At Chapin, we are always told how strong the alumnae community is, but I never totally believed it until I began doing research on the mural.

Take, for example, Caroline Smitter Nicholson, class of 1977. She was not part of the art club that painted the mural, but was a classmate of the students who created it. She was outraged at the mural being hidden (blogging with other alumna, contacting Chapin), and she was enthusiastic about our exhibit, so I believed she would be a great interview subject, giving a student’s point of view of the mural’s creation. My goal was to gain a better understanding of Chapin as well as women’s rights in the 1970’s.

She replied to my email, explaining that she did not know much about the mural and “had never seen it in the flesh,” as she did not even graduate from Chapin, having left for boarding school in 10th grade, and then graduating from Dalton. The photos of the mural I sent her represented the first time she had ever seen her friends’ project, but she was overjoyed, exclaiming “It makes me very proud to be classmates with the artists!”

The fact that Nicholson was such a vocal proponent of something she had never seen shows the strength of the Chapin community, and how powerful are the ties that students make here. Girls who have been here for 13 years, and those who arrive years later and don’t even graduate, can and do congregate and join under one cause: Chapin and its traditions, which is exactly what happened when news broke about the need to cover up the mural.

When this news reached the alumnae, Irina MacGuire, Head of Alumnae Affairs, explained that “the overall reaction was of understanding, but at the same time, sadness.” Losing a piece of Chapin that students over the past 33 years had enjoyed connected the alumnae community. But it is not just now that alumnae joined together; we have always had a strong alumnae community at Chapin.

The Alumnae Association was initially created in 1914 to organize community service work. Then over the years, it developed and now offers many events, such as a yearly luncheon and opportunities to meet and go to museums and shows.

MacGuire describes the Chapin community as “interconnected, loyal, and driven.” These qualities perfectly describe Nicholson, as she connected with many of the
women in her grade to reminisce about Chapin and the mural. Her loyalty to Chapin is demonstrated by her passionate involvement with a project she had never seen but cared about because her classmates painted it. And she is driven, successfully living in England and working in an art museum.

MacGuire explained that, like Nicholson, many women who don’t graduate from Chapin return to the community because they know this is an environment that “cares deeply about them.” There is also a “feeling of coming home, and you often hear people use the phrase ‘the Chapin family.’” This description aptly conveys Nicholson’s own experiences, as she said her classmates are “life-long friends” and she knows them like “sisters.”

My interaction with Caroline Nicholson proved how close the Chapin alumnae community is, and the mentality of Chapin alumnae was summed up in the end of her email: “I have fond memories of my time at Chapin. Say hello to hallowed halls for me.”

These halls generously welcome all who have ever been a student at Chapin, no matter how long they have been here, just as the legacy of the mural will remain strong, even though it is mostly covered up.