A generation rediscover being thrifty

SEATTLE (AP) — In a money-hungry world forever chanting "More," Vicki Robin and Joe Dominguez find simple pleasure in saying "Enough.

Each lives on a yearly budget of about $6,000, well below the federal poverty level. And while that's not unusual these days, Robin and Dominguez stand out for three reasons:

• They live as they do by choice.
• They wrote a book urging everyone to do the same.
• People actually are buying it.

New Frugality

The authors have become gurus of the New Frugality, offering a morning-after remedy of thrift for the 1980s bacchanal of consumerism. Their book, "Your Money Or Your Life," is among a shelf full of popular new business and personal-finance offerings emphasizing spiritual as well as material gains.

"Grabbing all you can is out; making do with what you have is in. Instant gratification is out; long-term gains are in. Conspicuous is out; conscious is in.

At the heart of it all is a concept that may seem revolutionary to a credit-card generation of baby boomers but was obvious to their grandparents: Live within your means.

"This is not a fad," Dominguez insisted. "It's a philosophy upon which this country was founded. It's about squeezing the buck until the eagle grins. This is where we come from. We forgot."

New books

There are plenty of new books and newsletters to help us remember:

• "Your Money Or Your Life," published by Viking in September, already is in its sixth printing with more than 100,000 copies distributed. It has made the New York Times' best-seller list of

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A love story turns into

Albert Herzstein keeps wife's love alive through charitable endeavors

By DEBRA RADOWICK

FULSHEAR — Ethel was the love of Albert’s life, so when she asked, "Why don’t we build them a new church?", what could he do?

He built a new sanctuary for First United Methodist Church in Fulshear. Albert and Ethel put up a plaque, honoring their parents.

Everyone was delighted.

But that was 1974. The sanctuary in Fulshear was the first step on Albert Herzstein’s journey toward the title “philanthropist.”

Since 1974, Herzstein, who lives in Houston, has donated millions toward buildings and worthy projects, including the Houston Food Bank, a school for underprivileged children, libraries, museums and hearing aid research.

But now, Herzstein has come full circle — back to Fulshear. The sanctuary still looks like new so "Al," as he is affectionately known to the congregation, is giving the church $300,000 to build two new buildings: an education wing and an activities hall.

The two-story education wing will house eight classrooms and office space, while the activities building will include a kitchen, a stage and giant fellowship hall. The Rev. Garry Masterson informed Al the activities building would be called Herzstein Hall.

Al thought for a minute and then asked, "If you don’t mind, could you call it Herzstein-Avis Hall?" After all, if it wasn’t for an Avis, I wouldn’t be here.

Ethel Avis was the love of Albert’s life. She was a descendent of a pioneer family that helped settle Fulshear. Her parents, Lola Walker and Spencer Avis, brought her up in the Methodist church in Fulshear.

Ethel was working at Western Union in Houston when she first caught Al’s ear. Yes, he first became enamored with her voice.

"I would call regularly to send messages so I talked to her on the telephone a lot," Al recalls. "She was Operator 32. She wouldn’t tell me her name. I never met her for a long time.

One day, Al was hanging around outside the Western Union office when he noticed a friend coming in. His eyes soon moved to another woman.

"She wore a blue organy hat and a blue organy dress," Al said. "I knew this was it."

He was about to meet "Operator 32." They married in 1928 and were together 56 years before she died.

When asked how he made his fortune, Herzstein simply says "hard work."

Herzstein began as a truck driver for Big Three Industries and actually moved into the company ranks as an executive vice president. He was lucky enough to be offered a chance to buy into the company. All the other investments and more were bought in.

Herzstein recalls that he and his wife had "just started building up our resources" when they decided to give First Methodist church in Fulshear.

Herzstein recalled the woman banker who told him that if he didn’t have any children he should give his money away. He promised to put his name on things so they would be remembered.

That is exactly what he has done. The Houston Food Bank, there’s an $800,000 gift from Herbert in the Herzstein House. There’s the Herzstein Library Museum in Clayton, N.C., the Krankatorium at Chinquapin School, Houston Hospice, the Hall Library, and hearing research projects at the University of Nebraska, Baylor College of Medicine in Texas, and in Israel. All are testimony to his generosity.

Temple Emmanuel and the Jewish Community Center in Fulshear also are there because of Herbert.

Philanthropist and Fulshear

On a recent visit to Fulshear, Albert Herzstein visited with his grand-niece Linda Brown (to the right) and Mayor Carl Bentley, and his great-grandmother was a member of First Methodist.
Herzstein Hall.

I thought for a minute and then said, "If you don't mind, could you visit Herzstein-Avis Hall?"

"If it wasn't for an Avis, I wouldn't be here."

Avis was the love of Herzstein's life. She was a part of a pioneer family that settled in Fulshear. Her parents, Rufus Walker and Spencer Avis, raised her up in the Methodist Church in Fulshear.

Avis was working at Western National Airlines in Houston when she first met Al's parents. Yes, he first fell enamored with her voice. They would call regularly to send her money so I talked to her on the phone a lot," Al recalls. "She was a hair stylist. She wouldn't tell her real name. I never met her for a while."

One day, Al was hanging around the Western Union office when he noticed a friend coming in. His eyes soon moved to the woman. She was wearing a blue organdy hat and organdy dress," Al said. "This was it."

They were about to meet "Operator," as they married in 1928 and have been together for 66 years. He asked how he made his money. Herzstein simply says "hard work."

Herzstein began as a truck driver for Big Three Industries and eventually moved into the corporate ranks as an executive vice president. He was lucky enough, he said, to have been offered a chance to buy into the company. After that, more investments and more payoffs followed.

Herzstein recalls that he and his wife had "just started building up our resources" when they decided to gift First Methodist Church Fulshear a Sanctuary.

Herzstein recalled the words of a banker who told him that because he didn't have any children, he should give his money away and put his name on things so that he would be remembered.

That is exactly what he has done. The Houston Food Bank, thanks to an $800,000 gift from Herzstein, is housed in the Herzstein Center. There's the Herzstein Heritage Museum in Clayton, N.M., a gymnasium at Chinquapin School, the Houston Hospice, the Hallettsville library, and hearing research projects at the University of New Mexico, Baylor College of Medicine and in Israel. All are testimony to his generosity.

Temple Emmanuel and the Jewish Community Center in Houston also exist because of Herzstein.

Herzstein and the original plaque

Herzstein himself said it feels a bit odd to be a Jewish philanthropist.

"It feels strange to give so much money away," he said. "It's not the Jewish way."

When someone joked that there must have been a Gentile back somewhere in your family, Herzstein was quick with his retort.

"We all come from Adam and Eve, you know," he said.

The Albert and Ethel Herzstein Charitable Foundation has been established to carry on once Albert is gone. In the meantime, he continues to go into his investment office every day. Herzstein, almost 86, doesn't like weekends and loathes those Monday holidays.

"I won't retire," he said. "I have to keep my brain working. When you retire, your brain retires, too. I don't have any friends left. They all retired. They all died."

Ironically, the translation of "Herzstein" is "heart of stone." He got the wrong name, people are quick to point out.

The congregation jokes that it'll be left to future generations to figure out why a Methodist church fellowship hall has a Jewish name on it. The truth is, though, that it will be a long time before Al Herzstein is forgotten by the people at First Methodist in Fulshear.