Traveling in Poland in the 1990s, Erica Lehrer came across an exhibit at the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow displaying wooden figurines of Jews. Prof. Lehrer, who teaches at Concordia University, the Canadian Institute for the History of Disability and a curator at the Centre for Ethnographic Research and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Violence, her book Jewish Poland Revisited: Ethnography, Memory, and Heritage, he recalls that when he first encountered the figurines of Jews. Prof. Lehrer, who teaches at Concordia University, says, “I think ethnography is far more complicated than it appears on the surface.”

In this essay, we explore the complexities of ethnography and how it relates to the experiences of Jewish refugees in Poland in the 1990s. Through her research, Prof. Lehrer identifies the challenges of working with figural representations and the importance of considering the context in which they are displayed.

Q: What does “curating life” mean to you?

A: “Curating life” is the idea of curating one’s own life story. It is about selecting, and making sense of what’s important and what has meaning in one’s life. Prof. Lehrer, when discussing curating life, says, “It’s kind of a razor’s edge between the personal and the private.”

Q: How does ethnography help in understanding the past?

A: Ethnography helps in understanding the past by providing a sense of place and context. It tells us how people lived in the past and what their experiences were like. Prof. Lehrer, when discussing the importance of ethnography, says, “It tells us who we are and how we came to be.”

In conclusion, ethnography is a powerful tool for understanding the past. It helps us to connect with our own history and to learn from the experiences of others. Through her research, Prof. Lehrer has shown us the importance of considering the context in which we live and to be mindful of the stories that we tell about ourselves and others.