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Woman files suit over refugee act

Says she was jailed in 1939 for living with Chinese boyfriend

BY MELISSA LEONG
STAFF REPORTER

An 81-year-old Toronto woman is suing the provincial and federal governments for imprisoning her more than 60 years ago because she was living with her Chinese boyfriend.

In her statement of claim filed Thursday, Velma Demerson said she was locked up in the Belmont Home

and Andrew Mercer Reformatory after being arrested under Ontario's Female Refugees Act in 1939.

The Act allowed the imprisonment of women aged 15 to 35 who were determined to be "incorrigible" or living an "immoral and dissolute" lifestyle, said Demerson's lawyer, David Midanik.

Demerson is seeking \$11 million in damages as well as an apology.

Midanik said Demerson has repeatedly asked the Ontario government for redress, but her requests have been ignored.

"This is the last resort," said Midanik.

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DAVID MIDANIK
Velma Demerson's lawyer

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Demerson also stated she spent al-

most 10 months in a cramped, windowless cell and was only allowed to speak for one hour per day.

She gave birth to a son in the reformatory and said he was taken away from her for four months without an explanation.

The statement of claim contains allegations that have yet to be proved in court.

Demerson's case has received support from women's right activists and civil libertarians.

Supporters are holding a benefit for her tomorrow at the Steelworkers Hall at 25 Cecil St., near Spadina Ave. and College St.