Tokyo to Sydney by chicken: Chiaki Iwamoto

Many people associate a place with food, and I am one of them.

I noticed recently that I don’t buy a whole chicken. One reason I suspect, is that it looks different in shape from what I know. Chicken thighs are familiar to me but not the actual chicken. Such unfamiliarity reminds me of where I am. It’s a big part of where I recognise as 'home'. It may sound silly but for someone like me, every vegetable, fruit, and meat counts.

I live in Sydney, Australia, but I spent my childhood and early adulthood in Japan, where there is no such a thing as a 'whole chicken’. I’ve never seen a whole chicken in my ordinary Japanese household or at a supermarket. In other words, it did not exist for almost two-thirds of my life.

Even after a decade living in Sydney, I never reach for those headless chickens sitting on the lowest refrigerated shelf. They look so intimidating. But, it was time to tackle.

A few days ago, I invited a friend, who happens to be a professionally trained French chef, to my tiny studio apartment.

We bought two whole chickens and she showed me how to cut them up. It was not as scary as I’d imagined! It was rather interesting. I felt I was in an anatomy class, and cutting up a whole chicken gave me a sense of what it is like to eat animals. One chicken has two legs, so I got two thighs, not six. Overall, it was a great experience.

But once I overcome all these unfamiliarities in Sydney I wonder what I’ll have left in Japan? When my childhood memories fade, will my sense of 'home' be gone?

I imagine a little chicken busy flapping her wings in the sky, trying to make her way to Australia.

The chicken is very much like me, and I am still flying.