

EPISODE FIVE

# GOOGLE LARRY



ASI  
AM



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### FILM SUMMARY

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In the 1990s, autistic persons began using the internet to build online communities, breaking the myth that autism imprisons people in a solitary existence. In this episode, however, Larry Gourley of Belfast, Northern Ireland finds a limit to the gift and reaches the edge of the internet. Though the internet does not have the answer he searches for, his efforts to find his baby photos find conclusion in a surprising correspondence with a cousin from Canada.



"[LARRY] FOUND THE  
LIMIT OF THE INTERNET...  
WHICH IS...IT CAN'T TELL  
ME WHO I AM."

-Neil Mullan, Larry's friend

### FILM THEMES

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- **Links between us**

Humans as a species are deeply interested in their roots. Anthropologists find evidence of genealogy, the study of family ancestry, dating back thousands of years to the Neolithic Period. With the proliferation of online ancestry research, the drive to know how each of us is linked to another has become more visible. The story in the film shows how Larry's search for his baby photo is another expression of this profoundly human curiosity. Who am I? Who do I belong to? Who belongs to me?

- **New vs. Old**

The Internet offers the quickest way to learn something. However, in Larry's search for his past, the most fruitful move he chose to make involved an antiquated form of communication: the handwritten, posted letter. The smartphone's "voice assistant" did not understand Larry's request and the Google searches kept producing irrelevant results. The idea that these newer technologies would fail where an old-fashioned letter succeeds is surprising and comical.

- **The Spectrum**

Larry is autistic. Some of his behaviors may seem different from mainstream behaviors. For example, Larry enjoys jumping and flapping his hands while waiting for his tea to cool. Discerning viewers may notice that Larry avoids making left turns. In some ways, Larry's actions fit characteristics that are common among people on the spectrum. In other ways, Larry does not fit the characteristics. He makes friends and shares jokes with ease. Larry's autism and his love for electronics brought about an interesting and unique challenge for the film team. Though we don't see the evidence in the film itself, Larry is the only person in the As I Am film series to be interviewed with the drone camera. This meant that instead of a standard set-up with a camera on a tripod, the interview involved the director flying the drone at Larry's eye-level while an assistant facilitated conversation.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Larry does not want to give up the search even when it seems unlikely he will find his baby photo online. Does the internet have limits? Have you ever found them? What were they?
2. The question "Who am I?" could take a lifetime or more to answer. Can you think of other questions that call for a lifetime of research? What question(s) would you spend your life researching?
3. How do we learn about ourselves? From whom or what or where? When you have questions about your heritage? Where do you turn?
4. At one point, Larry decides to stop looking for his baby photos. He does not want to write to his cousins to ask them about the photos, he just wants to connect with them and learn more about them. He chose to stop looking for the photos and then he ended up finding them. Have you ever experienced a similar twist of events?

## BEHIND THE SCENES

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The story of Larry's baby photos came together in pieces. No single person knew the whole path from the guessing game to the envelope of photos. As the different people who live with Larry reflected on the pieces they knew, the story became more intricate and, indeed, more mysterious. For example, Larry never mentioned the photos in his letter to his cousin. She sent them simply because she found them. The desire to discover more about his personal history spawned a connection with family that had emigrated to Canada. Following the letter exchange, Larry established an even stronger connection with his Canadian cousins and made a trip to visit them.

## IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

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When we learn about our personal and family history, we learn about the connections we share with others. Consider your own story. How are you connected with others? Does the internet help you maintain those connections and build new ones? OR Does it create barriers that distance you from others?