Hi, this is Emily G. Thompson, author of *Mysteries Uncovered*, which is available for purchase now. I’m about to read you part of the chapter on the disappearance of Amelia Earhart.

Pioneering aviator Amelia Earhart was a world-renowned figure and trailblazing female role model. Intrepid, free-spirited, and ambitious, she was famously the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. There seemed to be almost nothing she could not accomplish in her chosen field—including the longest-ever around-the-world flight. She set out to make history. Instead, she flew into legend.

Aviator Amelia Earhart and her navigator Fred Noonan have been missing for more than eight decades. On July 2, 1937, they—and their airplane—vanished without a trace, just short of completing Amelia’s greatest achievement to date: circumnavigating the globe around the equator. Two years later, the United States government declared that their plane had crashed in the Pacific Ocean, killing them both on impact. However, their bodies have never been found. The mystery of their fate has inspired books, documentaries, TV shows, movies, songs, and even museums.

Amelia Earhart was born on July 24, 1897, in Atchison, a city tucked away in the northeast corner of Kansas, around 55 miles from Kansas City. Atchison is a quaint city often known as “Little Switzerland” owing to its rolling hills and valleys. The area is dotted with beautifully restored Victorian mansions and a trolley car, originating back to the Old Santa Fe Train Depot, that meanders through charming homes and historic sites. It was here on a bluff overlooking the Missouri River that, as a young woman, Amelia first felt the lure of the skies.

Amelia’s parents, Edwin and Amy, struggled financially, but always provided for Amelia and her younger sister, Muriel. When Amelia was about seven years old, the Earhart family visited the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. There Amelia experienced her first-ever rollercoaster ride. Overjoyed by the sensation of speed and excitement, Amelia decided to build her very own rollercoaster in the backyard. It consisted simply of a wooden box that flew across wooden planks that had been greased with oil.

When the pressures of providing for the family became too much for him, Edwin turned to alcohol. He closed the doors of his failing law office and took up employment at the Rock Island Railroad in Des Moines, Iowa. The plan was for Edwin and Amy to get settled in Iowa and find a place for the family to live. Until then, Amelia and Muriel would be staying with their grandparents in Atchison, where they enjoyed a secure upper-
middle-class lifestyle, attending private school and frequently visiting the local library. At Christmas, Edwin and Amy would return to Atchison with gifts for their girls, including sleds and rifles, which at the time were almost exclusively gifts for boys. When Amelia was 11 years old, she and Muriel left Atchison to be with their parents in Des Moines, but often returned to their grandparents for long visits. In 1915, Amy and Edwin separated and Amelia attended six different high schools before finally graduating from Chicago’s Hyde Park High School.

As a young woman, Amelia developed a strong independent streak. She was convinced that women were just as capable as men in many areas that were traditionally considered “men’s work.” She firmly rejected the traditional roles society seemed to have reserved for women and collected magazine and newspaper clippings about inspirational women who had established themselves in positions that were typically held by men. She took work with the Red Cross as a nurse’s aide in the Spadina Military Hospital in Toronto during World War II, and briefly studied medicine at Columbia University. When Amelia turned 21, her father paid $10 for her to take a ride in an airplane during an air show in Long Beach, California. From that day forward, Amelia knew that her life’s ambition was to fly. She saved the $500 needed for aviation lessons, taking a number of small jobs, including as a photographer, truck driver, clerk, and stenographer.

As Amelia was nurturing her love for flying, women were taking the aviation industry by storm. Blanche Scott was the first American woman to pilot an airplane in 1910, and in 1912 she became the first woman to fly the English Channel. In 1911, Harriet Quimby became the first woman to earn a pilot’s license. On the day that Harriet died in 1912, Ruth Law flew her very first solo flight, and the following year she was the first woman to loop the loop. Amelia was greatly inspired by these pioneering women, but their achievements were continually overshadowed by those of male aviation heroes, such as Eddie Rickenbacker, Howard Hughes, and Charles Lindbergh, who dominated the media in the 1920s.

From the moment she took the controls, Amelia had her eyes set on the record books. Her impetuousness was evident when, after less than three hours of flying lessons, she spent all of her savings on a yellow Kinner Airster biplane that she called Canary.

In May 1923, Amelia became the 16th American woman to obtain a pilot’s license; the same year, she took her first shot at an aviation record, becoming the first woman to fly higher than 14,000 feet (4,267.2m). Following this feat, she continued to log time in Canary until she sold it in 1924.

While retaining her aviation dreams, Amelia’s strong desire to make a contribution to society led her to become a social worker at Denison House in Boston. She commuted there in style, behind the wheel of her yellow Kissel Speedster automobile. Denison House was a women-run institution that provided support to local residents, particularly the many new immigrants to Boston’s South Cove neighborhood. Amelia threw herself into the work with typical enthusiasm. Her considerable personal drive soon led to her organizing adult education programs, women’s clubs, and coaching girls’ basketball and
fencing. She also put her flying skills to good use—in 1927, she dropped leaflets advertising a Denison House fundraiser over Boston and nearby Cambridge.

However, the following year would bring Amelia worldwide fame. In June, piloting a tri-motor Fokker F7 named *Friendship* with a small crew onboard, she became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean. When she landed in Burry Port, Wales, she had accomplished a goal that three women had died trying to accomplish that very year. People were inspired by her bravery and news of her feat spread across the world. On her return to the US, she was met with a grand parade. The following year, she became the first woman to fly solo across the United States in both directions.

Amelia bettered these considerable achievements on May 22, 1932, by becoming the first woman to fly the Atlantic Ocean solo. She set out from Harbor Grace, Newfoundland, Canada, bound for Paris, France. She brought with her a toothbrush, a container of hot soup, an ice pack, and straws for three cans of tomato juice.

Owing to ice forming on the wings and mechanical issues, Amelia had to cut her flight short, landing in a field in Derry, Northern Ireland. Despite this, she had set a transatlantic speed record of 14 hours and 56 minutes. She followed this feat in January 1935, by becoming the first person to fly the Pacific solo, when she flew from Honolulu, Hawaii, to Oakland, California.

Amelia took to her newfound fame gracefully. She earned herself the nickname “Lady Lindy,” after her male aviation counterpart, Charles Lindbergh, although this was a name she wasn’t fond of. An inspiration to women everywhere, she hoped that her work and accomplishments would inspire other women to pursue their dreams. In 1931, she married the publishing heir George Palmer Putnam, but only on the understanding that she would lose none of her independence. In a 1935 parade in her hometown of Atchison, she told the crowd, “It is my fondest hope that women will become more interested, as pilots or passengers, or last but not least, let their men fly. Women have been labeled the greatest sales resistance in flying. They won’t go up and they won’t let their men go up. If mother says father will stay down, father stays down.” In Washington, she became the first woman to be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and National Geographic Society medals. “Her success expanded the powers of women, as well as men, to their ever-widening limits,” said President Herbert Hoover.

The one feat left for Amelia to accomplish was an around-the-world flight and, in early 1935, this is what she set her sights on.