

Jean “Hadley” Sillick Robertson ’60

Jacqueline M. Jung ’61 Lifetime Service Award



Hadley Sillick Robertson remembers the thrill of decorating her own room in Scott House, a stately Union Avenue Victorian reborn as a Skidmore dorm. Her highly prized single soon rang with a boisterous chorus of greetings and introductions from fellow freshmen. “It was clear to me at that moment that I had landed in a place that was going to be friendly and fun,” observes the Iowa native. Hadley was right; over the next four years she reveled in the camaraderie of her classmates, many of whom became lifelong friends. For this dedicated alumna, the enduring fun and fellowship has inspired a lifetime of service as a Skidmore volunteer.

Back in the mid- to late '50s, she recalls, identifying herself as a Skidmore student routinely prompted a puzzling response from male acquaintances: “They asked ‘Are you having fun?’ The questioned seemed rather demeaning. But the truth was, I was having fun — and getting a good education!”

Although she explored other disciplines, Hadley found her academic sweet spot in mathematics. She was one of just four math majors who became the intense focus of “the energetic, chalk-scribbling” Professor Mary Williams. She encouraged Hadley’s creativity and rewarded her humor-infused thesis, “The Birth of Calculus,” with an “A.”

Because Williams taught well above the undergraduate level, Hadley and her peers were able to breeze through the Graduate Record Examination. The quality of the education, she says, “made landing a job as a computer programmer a snap.”

She spent eight years as a programmer at Sperry Univac. Although programming was not considered an exclusively male domain at the time, women were paid less. The prevailing attitude was reflected in the earnest comment of a male co-worker who said to Hadley, “You’re probably good at programming because you like needlepoint.” Hadley quips, “I’m guessing female programmers probably don’t get that today.”

After getting married, Hadley decided to answer the siren call of art. When her husband’s career sent the family to Philadelphia, she studied painting and drawing at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, later taking a course in greeting card illustration at Parsons School of Design in New York City. Hadley went on to develop her own line of humorous greeting cards for Recycled Paper Products Inc. Her drawings have also been published in *The New York Times* and she has exhibited her paintings in juried shows and through the American Watercolor Society.

In the 1980s, Hadley tapped into another passion when she became a Skidmore volunteer. Encouraged by members of Skidmore’s New York City alumni club, she reconnected with classmates at her 20th Reunion. The pull of their special camaraderie drew her in and hasn’t let up since. A perennial Reunion planner, she has served as historian and chair. Hadley led her class as president and fulfilled multiple terms as Friends of the Presidents chair and fund chair. She is also a prolific fundraiser who excelled as a class agent and campaign volunteer. Most importantly, Hadley has worn each of her many volunteer hats in her signature style. She has captured the Spirit of ’60 in whimsical drawings for class histories, letters and logos. But her proudest moment as a volunteer was devising a scheme to pit the 1956 freshmen dorms against one another as a fundraiser for their 50th Reunion. “We broke a participation record that still stands,” she says.

Hadley’s exceptional contributions were recognized with an Outstanding Service Award in 2000 and a 50th Reunion Service Award in 2010.

“It’s all been fun,” she insists, “to work for and with this group of sisters. I like the feeling of knowing we face life’s challenges and joys together. I also volunteer because I loved my time at Skidmore; it’s a unique place. I want the College to continue thriving so others can have the same wonderful experience I did.”