probably a repressed memory for good reason, the lovely Hannah has reminded me of this daily journey, and I thought I'd share it with you all, because I'm on the train and felt the need to write a blog post.

I would head off to school in the morning, complete with teenage mutant hero turtles lunchbox, catching the bus at the end of the driveway. Mary and Hannah, the chubby cheeked cherub, would frequently accompany me, for fear I would get lost in the thirty metres it took to happily skip (or more likely, grumpily trudge) down to the end. This was significantly more trouble than it was worth, given that Hannah was (and is) the slowest human being on the planet unless she smells out food or money, in which case we see only the dust settling as she sprints towards it in a style roughly akin to roadrunner. Indeed if you put the food at one end and money at the other end of a room and lead her to the middle, it's a real life tasmanian devil situation. There is, thus far, a lack of anvils dropping and dynamite going off, but I give it 3 days at Christmas before someone reaches that stage. But back to my original story. Well Hannah and Mary would escort me to the end of the drive, where the bus would (never promptly) be heard before we would see it, rickety and defying all laws of physics as it stayed in one piece. The neighbours would have already claimed the seats that were down the back and not broken, and so I would sigh, choose the least broken one with the least amount of rubbish or stains floating about on it, and sit myself down gingerly. Now the journey into school was significantly less boisterous than the way back, the entire population having spent a day making teachers contemplate murder and deciding, on the whole it probably wasn't worth it (having been in the classroom throughout the day, I'm inclined to think they may be mistaken).

The way home was what the general public could only describe as 'bloody mayhem'. I believe people wear seatbelts on buses these days. I doubt there was a seatbelt on that bus, never mind the fact that you couldn't get a child to sit still long enough to buckle them in. Whilst leftover lunch got thrown slap bang into one child's face, ruler fights broke out (shatter resistant my derrière) amongst the more cultured of our school going crowd, with screeches of 'hon guard' from one party, causing a general panic as everyone scrambled to their seats and anxiously gawked about for the aforementioned garda. Crisis averted and no gardai in sight, with the 'hon guard' offender red cheeked in his seat, the bus was still for 20 seconds, until a pencil parer hit him square in the back of the head with a distinct 'Thunk'. He whipped around, drew his ruler, and normal order of chaos was restored. Shortly after, the chorus broke out with a sparkling rendition of 'bang bang susie' (don't ask), and other such gems that 10 year old boys are massive fans of. Things quieted significantly as the crowds descended from the bus as we progressed down the lane, or got thrown off in some places (by the other children or by the bus driver, a man whose general temperament and appearance made the bad giants from the BFG look like Jeeves from Jeeves and Wooster), and the screams, curses and not so empty threats settled to the odd scream and a general background babble.

Coming off the bus I would often be greeted again by a smiling Hannah and Mary, the out of character smile from Hannah being a response to the learned association between the homecoming of Sarah and immediate dinner. Hannah, at that age, eating a diet almost exclusively of butter with some pasta thrown in, and sugar with a sup of tea poured on top was a sturdy young lassie who enjoyed the finer things in life- watching Barney nestled in a beanbag in front of the telly, dressing up in mum's best clothes before she figured out where Hannah had disappeared to, and, of course, an artisan tayto sandwich, brought to her on a silver platter (or a chipped

plate, or even just a piece of second hand tinfoil). She did, however, eat everything in her path, but those were her preferred foodstuffs at the time. My father used to refer to her as 'The skip', (used in a sentence- don't throw that out, sure it can go to the skip'). Bless her cotton (in fact 100% cotton only) socks. Here's Hannah doing her dressing up thing.



Despite the smile that made me think that if I didn't walk back in quick enough she may just eat me, it did come as a welcome sign, for it meant that the bus journey had thankfully come to an end, and that I had managed to make it through in one piece, not that I could say the same for the poor child being dangled out the window by his schoolbag. Anybody else remember the school trips?

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Homemade Peanut Butter Cups - Especially for Jennifer!

August 11, 2012

Jennifer is my cousin. She was born that way, she couldn't help it, poor girl. We spent a lot of time together growing up, whether we liked it or not, for my mother's family are all quite close. Quite a lot of our time was spent running like mad eejits through homemade obstacle courses- when Mammy CITC discovered that she could buy medals in town, these became the high end, low budgt community games. Mainly because I couldn't win anything at the actual community games. Well, I did win bronze (I use that term lightly) once in swimming. I came third. Out of three. Still, I got a medal which sits proudly in the back of a press somewhere. But I digress.

Well the whole point was, really, that we all grew up together- Jennifer, Jason, Hannah and I, all being of similar ages. We tended to be thrown together every time one of our respective families had had enough of us and ran off on a holiday without us. These trips mostly involved mandatory shows held in Granny's house which would of course be unavoidable for parents, and tickets for which would cost a minimum of 2 pounds per person. Except for Granny, whose wardrobes and house were raided for props and costumes, and so earned herself a VIP seat and a personal assistant should she want a drink throughout the performance. The show would begin promptly at 2pm, starting of course with the youngest- Hannah, who would silence the audience with an emotional rendition of 'Cats sleep anywhere'. Not a dry eye in the house as she held herself together long enough to utter the last line of the well known poem.. 'Cats.. sleep... anywhere'. This would be followed by Jason, sometimes with Jennifer's help, as he recited something about football, played football, or produced a football from a top hat- you get the gist here. Jennifer would then captivate the audience with another of the poems learned in drama, and I would follow in the same thread. After this would come the matinee, at which homemade foodstuffs could be purchased at exorbitant prices from a vendor (me). Foodstuffs available would largely consist of Granny's collection of sweets, an attempt at home baking which would have taken place without the aid of a weighing scales (written on the programme was clear warning that consumption was at the risk of the purchaser), but with some help from the weighing scales in Granny's post office. This was one of those old affairs with a balance and weights that would dictate the cost of a parcel. And yes, my Granny had a post office in her house, and worked there until her 80's or so, but now has retired! Well using this weighing balance apparatus we managed to put together some kind of recipe that made something akin to marla (plasticine to non irish) and with a healthy dose of bits of red wax that got mixed up in the flour during the weighing process, with the odd stamp floating around in the mixture. It was like a lucky dip really, when you think about it.

But then the masterpiece. Three days and hours of practice would have resulted in the formulation, direction and eventually production of an original and highly secret script. For the life of me, I can't remember what even one of these were about, but I assume something akin to a Tony award winning performance, the likes of which could never again be matched, thus the need to completely block it out of our memories, so as to have a chance at enjoying life, and so forth.

But regardless, when we took our bow at the end of the production, the parents would promptly wake back up, cheer and clap with some fervour and in an emotional state (probably something to do with the fact they had lost 2 hours and the guts of five pounds each) give us a standing ovation. It was probably cheap realistically, I assume one has to produce at least an iPad or laptop, or a minimum of a 32" 3D TV as payment for contemporary shows that one's children put on.



Hannah, Jason, Jennifer and me at the back, rehearsing for a masterpiece! Hannah just burst a balloon

Anyway, what started off this whole thing was the fact that Jennifer's birthday is coming up, and while she is stuck at the airport for most of it, booo, I had to make her something nice. And given that the girl is slightly obsessed with all things peanut butter, what better way than to produce her very own supply of peanut butter sweets. I made two kinds and trialed them at work, and both went down a treat. The first I made were the homemade version of peanut butter cups- which were actually quite doable really, and which look fabulous. I used a mold I got for about 1.99 in homestore and more (be still my beating heart), and some sweet cases, but really you could just use anything- bun cases etc. This would easily make about 30-40 small cups/sweets



Yummy yummy Peanut butter cups

Peanut butter cups

100-200g chocolate – I use 55%, and used about 200g.

1 tsp unsalted butter

150g peanut butter

50g unsalted butter

80g icing sugar

What to do

1. Melt your chocolate in a heatproof bowl over simmering water.
2. Stir in your butter when melted.
3. Using a pastry brush, brush your melted chocolate into your mold or cases. You may want to let each coat set and give another coat so that the chocolate is of a good thickness. Use about half of your chocolate.
4. Leave to set. Keep your leftover chocolate warm
5. Put your peanut butter, butter and icing sugar together in a bowl. You can either microwave this for about a minute on med high, or set it over your water (which is what I did) and give it a good whisk together when everything is softening up. That's basically it!
6. So when your chocolate is set, you're going to drop spoonfuls of your peanut butter mix in your pre-chocolatised cases. This is usually warmish so having a good chocolate base is a good idea. Again, leave this to set in a cool place. leave a bit of space for your covering of chocolate if you're using a mold or cup.
7. When the mixture is cool and somewhat set, you can use the rest of your chocolate to cover your cups. Then we leave them to set for the last time before tucking in!

I kept these in the fridge – It's not the best for the chocolate but I wanted to be on the safe side with the butter. They last at least a week (but only if you hide them from your family).

VARIATION- I also did some with half peanut butter and half nutella. YUM. Melt about 2 tablespoons nutella in a bowl, and drop in on top of the peanut butter and voila! Be still my beating heart.

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