

A Chocolate-Lover's Delight

Sweet tooth: Juliette Binoche has a favorite food in 'Chocolat'.

Joanne Harris is doing an interview on a car phone in California on her first trip to the United States. It's a far cry from Yorkshire, England, where the 36-year-old author lives with her husband and seven-year-old daughter and writes novels. Recently Ms Harris hit the big time: One of her books, *Chocolat*, was made into a movie directed by Lasse Hallstrom ('The Cider House Rules') and starring Juliette Binoche. 'Chocolat' opens in New York and Los Angeles on Friday, December 15, and in theaters across the country on December 22.

Ms. Harris chats with USATODAY.com reporter Tara McKelvey about growing up in Yorkshire, England; favorite food; and diets

Q: I heard you grew up in a sweet-shop. Is that true?

Joanne Harris: Yes, it was a corner sweet-shop, which also sold newspapers. It was in Yorkshire. It was called Shorts, like "eat my shorts." My grandparents ran it. At the time, my mother had just come over from France and didn't speak English. And so we lived with my grandparents for some time. I was actually born just across the road in a sort of temporary hospital.

Q: Why is your book about chocolate and not about, say, jelly doughnuts?

Joanne Harris: Jelly doughnuts, though delicious, don't have quite that central appeal. There's something about the texture of chocolate, and there's also something about the chemistry. It contains certain things that simulate the adrenal glands and produce endorphins. It kind of gives you a sort of pleasant feeling that's not just to do with the high you get from sugar. It's a stimulant. A bit like coffee. But it tastes better to me.

Q: How much chocolate do you eat?

Joanne Harris: I always start the day with drinking chocolate. I love that. I drink it when I'm working. It's hot. It's always hot. And it's always made with milk and proper chocolate rather than just the powdered stuff. There's one brand that I like very much. It's called Green & Black. It's organic chocolate, and it's made by an English company.

Q: Do you go on diets?

Joanne Harris: No. I never diet. I found if I go on diets I just put weight on. I stopped doing that years ago. I'm not a nice person if I'm doing things like that.

Q: What did you think about having Juliette Binoche star in the movie version?

Joanne Harris: I'd actually thought of her right from the start. Well, you know, I think a lot of authors do this. They fantasize, 'Hey, what would happen if this was a movie.' You don't necessarily take it seriously at the time. But you play with the idea. She's exactly the person I had in mind from the start. And I'm very, very glad that they chose her.