Sister Antoinette McNamara was born in Chicago; her sister Josephine was born about 18 months later. She was 2 ½ years old when her mother died. The girls were cared for by their father and grandmother until their father remarried, about two years later, and two more little sisters joined the family.

Sister Antoinette attended St. Martin Commercial High School in Chicago, and she became a secretary for a year following graduation. A friend introduced her to the friend’s two sisters who were IHMs. She joined the IHM community and was received in August 1945. Her sister, Josephine, joined two years later.

She recalls being a part of a wonderful class during her novitiate years and remembers picking berries and string beans at the community’s farms.

“Strawberries were the worst because you had to get down on your knees. We picked boxes and boxes of them,” she notes.

Sister Antoinette’s first mission was at St. Agnes followed by ministries at Our Lady of Help and Gesu, all in Detroit. She spent three years teaching at St. Michael the Archangel in Miami before returning to Michigan to teach at St. Mary in Mt. Clemens.

While there, there was a fire at St. Mary School. “The church caught on fire when the workmen were using a blow torch. The next thing the fire alarm went off.”

It was a time of change in the Catholic Church, and Sister Antoinette embraced the changes brought on by Vatican II. She liked that Vatican II afforded her more opportunity – in her choices of ministry, to be closer with people and to grow in her faith.

She earned her master’s degree in library science from Dominican University and became a librarian at Immaculate Heart of Mary High School in Westchester, Ill. She also served as librarian at St. Mark in Cleveland. She enjoyed working with the children when they came for books, although she claims she was strict, expecting silence in the library.

For nine years, she served as secretary at the Ministry Resource Center in Chicago, which required taking three buses every day to get to work because she didn’t drive. Waiting for the buses during Chicago winters was the most grueling part of the job for her.

When Sister Antoinette returned to Monroe, she became secretary at St. Mary Conference Center. For 16 years following her retirement, she volunteered in the Motherhouse library.

She was aware of her growing memory loss and graciously accepted it. She noted that her greatest joy since joining the community has been “being with people.”