

SNAPSHOTS

It's difficult to hang a label on the slim, side-burned young man seen as an interviewer on CBC's Sunday night public affairs program *The Way It Is*.

Peter Desbarats describes himself as an English-speaking, Roman-Catholic, French-Canadian of partly Scottish-Presbyterian and Swiss-American ancestry who sometimes envies the self-certitude of "full-blooded Wasps and Frogs."

Desbarats (Torontonians can pronounce that Debora) is the non-sense host of Montreal's daily CBC-TV public affairs show, *Seven On Six*, a sister show of Ross McLean's daily Ch. 6 show, *The Day It Is*.

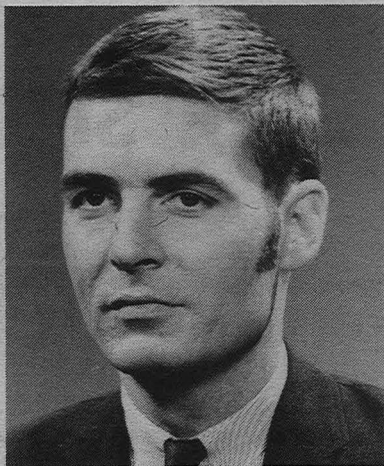
He is the author of a sensitively-plotted new children's book, *Gabrielle and Selena*, to be published next spring.

He is the enterprising (some might say foolhardy) young political reporter who left a plum job at the *Montreal Star* to launch a short-lived national magazine, *Parallel*.

He is the hard-nosed political writer who a couple of years ago authored *The State of Quebec*, a political analysis generally favorably reviewed by critics and described as "entertaining and enlightening" by one.

And Desbarats is also the leather-jacketed swashbuckler who roars down Montreal streets astride a motorcycle.

About his TV career, Desbarats confesses, "Actually, I don't feel



Peter Desbarats

"I'm a natural performer." While his interview technique is skilful, it's true he does appear somewhat stiff on air. His main asset, he feels, is his journalistic background.

"This allows me to play a part in planning and in the editorial part of the program. I think this makes a big difference to the ultimate on-air interview."

Although Desbarats feels he'll always want to keep his hand in writing (he's currently writing a book on 19th Century Quebec painter Cornelius Krieghoff for McClelland & Stewart) he finds his daily public affairs show highly



Desbarats (left with the publisher and art director of the now-defunct magazine *Parallel*.

rewarding. "It gives me a sense of involvement.

Desbarats has some pronounced views on television.

He feels viewers are getting tired of programs that rely on shock value. "People, I think, want to find out about things. That doesn't mean a program has to be dull. But its approach just shouldn't be predicated on trying to shock rather than inform.

Desbarats feels his program, *Seven On Six*, has succeeded in building up an image of reliability. "Because of this we can have people on the program who might say some pretty objectionable things. When this happens, we get surprisingly little adverse comment. Our viewers seem to accept it in the context of the program as a whole."

Something that did bring a lot of criticism was the time *Seven on*

Six presented a bilingual program without simultaneous translation of the French commentary. More than 100 phone calls were logged from English viewers protesting the use of French.

"We felt we ought to do it that way," explains Desbarats. "It was the day after the Carter report came out. After all, our bilingual and bicultural problems were what it was all about.

"This was a classic case in which the medium was the message. A good deal of the program was in French. It wasn't understandable to a lot of viewers . . . well, that was the message."

As a nice twist, Desbarats also got a complaint from a French-Canadian viewer who'd seen a rebroadcast. She wanted to know why an obviously French-Canadian boy like him was appearing on an English network.