An amazing conversation with Eugene Kennedy on Newtown, love, joy and pain

By Andrew Malcolm
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This is a unique post for us, but one that could well improve your life, simply by listening and thinking. I don't think we've ever said that here. But we mean it.

Many of you know that Melissa Clouthier and I do a weekly podcast with our friend Brad Jackson. For the last few months that podcast is also posted on the Investor's Business Daily website.

Or just go to the bottom of every one of my columns every day and you'll find the box link to the M&M podcast page.

The other day Melissa, Brad and I had a wondrous moment. Like millions of Americans, as parents we've been struggling with our own personal reactions to the Newtown shootings. At times we've turned away in pain. At other moments, we've watched and felt ill.

So, we brought on our show a longtime family friend of mine, Eugene Kennedy.

To say he's a Renaissance man is an understatement: former department chairman and now professor emeritus of psychology at Loyola University.

He's a former priest, philosopher, theologian, novelist, historian of the human condition, husband, grandfather and raconteur extraordinaire about the famous who've been drawn to his brilliant mind, from Jacqueline Kennedy and Norman Mailer to Katherine Hepburn and Saul Bellow.

I knew he'd have some thoughtful insights. But we had no idea he would extemporaneously expound on life, love, pain and suffering and their necessary roles in the human experience of modern times. What religion is not. What faith is. How we can help those experiencing adversity and, therefore, help ourselves. And the fragility and vulnerability of the human condition that actually unites us all.

The foundation of our talk was addressing the awfulness of Newtown and why it resonated so profoundly with so many, especially parents. But we apply Kennedy's lessons far beyond that little Connecticut community.
"Love," Kennedy says, "guarantees suffering. Yet it is the greatest experience of being alive and the greatest pain." You cannot protect yourself from everything, as hard you try. Yet to try to seal yourself off is to deny your participation in the richness of what life really can be, with its joys and its sorrows."

He talks of myths throughout history, 'mythos' being the Greek word for story. "We are all on a Hero's journey in life. We must leave home and face the unknown perils in the world that lead us to fully experience life. Every day each of us slays dragons in our own way in our own lives."

Kennedy also warns against the facile panaceas to tragedy inevitably offered by self-promoting politicians at traumatic times like this.

Lifting quotes out of context, as old print journalism used to do, does not do Kennedy justice. You need the experience of hearing him talk and processing it for yourself. So, I'm going to stop writing here and urge you to just listen. It's a timeless lesson, but especially relevant in this holiday period so packed with family.

Hundreds of people have already taken a few minutes to soak up this personal exchange with Eugene Kennedy and to learn more about not just handling adversity in our human lives, but embracing it, thereby helping others and ourselves. I've already heard from many. The distinguished writer and social observer Peggy Noonan shared her reactions to Kennedy's remarks in her Wall Street Journal column here.