



## Season 13: Episode 10 | Harvey Satewas Gabriel | Mohawk: A Language Brought Back to Life

**Lorna Dueck:** Our guest today has a Mohawk name, Harvey Awennaras. Awennaras means to echo, and echo Harvey has done. He is our lead translator at the Canadian Bible Society for the Mohawk Bible.

It's a beautiful full copy Bible, which has been a language of love for Harvey and a work of love, and we're going to be joined by his granddaughter Samantha shortly, and we're going to understand just how important this translation has been. And Harvey, thank you very much for joining us today here in your Mohawk Chapel, which has been part of your life since you were a boy.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** Thank you.

I've been a member of this church since 1954, and my mother used to bring me to church when I was about five years old, the first time I came with my mother, and she used to sit way down in the corner. She never came in the front, but at five years old, I was always amazed. At the pulpit, there's a big book.

At the time, at five years old, I didn't know it was a book, and sometimes after a few months, I asked my mother, what's that thing that's on top of where the minister stands behind? And my mother says, that's the book. It's a holy book. It's all written about God's words.

At five years old, I didn't know what was God's words, so I just took it in. And then at 17, my mother said to us, with my two other brothers in the morning having breakfast, she says, you boys should go to church this morning. Reverend John Angus is going to preach.

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Now, Reverend John Angus was a member of this community, a fluent Mohawk speaker, and he became United Church minister, and I came to church with my mother that morning. The Minister Reverend Angus entered that door, and there was a lot of people. Back then, a lot of people used to come to church.

When he came in, he stood at just about every aisle, every pew, talking to people in Mohawk. And I started to realize, hey, he's speaking Mohawk.

**Lorna Dueck:** Which was the language your mother spoke only at home.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** Only Mohawk in my parents' house, nothing else.

**Lorna Dueck:** Because she said the Creator gave us this language.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** Yes.

And then when it was time to start, I was expecting him to speak English, because all the other ministers, when they get behind that pulpit, they spoke English. Reverend John Angus started talking Mohawk. I said, wow, this is strange.

A church minister now speaking Mohawk, which is very delightful for me.

**Lorna Dueck:** As a 17-year-old, it impacted you.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** As a 17-years-old, yeah.

It's the first time I ever heard Mohawk spoken behind that pulpit.

**Lorna Dueck:** Wow.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** And then when it was time to read the Scripture, he even more surprised me.

He translated right on the spot where he was reading in Mohawk. I said to myself, will I ever be that smart to translate God's Word like that man?

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**Lorna Dueck:** I want to just pick up on that phrase; will you ever be that smart? Harvey, at age 74, you began this project of translating God's Word into Mohawk. And I just want to back up for our audience, give you all a little bit of background.

Harvey, you worked all of your career, 54 plus years, making something we all have in our homes, and that's the little felt chair pads. You're part of a team that designed, cut, did all of that work. And after you retired from that factory in Montreal, which you went to every day here from Kanehsatà:ke, you then had an idea, a vision at 74.

What did you decide to start doing?

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** Well, in 1974, after supper, I said to my wife, I'm going to go start the mower, cut the grass, which I did. But then while I was cutting the grass, the idea came, when I retire, what will I do? And this was about 33 years before I retired. At that moment, an idea came, when you retire, you will translate the Bible.

That was a big surprise to me. I said, me, I don't know nothing about the Bible. And I can't even read Mohawk from my great-grandfather's translation.

I tried a lot of times to read it. And it was just like, maybe a foreign writing to me. I couldn't put two and two together.

But then when I retired, the idea came right up.

**Lorna Dueck:** After all those years from that lawn mower experience?

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** Maybe 35 years. But before that, in 1999, a few people started to translate 2 Corinthians.

They called me up, and they want me to join their translation. I said, me, translate God's Word? Who am I? I can't do that. Because my father used to say, be careful with God's Word.

Don't fool around with it. You might miss a lot. I don't know why he said that.

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Maybe the Creator put something in his head that your son will be translating very soon. Later on, around 1980, a new minister came in church. His name was Frank Gilmore.

And he was energetic. When he comes in through that door, he was almost like running into the pulpit. The first Sunday he came, he was preaching.

He said to the congregation, anybody know how to read Mohawk? They all pointed at me. And at the time, I wasn't really a good reader. He said, fine.

He said, what's your name? So, I told him. He said, next week, I'm going to send you a verse. You translate. And next Sunday, you will read.

**Lorna Dueck:** In Mohawk?

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** In Mohawk.

Now, that happened the next week. I did receive his version.

He wanted me to translate. And at the time, we didn't have a Bible at home. So, my wife managed to get us somewhere English Bible.

So, and I translated. And then I think it was King James, the one she brought up. And King James is such a tough one to translate.

But I struggled to translate. And a lot of the words, I asked my wife the meaning of this to explain it better. And my wife helped a lot in my translation because as a translator, you have to put it back into English what you translate.

**Lorna Dueck:** Her first language is English. Your first language is Mohawk. What a good team.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** When I was told that you'll be working with three retired schoolteachers from Kahnawake, I didn't go for that too much. School teachers, they're going to drown me.

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They might be too smart for me. So anyway, I went along and the first meeting, well, a couple of meetings, they didn't know the word glory in Mohawk. I said, whoa.

They're schoolteachers and they don't know the word glory in Mohawk. So, they asked me. So, I told them.

**Lorna Dueck:** What is the word glory, in Mohawk?

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** "Katanerakwátsera."

**Lorna Dueck:** Oh, my. This is a great moment for us to invite somebody very special into the interview, because you're speaking about capturing and carrying forward a language. And I want to ask if your granddaughter, Samantha, will join us.

And she's going to just bring with her an amazing... Hi, Samantha. Great to have you join us.

**Samantha Pepin:** Hello. Thanks for having us.

**Lorna Dueck:** And Harvey, she's bringing with her the fruit of all of this. You're 86 now.

74 is when you began on that committee, age 74, saying, I think I can be a translator after all. Samantha, what does this mean to you to see your tóta capture your language?

**Samantha Pepin:** After all of the years? It's still very overwhelming to be part of even this moment when it was really, I can get emotional just thinking about it because it's something to be incredibly proud of. And this will live on beyond all of our years.

And I was just listening to the episode that you had with Jeff Green, who we have to thank for having us be part of this episode.

**Lorna Dueck:** Jeff Green is our Vice President of Bible translation. Yeah.

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Who you to Harvey, you and Jeff matched up and have had a real labor of love between Jeff's coaching calls, Harvey's and Jeff would just occasionally be able to find one question or here or there to correct or guide.

**Samantha Pepin:** Tóta would always refer to him as the professor. I thought in my mind, he's like this older gentleman looking like, you know, Dumbledore from Harry Potter.

I thought it was, you know, a professor, you know, that he worked with and they exchanged emails. So, growing up in my young adulthood, I'm 33 now, I didn't see it, right.

I would hear about it when I would visit. And it was just a project that was ongoing for at least half my life.

**Lorna Dueck:** And Harvey, you were doing one finger typing, right? Like, yes, technology stepping in.

And you needed the grandkids and everybody else to help you keep figuring out the programming. I think your wife taught you how to use the computer, right?

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** I could never get all my fingers on the keyboards. Never. I tried. I didn't get anywhere.

**Lorna Dueck:** But one at a time, it worked.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** Yeah, it didn't even become a word. So, I tried one finger. Hey, that works. So that's how I started.

But by the time I finished translating the Bible, I got to be very fast on it.

**Lorna Dueck:** Still one finger at a time.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** Yeah. To work on the Bible is very interesting. One verse at a time, one chapter at a time, one book at a time.

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And then I was always anxious to finish the verse or the book or a chapter. What's the other one? What do they say about God on the other books or the verse? And that's how I didn't find it too long. One time that I was asked, how long did it take you to translate the Bible? I said, I don't know.

I never took time to count. But my wife does. She counted.

Of all the times that she noticed I was translating, she came up with 15 or 17 years.

**Lorna Dueck:** My goodness.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** 15 or 17 years meant nothing to me.

**Lorna Dueck:** What a beautiful retirement project.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** Yes.

**Lorna Dueck:** You started early in the morning, too, didn't you? She told me that, too, that you were you were up there.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** I go down to my office downstairs, and I start translating before breakfast. That's how interesting I was to hear God's Word.

And that's how I finished the book. And then three years ago, the United Church celebrated 100 years in existence. They wrote me an email inviting me to go to this big church in Toronto to read the book.

I said, I don't feel like going by car. I said, I'll ask my granddaughter. My granddaughter is very smart. I called her up. And she agrees to go to Toronto to read the Bible at 100-year-old United Church existence.

**Lorna Dueck:** And read the Bible in Mohawk.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** In Mohawk. And she reads good. She reads good in Mohawk.

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There's not too many young people that read Mohawk like she does.

**Lorna Dueck:** OK, Samantha, what did that mean for you?

**Samantha Pepin:** That was heavy. That was insane, to say the least, because like it was it was one thing to see the fruits of his labor and that of my, and all of the other elders, part of Kanehsatà:ke and Kahnawà:ke that contributed to making this project come to life.

That of my cousin, Kawisentha Taylor, who inspires me every day. She and alongside her mom helped see that through with my tóta and the work that they did. You know, like it's multigenerational.

You know, we go back to Sosé, Joseph Swan, Onasakenrat and he left behind this inspiration. It weighed on me only at the point that I stood up and was ready to speak. And before getting ready, I told the cameraman when I'm in front of the camera, there are there are two sides of me.

There's this very forward, very outgoing person, and then there's the fight or flight and I'm ready to go because my heart gets so emotional and flutters a little bit. I get a little red and I felt that like just come over me because it was at that moment how real it felt that this was hundreds, you know, hundreds of years, if not more of resilience and of our people that have continued to fight for the right to be here, for the right to speak their language and to continue to speak from the heart.

**Lorna Dueck:** And wasn't even Joseph Swan poisoned for his, is that the relative in your, you have a relative in your family tree?

**Samantha Pepin:** This is yeah; this is his great, great grandfather he refers to.

**Lorna Dueck:** Yes, he was such a powerful communicator that he was taken out. Your mother was in in a residential school. What impact did that have on you on her?

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**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** My brother and I always spoke Mohawk at home. No other language she allowed in her house. And she used to say when you meet another Mohawk speak to that person in your language.

If you don't, you will insult the Creator because He's the one that gave you that language. So, I was very, she was strong in her language. And that's what I tell the young people that used to come to me.

The students nowadays learning Mohawk. They used to come to visit me, but now they don't come anymore. Maybe because when they come to me, I tell them you have you should connect yourself with Jesus Christ because He's the One that gave us the language.

You have to respect what He gave us. But now they don't come.

**Lorna Dueck:** Okay, Harvey, this is a sensitive subject, because you are a deep follower of Jesus Christ.

And yet, we do have the church run residential school burden to heal in this country. How do you separate that? How do you pursue Jesus Christ and deal with the sins that were caused by people who also said they were followers of Christ?

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** Well, you know, in my parents' house, they never told me what Jesus Christ can do for me. Until I listened to Billy Graham.

Billy Graham is the one that told me, give your life to Jesus Christ. And He will give you something to do for Him. When I heard Billy Graham say that, I said to myself, me do something for Jesus Christ, I know nothing about to do something for Him.

And then he also said that he will find if you're looking for a job, Jesus Christ will find you a job. And when He finds you a job, you will stay there for a long time. I stayed 47 years with the same company.

Yeah, because of Jesus Christ. And he also said He will find you a wife.

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**Lorna Dueck:** And we had lunch with your wonderful wife, Susan, before this.

And you stayed with her a long time.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** And He said he will find you a wife. And when I heard that Billy Graham said that on TV, I said, hey, those are the two things I need.

A job and a wife. So anyway, my wife's over there.

**Lorna Dueck:** Yeah, lovely, lovely.

In the course of being such a passionate reader of the Bible and translator of the Bible, you've captured something for your culture. And Samantha, I want to ask you, what does that mean? What does that mean that the language is now in such a great collection of the Holy Bible?

**Samantha Pepin:** It's like I said, it's timeless. It's incredible to be able to know that.

As my tóta pointed out, once upon a time when this was in the works that any word that you could ever imagine and want to know is in this piece of literature, it's right here. And that is just so powerful, because we were once part of the demographic that once thought we would lose our language, we would lose the way to who we are. And now we're in the most revival state of our language here in Kanehsàtà:ke.

And it takes a team really to make this happen. And this is one part of the big puzzle that is bringing our people back to who they are.

**Lorna Dueck:** I want to ask you both. Is there a favorite or is there a verse, Harvey, let's start with you, that means very much to you?

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** Well, nowadays, since I translated the whole Bible, after supper nowadays, I sit in my easy chair and I go and pick up my Bible and I, just to hold the Bible gives me power, gives me a lot of other ideas. And whenever I want something, I ask Jesus Christ and He lets me have it. A couple of weeks ago, maybe

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two weeks ago or less, sitting in my easy chair, I said to Him, I want to do more for You.

Give me some more something to do. So, a few days after I got a phone call or email from this community member, she started a garden of hope. And she asked me, she says, I want to invite you to come and speak to the young people from Montreal.

They are the students of a Christian school. I said, hey, thank you. So anyway, I went and we met in a garden.

Imagine, Jesus Christ went into the garden. And now I went to the garden too, just following Him. You know, so and then after we finished with the students, they asked me to read something from my Bible because I took my Bible with me.

And I said, well, I'm going to give you a chapter. But you should read this every day of your life and memorize this, if possible, if you can.

**Lorna Dueck:** What chapter was that?

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** Psalms 116.

Psalm 116. I read it to them in Mohawk, and I explained to them in English.

It says, "I love the Lord because he heard my voice and because He listens to me."

And at that part, I said to the students, imagine the Creator of heaven and earth listens to me. I said, that is something great, isn't it? And they all said, yes. I said, memorize that.

**Lorna Dueck:** Samantha, he has got an unstoppable passion for not only your language, but for the Lord. What does it mean to your generation to see your language brought back like that?

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**Samantha Pepin:** My tóta is one of my biggest inspirations of all time. He's one of my heroes.

And I wake up every day, and I get to pull up my phone because I'm 33 and I have an iPhone and I get to go on the Bible app and read the verse of the day. And I once read the Bible when I was much younger and grew up and kind of drifted apart from that part of my life. And today, when I choose to read it, it's in my language.

**Lorna Dueck:** On your Bible app?

**Samantha Pepin:** Bible app. Yes, ma'am.

**Lorna Dueck:** The Bible app has added Mohawk to it.

**Samantha Pepin:** They added it when the Bible was uploaded to the Canadian Bible Society website. And I immediately did my research, and I found that on the Bible app and I added it to my Bible. It's [MyBible](#).

So, when I go on, I could choose to go into English, but there are the Scriptures and the readings.

**Lorna Dueck:** What does that mean to you to have it in Mohawk?

**Samantha Pepin:** It is a power. It is powerful to be amongst hundreds of languages across this planet, across other Indigenous nations.

And it is part of my revival to speak fluently in my language, let alone keep reading it and be as smart as my tóta one day and hopefully share that in the next generation. And when I have children, I'll be able to pass that down to them and so on and so forth. As I said, this book has every word you could ever possibly think of.

And every word means so much more than what it actually means, you know. So, I'm here. I'm beyond grateful to be part of this journey for my tóta .

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And I will carry that with me forever and document it as much as I can, because it's more than just something you pick up in church. It's a group of people and its history. It is who we are as Kanehsatà:keró:nons, the history that this project brought with it.

And like I said, a multi-generational example of what it takes to continue on the work of our ancestors. It's incredible. Incredible.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** You know, our dedication, three years ago, we had a dinner. So, one of my friends from Kahnawà:ke, he called me over. He says, Harvey, every word you wrote down in that book, it's not your words.

I said, Frank, I'm glad you said that. Those are not my words. Came from Him.

And that's what he said. He said, that came from God. God gave you those words to write down. I said, Frank, thank you. I'm glad you said that. And it's true.

I never put myself up so high. Never bragging about how I translated the Bible. I always put myself low.

**Lorna Dueck:** Well, you are a treasure, Harvey. And Samantha, you said it so well. This is a great legacy.

And as we sit in this historic church, and I think of the struggle of the generations of your family, this has been a battle to see the Mohawk people of God have their own language in the Holy Book.

I think we could visit for much longer, but we are going to wrap things up. And I'm going to reach for the Mohawk Bible.

And I'm going to ask you to reach for your Mohawk Bible, Samantha, on your app. We're going to read the verse of the day,

**Samantha Pepin:** [Matthew 5:10](#) in Mohawk.

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*"lakotaskat ne kariðiioston iontatkenronseronniatha: aseken akoðenk ne karonhiake."*

Which translates to, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

**Lorna Dueck:** And I just want to close with how meaningful that is, because in your family artifacts, and it's right here, we mentioned already your great grandfather who was poisoned for his passion for Christianity and the Bible and working with the Methodist church. And the next generation, your mother, who suffered in the residential schools, this little gal right there, your mother. "Blessed are those who have been persecuted, for theirs is the kingdom of God."

You have brought the Kingdom of God to us today in this beautiful interview. Thank you for what you've left in the legacy of the Mohawk Bible translation. Samantha, bless you as you run with the torch.

Your grandfather has left in your family. This has been beautiful.

**Harvey Satewas Gabriel:** My mother had a famous verse from the Bible.

She would always repeat that verse, "The heavens and earth will pass away, but my word will never pass away." (Matthew 24:35)

That book will never pass away.

**Lorna Dueck:** Indeed.

Thank you so much.

**Samantha Pepin:** Thank you. Niá:wen.