Sister Mary Jo Rosenau grew up in Detroit. Her father died when she was 6, and the family moved in with her grandparents. She attended St. Edward Elementary School with the Dominican Sisters and met the IHMs while attending Annunciation High School.

Sister Mary Jo wanted to join the IHMs even though two of her aunts were St. Joseph Sisters and wanted her with them.

“I think the IHMs were closer to the reality I had of what sisters should be. You could just feel a reverence. I don’t know what it was but I was definitely impressed.”

A doctor said a thyroid problem might cause difficulties with the strenuous life of an IHM sister. Determined to prove him wrong, Sister Mary Jo worked on her health all summer and prayed to Mary and Joseph. She was accepted to the IHMs after a second medical examination revealed a reversal in her condition.

“The minute I walked in the door [of the Motherhouse], I said ‘I’m home.’ I found what I was looking for.”

Sister Mary Jo began her ministry at Our Lady of Good Counsel (Detroit), followed by teaching math and physics at St. Mary High School (Mount Clemens), although she hadn’t looked at a physics book in five years. Undaunted, she dove in, preparing classes until lights-out each night.

“The first couple of years, I was always just a couple of chapters ahead of the kids. I taught the whole range of math and physics. And I had the junior religion classes – church history (and I hate history).”

In addition to teaching during school hours, Sister Mary Jo worked with students preparing to present at science fairs.

“I had some success. I never had a student who got the big prize, but I had quite a few who got blue ribbons. I enjoyed that work.”

Sister Mary Jo fondly recalls one student who got in touch with her a few years later.

“He had gone on to Michigan Technological University (MTU) and wrote to say that one day in class I told him I thought he would be good in research because of the way he could ask questions. That was exactly what he had done, and he said it was because ‘you said that to me!’ It was a real highlight.”
Sister Mary Jo received three National Science Foundation grants, which she used to further her education, attending the University of Detroit (nuclear atomic physics); Wayne State University (physical science); and MTU (engineering). These culminated in a master's degree in education from Wayne State.

Sister Mary Jo “retired” in 1999 but tutored and taught physics until 2004. She ran the household at Our Lady Star of the Sea from 2004 through 2012 and volunteered as a tutor in the primary grades.

The sisters at the Motherhouse welcomed her home in 2012 and say “she brought light to the house.” Sister Mary Jo knows she is where she belongs.